FM unveils Rs.102 tn infra push to reignite growth

GS-III | 01 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the government’s move to boost infrastructure investments and the role of NIP; Greenfield and brownfield projects

News: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday unveiled a plan to invest ₹102 trillion over five years to develop social and economic infrastructure to boost India’s sagging growth.

How the projects will get implemented and the role of NIP

- The projects will be implemented under the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) mechanism.
- The task force for the purpose was set up after PM Modi, in his Independence Day speech, promised to roll out an ambitious infrastructure push worth Rs.100 trillion over the next five years to make India a $5 trillion economy.
- This exercise, the first of its kind, is expected to be followed up by a periodical review process. NIP will enable a forward outlook on infrastructure projects, which will create jobs, improve ease of living and provide equitable access to infrastructure for all, thereby making growth more inclusive.
- Greenfield and brownfield projects worth more than ₹100 crore per project that may be at the conceptualization stage, under implementation and under development would be part of NIP.
- The projects will be spread across 21 ministries and 18 states and Union territories.
- While the Centre and states will contribute 39% each of the project cost, the private sector will contribute 22%. By 2025, it is expected that the private sector contribution will rise to 30%.
Suggestions for reforms made by various working groups under the task force will be taken up. This will include reforming the contracts based on the public-private partnership model, enforcement of contracts and the dispute resolution process.

A robust monitoring mechanism will also be established.

Between FY20 and FY25, sectors such as energy (24%), roads (19%), urban (16%) and railways (13%) amount to around 70% of the projected capital expenditure in infrastructure in India.

Out of the total expected capital expenditure of ?102 trillion, projects worth ?42.7 trillion (42%) are under implementation, which includes expressways and the national gas grid.

Projects worth ?32.7 trillion (32%) are in the conceptualization stage and the rest are under development, which includes urban, roads and renewable energy.

Other measures taken by the govt. to boost economic growth

- The government has taken a raft of measures to address a slowdown in the broader economy, including a massive corporate tax cut and sector-specific steps. However, a renewed thrust on infrastructure projects is expected to increase economic activity, generate employment and boost demand.
- Encouraging more private sector investment in the infrastructure space can create additional fiscal space for the government.

Reforms suggested by the NIP report

- To boost investment in the infrastructure sector, the NIP report released by the finance minister also suggested general reforms and updating sector policies.
- The report said it is critical to have a robust project preparation framework consisting of a transparent policy and legislative framework, presence of guidelines, model bidding documents and standard procedures, design, multistage reviews and audits.
- “Inadequate attention to project planning may lead to avoidable delays in the implementation of the project or may even lead to scrapping of projects prior
to its implementation," said the NIP report.
• The report also called for robust private sector participation in the infrastructure sector and optimal risk sharing between the public and private sector entities, such that the risks are allocated to entities best equipped to handle them.

What are Greenfield and Brownfield projects?

• The Greenfield project means that a work which is not following a prior work. In infrastructure the projects on the unused lands where there is no need to remodel or demolish an existing structure are called Green Field Projects.
• The projects which are modified or upgraded are called brownfield projects.

Source: mint

Core sectors shrink for fourth straight month
GS-III | 01 January,2020

Syllabus subtopic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the eight core sectors of the Indian Economy and their performance; Index of Industrial Production

News: India’s eight infrastructure sectors shrank for the fourth straight month in November at 1.5%, though the magnitude of contraction slowed from 5.8% in the previous month. The eight core sectors contribute 40% to the Index of Industrial Production.

What does it signify?
The slowing of the pace of contraction is being interpreted by some economists as a sign of green shoots, indicating that the economy is on a recovery path.

Background

- India’s economic growth decelerated to a six-and-a-half-year low of 4.5% in the September quarter on the back of slowing domestic and external demand.

- Data released by the Controller General of Accounts on Friday showed that the government exceeded its 2019-20 fiscal deficit target by 114.8% during the April-November period.

- After reducing policy rates five consecutive times by a cumulative 135 basis points, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) opted for a pause in its December monetary policy review, given the sharp increase in retail inflation and weak monetary transmission from its earlier rate cuts. Retail inflation quickened to 4.6% in October, propelled by a surge in food prices.

- Earlier last month, RBI pared its growth forecast to 5% for 2019-20 from its October estimate of 6.1%, citing weak business and consumer sentiment. “While improved monetary transmission and a quick resolution of global trade tensions are possible upsides to growth projections, a delay in revival of domestic demand, a further slowdown in global economic activity and geopolitical tensions are downside risks,” said RBI.
Sector-wise performance

- Five of the eight infra sectors reported a drop in output in November, according to data released by the industry department on Friday.
- **Cement** production bounced back to 4.1% growth, recovering from monsoon-related disruptions, while the output of **refinery products** accelerated to
3.1% in November. The output of coal and electricity sectors shrunk at a slower pace of 2.5% and 5.7%, respectively, in November from the previous month.

- However, crude oil, natural gas and steel saw their output shrink at a faster pace in November than in October.
- The core sector growth numbers for November, though disappointing, have a silver lining as sectors such as cement and fertilizers have registered growth.

About Index of Industrial Production (IIP)

- IIP is a composite indicator measuring changes in the volume of production of a basket of industrial products over a period of time, with respect to a chosen base period.
- It is compiled and published on a monthly basis by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) with a time lag of six weeks from the reference month.
DoT kick-starts process to roll out 5G, trials likely in Jan-Mar
Syllabus subtopic: Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.

Prelims and Mains focus: about 5G; its advantages and significance in development of various sectors

News: The telecom department has initiated the process of rolling out 5G networks in the country, with telecom operators set to begin testing the technology later this month.

- All major telecom operators and equipment vendors on Tuesday met top officials of the department of telecommunications (DoT) to discuss the roadmap for trials.
- DoT is expected to allot spectrum in a few days and trials will happen in January-March.
- The meeting with telecom companies happened a day after the government said it has allowed all applicants, including China's Huawei, to participate in 5G trials.
- The DoT will allocate the trial spectrum to its licencees, which are telecom service providers, who can then choose to partner with vendors such as Nokia, Huawei, Ericsson and Samsung.

Background

- In June 2019, DoT approved a one-year 5G trial period and a one-time fee of Rs.5,000 for entities seeking experimental spectrum to conduct trials. The government also announced its intention to focus on three big social sectors for deployment of 5G—education, agriculture and healthcare. However, building use-cases in these sectors is still a work in progress. So far, six proposals have been received, which includes those from China’s ZTE and Huawei. Any field trial in respect of 5G is to be carried out only through licensed telecom service providers in a restrictive, limited geographical area and for specific use case.
Earlier this month, DoT approved prices for the next spectrum auction that will happen by April. Of the 8,300MHz of airwaves the government plans to offer, 6,050MHz have been allocated for 5G. The 3,300-3,600MHz band allocated for 5G has been priced at ₹492 crore per megahertz.

Case of China’s Huawei

- This has come as relief for Huawei, which has been facing global scrutiny over network security concerns. The US has claimed that Huawei’s 5G equipment could be used by China to spy on other countries, an allegation the company has denied.
- The approval for conducting 5G trials does not, however, automatically imply that Huawei’s equipment will be cleared for a commercial rollout in India.

5G scenario in India vis-a-vis other countries

- 5G is the next generation of wireless technology and will boost data speeds and propel the Internet of Things, with the potential to bring radical changes in agriculture, manufacturing, healthcare and education.
- India’s 5G trials and commercial rollout are far behind global peers, which have even deployed commercial networks. South Korea was the first to commercially start 5G services in April.
- China’s state-run teleco operators China Mobile, China Unicom and China Telecom rolled out 5G services in November to consumers in 50 Chinese cities, including Beijing and Shanghai.
- US’s Verizon Communications Inc. kickstarted 5G services in October 2018 in Houston, Indianapolis, Los Angeles and Sacramento, using non-standard gear.
Source: mint
Current account deficit narrows to 0.9% of GDP

Syllabus subtopic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the Current Account Deficit (CAD) and the reasons for it narrowing down this fiscal: about External Commercial Borrowings (ECBs)

News: India’s current account deficit (CAD) narrowed to 0.9% of GDP, or $6.3 billion, in the September 2019 quarter, on account of lower trade deficit. It had stood at 2.9% of the gross domestic product (GDP), or $19 billion, in the corresponding quarter of 2018-19.

On a sequential basis, CAD had printed 2% of GDP, or $14.2 billion, in the June 2019 quarter. “The contraction in the CAD was primarily on account of a lower trade deficit at $38.1 billion as compared with $50 billion a year ago,” the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said in a release on Tuesday.

Yearly trend of various parameters in 2019 vis-à-vis 2018

- During the first half of the current financial year, CAD narrowed to 1.5% of the GDP from 2.6% in the corresponding period in 2018-19, on the back of a reduction in the trade deficit, which shrank to $84.3 billion as compared with $95.8 billion a year ago. The balance of payments stood at $5.12 billion in the second quarter and $19.1 billion during the first half of this fiscal.
- Net services receipts increased 0.9% in July-September on a year-on-year basis, on the back of a rise in net earnings from computer, travel and financial services, the RBI said.
- In the second quarter of 2019-20, private transfer receipts, mainly representing remittances by Indians employed overseas, rose to $21.9 billion, a rise of 5.2% compared to a year ago.
- The net inflow on account of external commercial borrowings (ECB) was $3.2 billion in the second quarter as compared with $2 billion a year earlier.
About Balance of Payments (BOP)

Balance of Payment is systematic record of overall international economic transactions during specific time period

- It takes into account the export and import of both Goods (Visible items) and Services (Invisible items).
- World’s net Balance of Payment is always zero.
- The BOP of a country gives information about its ability to pay for its imports. It gives information about the position of the country with respect to issues like currency crisis, capital flows and its impact on the economy etc. It also gives valuable insights into its economic output which is required for its economic growth.

Components of the Balance of payments (BOP)

The components of the balance of payment are:

Current account: It includes the financial transactions dealing with the export and import of goods, services, unilateral transfers, investment income etc.

Capital account: It includes the financial transactions dealing with assets such as foreign direct investment, foreign portfolio investment, foreign loans etc.

Official reserve transactions: It conducted by the central bank in case of the BOP deficit or BOP surplus.

Errors and omissions: It is the element of BOP (other than the current account and the capital account) which refers to the balancing items reflecting the inability to record all the international financial transactions.

Source: The Hindu
UPSC "PT" DNA (Daily News Analysis)

**Syllabus subtopic:** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India’s interests, Indian diaspora.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the bill passed by Taiwan; China-Taiwan dispute; difference between One China policy and principle

**News:** Taiwan passed a controversial bill on Tuesday **aimed at countering China’s influence on the selfruled island**, less than two weeks before it goes to the polls to elect a new President.

**What is the Bill about?**

- The “anti-infiltration Bill” pushed by President TsaiIngwen’s Beijingsceptic ruling party became law despite strong objection from the Opposition Kuomintang (KMT) party.
- It *bans* “hostile” *foreign forces* from activities such as *campaigning, lobbying, making political donations, disrupting social order* or *spreading disinformation related to elections*. Violators face a maximum fiveyear prison term and a fine of up to around $3,32,000.

**What is the reason behind the passage of the Bill**

- The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) govt. said it passed the Bill to prevent China, which is Taiwan’s only threat, from using its sharp power and its capital to pollute, manipulate or sabotage Taiwan’s democratic activities.
- The Mainland Affairs Council, Taiwan’s top China policymaking body, said the new law would help strengthen the island’s “democratic defences”.

**China’s response**

- In Beijing, the Taiwan Affairs Office lashed out at the DPP over the new law.
- “The DPP imposes *Green Terror’* for its political and election gains to damage *crossstrait exchanges* while creating hostility and confrontation between the two sides,” office spokeswoman Zhu Fenglian said, according to
the Xinhua news agency.
- China still sees self-ruling, democratic Taiwan as part of its territory and has vowed to one day reunify it — by force if necessary.

Background

- Taiwan holds a presidential vote on Jan. 11 with President Tsai Ing-wen hoping to win re-election. She has repeatedly mentioned what she sees as the threat of China as a warning to voters.
- Tsai's ruling Democratic Progressive Party is pro-independence, although she has said she wants to maintain the status quo with China but will defend
Taiwan’s security and democracy.

- **Democratic Taiwan** is claimed by China as a wayward province and is the Communist Party’s most sensitive and important territorial issue. China has threatened to attack if Taiwan moves toward formal independence.
- President Xi Jinping said in January that China reserves the right to use force to bring Taiwan under its control but will strive to achieve peaceful “reunification”.

### One China Policy

The One-China policy refers to the policy or view that there is **only one state called "China"**, despite the existence of two governments that claim to be "China".

- As a policy, this means that countries seeking diplomatic relations with People's Republic of China (PRC, Mainland China) must **break official relations** with the Republic of China (ROC, Taiwan) and vice versa.
- The One China policy is **different from the "One China principle"**, which is the principle that insists both Taiwan and mainland China are inalienable parts of a single China.

### What is the ‘One China’ principle?

The principle affirms **Chinese sovereignty over Taiwan** and is the cornerstone of bilateral diplomatic relations between Washington and Beijing.

- Any country that wants to establish political and diplomatic relations with China must agree to adhere to this principle and not recognise Taiwan as an independent country.
- Currently, 21 states recognize Taiwan as a sovereign country. **India does not maintain any diplomatic ties with the Taiwan.**
- In practice, the ‘One China’ principle is a stabilisation mechanism that **preserves the status quo over Taiwan’s political status** while **allowing it to function as an independent economic, civic and administrative entity**.
- Since 1979, Taiwan has had to negotiate its ‘international living space’ but it has largely honoured the ‘One China’ principle.
Bhima-Koregaon village prepares for historic day

GS-I | 01 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present - significant events, personalities, issues

**Prelims and Mains focus:** About the Bhima Koregaon conflict; its outcome and significance

**News:** Lakhs of devotees, neo-Buddhists, members of Ambedkarite outfits, politicians, students and other visitors are expected to congregate near the ranstham or victory pillar in Bhima-Koregaon village for the 202nd anniversary of the Bhima-Koregaon battle of 1818 on New Year’s Day on Wednesday.

**About Bhima-Koregaon conflict**

- The battle was fought in Bhima Koregaon, a district in Pune with a strong historical Dalit connection, between the Peshwa forces and the British on January 1, 1818.

- The British army, which comprised mainly of Dalit soldiers, fought the upper caste-dominated Peshwa army. The British troops defeated the Peshwa army.

**Outcomes of the battle:**

- The victory was seen as a win against caste-based discrimination and oppression. Peshwas were notorious for their oppression and persecution of Mahar dalits. The victory in the battle over Peshwas gave dalits a moral victory, a victory against caste-based discrimination and oppression and
sense of identity.

- However, the divide and rule policy of the British created multiple fissures in Indian society which is even visible today in the way of excessive caste and religious discrimination which needs to be checked keeping in mind the tenets of the Constitution.

**Why Bhima Koregaon is seen as a Dalit symbol?**

- The battle has come to be seen as a symbol of Dalit pride because a large number of soldiers in the Company force were the Mahar Dalits. Since the Peshwas, who were Brahmins, were seen as oppressors of Dalits, the victory of the Mahar soldiers over the the Peshwa force is seen as Dalit assertion.

- On 1 January 1927, B.R. Ambedkar visited the memorial obelisk erected on the spot which bears the names of the dead including nearly two dozen Mahar soldiers. The men who fought in the battle of Koregaon were the Mahars, and the Mahars are Untouchables.

Source: The Hindu

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**Odisha tribals still suffering from hunger, malnutrition**

**GS-II | 01 January, 2020**

**Syllabus subtopic:** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the findings of RTF regarding malnutrition among tribes in Odisha; about juanga and Paudi Bhuyan tribe
News: Right to Food Campaign (RTF), a platform of social activists, said poor implementation of government welfare programmes was marginalising tribals further in backward pockets of Odisha.

**Background**

In the wake of malnutrition deaths of 20 infants of the *Juanga tribe* at Nagada village in Jajpur district in 2016, the RTF campaigners started visiting villages inhabited by particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs) in different parts of the State.

**What did it reveal?**

- As per the findings shared by RTF members, *Paudi Bhuyan tribes* in four villages – Kiri, Keta, Kundula and Kunu – under Bonai subdivision of Sundargarh districts were suffering from hunger and malnutrition.

- *Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS) programme*, one of the most important food security programmes, was found non-existent in Paudi Bhuyan tribal villages. *Anganwadi centres* were non-functional. No ICDS authority has visited these villages in two decades. Children were never immunised. They were also not getting cooked food.

- Under the *Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act*, 21 tribals of these villages had worked in a road construction work in 2014, but they had not got their payments.

- *Paudi Bhuyan, one of the most vulnerable and neglected tribes* who reside on hilltops, should be mainstreamed and linked with government welfare programmes immediately.

- In *Nagada village*, which put Odisha to shame following reports of malnutrition deaths of children, situation remained unchanged despite the
State government promising to have given utmost attention for its development.

About PVTGs

- PVTGs are more vulnerable among the tribal groups.
- They have declining or stagnant population, low level of literacy, pre-agricultural level of technology and are economically backward.
- They generally inhabit remote localities having poor infrastructure and administrative support.

Identification:

- In 1975, the Government of India initiated to identify the most vulnerable tribal groups as a separate category called PVTGs and declared 52 such groups, while in 1993 an additional 23 groups were added to the category, making it a total of 75 PVTGs out of 705 Scheduled Tribes, spread over 18 states and one Union Territory (A&N Islands) in the country (2011 census).
- Among the 75 listed PVTG’s the highest number are found in Odisha (13), followed by Andhra Pradesh (12).

The criteria followed for determination of PVTGs are as under:

- A pre-agriculture level of technology.
- A stagnant or declining population.
- Extremely low literacy.
- A subsistence level of economy.

Source: The Hindu
Syllabus subtopic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Prelims and Mains focus: About the RBI’s Operation Twist; its need and impact

News: Recently, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) decided to undertake its own version of Operation Twist to bring down 10-year yields of government securities (G-Secs) and drive monetary transmission.
Why is Operation Twist so important?

Operation Twist is a move in which a central bank decides to simultaneously buy long-dated securities while selling short-term securities. The objective behind such an operation is management of the yield curve. Other central banks, including the US Federal Reserve, have used similar measures. This is
the first time RBI has undertaken such an unconventional policy measure with the aim of flattening the yield curve by lowering longer rates to boost lending and growth. On Monday, RBI undertook its second round of open market operations (OMOs), the first round of which was undertaken on 23 October.

**Did RBI buy, sell bonds of the same amounts?**

A conventional Operation Twist involves a central bank buying and selling securities of the same amounts. The purchase of securities pushes down the yields of long-dated securities, while the sale of short-term bonds drives up their yield. This transaction is undertaken as it effectively reduces the term premia. But in the case of RBI’s recent move, on 23 October, the central bank bought a net of Rs.10,000 crore of 10-year bonds and sold one-year bonds of Rs.6,825 crore. On 30 December, RBI again bought 10-year bonds worth Rs.10,000 crore while selling one-year bonds worth Rs.8,501 crore.

**So did the move have an impact on bond yields?**

The recent Operation Twist impacted bond yields that had shot up to 6.705% on 18 December. The move was announced on 19 December 2019 and yields moderated to 6.501% on 1 January 2020. Ending uncertainty on fiscal deficit numbers for 2019-20 and 2020-21 and a credible long-term fiscal consolidation path will help moderate bond yields.

**Why did 10-year yields rise after 30 Dec?**

In the past, RBI had ruled out its desire to get into yield curve management. But by undertaking Operation Twist, it has provided strong signals to markets that could be well on the cards. Despite this, the second Operation Twist on 30 December didn’t pare yields as investors are jittery due to concerns regarding the FY20 fiscal deficit. RBI also released the calendar for state borrowings of Rs.2 trillion for the Q4 FY20. Operation Twist is likely to have subdued the impact of these developments on the yield curve.
Can we expect more such operations?

Over the last few months there has been a call for OMOs to drive monetary transmission. More such operations are possible as RBI tries to improve transmission and the monetary policy panel continues with an accommodative stand. A countercyclical fiscal policy is warranted due to the growth slowdown and is factored in by investors. Thus, by revising deficit targets and creating a credible medium-term consolidation path, the Centre can send bond markets a positive signal, which would supplement RBI’s Operation Twist.

Source: mint

Relief for govt as GST collections remain above Rs.1 trillion mark

GS-III | 02 January,2020

Syllabus subtopic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Prelims and Mains focus: About GST; reasons for delays in compensation to states

News: Goods and services tax (GST) collections exceeded the Rs.1 trillion mark for the second straight month in December, bringing some relief to policymakers fighting to boost consumption and liquidity in a slowing economy.

- Central and state governments together collected Rs.1.03 trillion in December, 9% more than what was collected in the year earlier. With an improvement in the performance of a number of leading indicators, including core sector industries, auto sales and non-oil merchandise exports, experts expect factory output to report modest growth in November after having contracted since September.
Background

- India’s GDP growth decelerated to a **six-and-a-half-year low of 4.5%** in the September quarter amid slowing domestic and external demand.
- Declining GST receipts in the past few months had led to **tension in Centre-state relations** as some states complained about a **delay in payment of**
GST compensation from the central government.

- Tax cuts and exemptions granted in several rounds since the rollout of GST have made it revenue-deficient rather than revenue-neutral, as was originally planned. Tax cuts on consumer goods have also led to a situation where businesses are paying more taxes on raw materials than on finished products and subsequently claiming the excess paid as refunds.

GST collections across states and UTs

Among major states and Union territories (UTs) that recorded a substantial jump in gross domestic GST collections are Assam (33%), Maharashtra (22%), Tamil Nadu (19%), Gujarat (18%), Delhi (18%), Kerala (17%), West Bengal (16%) and Madhya Pradesh (16%). The under-performers include Jharkhand (-3%), Odisha (2%), Goa (6%) and Rajasthan (10%).

Way ahead

- GST collections crossing ₹1 trillion for the second month in a row and a 16% growth on domestic transactions vis-à-vis December 2018 is a positive development. It seems that efforts of the government, like restriction on availment of unmatched credits, to plug GST evasion is bearing results.
- Finance ministers of central and state governments are likely to discuss restructuring GST slabs and rates as well as ways to handle a revenue shortfall and the GST compensation to states in the year starting 1 April after the Union budget is presented on 1 February.

Source: mint

RBI extends relaxation in NBFC norms till June

GS-III | 02 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.
Prelims and Mains focus: About the liquidity crisis in the NBFC sectors and efforts of RBI to improve the liquidity situation

News: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has extended by six months existing relaxations for securitization of assets by non-banking financial companies (NBFCs).

Aim of the move
The move is aimed at providing NBFCs with some more breathing space to repair their balance sheets by selling assets and improving liquidity.

Background
- In November 2018, the RBI had first eased the minimum holding period (MHP) requirement for originating NBFCs, for loans of maturity above five years to six months from 12.
- The relaxation was originally given for six months till May 2019. RBI then extended it to 31 December 2019.
- These relaxations were allowed after the liquidity crisis in the non-bank space following defaults by Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services (IL&FS) in 2018. So much so that NBFCs and their mortgage lending peers relied largely on securitization deals to raise funds.
- A report by rating agency ICRA in October 2019 found that these two classes of non-bank lenders raised Rs. 2.36 trillion through the securitization route between October 2018 and September 2019.

What is MHP?
The minimum holding period is the duration for which an NBFC is required to hold the loans on its book before selling them.
Efforts made by the RBI to improve liquidity in NBFCs

- The RBI has maintained that it is **regularly monitoring the top 50 NBFCs** which roughly represent about 75% of the sector.
- NBFCs are also being monitored by the RBI to see whether they have adequate coverage for their liquidity requirements for at least three months.
- Credit flow is slowly reviving to the NBFC sector and the better-performing ones are able to access funds from the market at pre-IL&FS rates.

About NBFCs

The Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) are the financial institutions that **offer the banking services, but do not comply with the legal definition of a bank**, i.e. it **does not hold a bank license**.

Both banks and NBFCs are financial intermediaries. NBFCs can lend and make investments. Hence, their **activities are akin to that of banks**.

However, there are a **few differences between NBFCs and banks**:

1. NBFC cannot accept demand deposits;
2. Banks can maintain demand deposits (savings/current accounts) but NBFCs accept only term deposits;
3. Banks form a part of Payment and Settlement Mechanism but NBFCs do not form part of the payment and settlement system and cannot issue cheques drawn on itself;
4. Deposit insurance facility of Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation is not available to depositors of NBFCs, unlike in case of banks.

Significance of NBFCs

Non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) are a fundamental part of the Indian financial system playing a significant role in nation building and financial inclusion. It plays a **complementary role to the banking system** in promoting financial inclusion. There are multiple varieties of NBFCs and so the sector demands a well-coordinated response from all stakeholders keeping in mind the differential contextual requirements of different categories of NBFCs.
Gaganyaan, ChandrayaanÂ³ in mission mode, says ISRO
GS-III | 02 January,2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about Gaganyaan; Chandrayaan-3: their significance

**Context:** Four pilots from the Indian Air Force (IAF) will leave for Russia this month to receive training as astronauts of Gaganyaan, the first Indian crewed flight to space.

- The four will leave in the third week of January to be trained at the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Centre in Moscow, as per an agreement signed between the space agencies of the two countries last year.
About Gaganyaan

- Set for 2022 Gaganyaan, announced by the PM Modi in August 2018, is the Rs. 10,000 crore Indian human space flight scheduled for 2022. It is designed to have 37 crew members spend 37 days in space in a 400km orbit.

- The first of the two pre-Gaganyaan flights with a humanoid will be launched this yearend along with some of the six shortlisted micro-gravity experiments, Dr. Sivan said.
Chandrayaan-3 on the anvil

- ISRO has also quietly begun work on another soft landing mission to the moon with most of the same features of Chandrayaan2 and almost on the back of the failure of the latter’s lander on the lunar surface on September 7.
- The launch of the nearly Rs. 600crore Chandrayaan3 is targeted for the end of this year or early 2021.
- It will be almost a repetition of the July 2019 Chandrayaan2 mission in the configuration of spacecraft, the landing spot on the moon and the experiments to be conducted on the lunar surface.
- The third mission, was ISRO’s bid to realise for itself the difficult technology of softlanding on another planetary body. The agency is undertaking it as the landing module of the second mission crashed barely five minutes before it was to have landed on the lunar surface.
- The lander and rover are estimated to cost Rs.250 crore and will go to the moon on a propulsion model. The GSLV Mark III vehicle costs around Rs.350 crore.
- Although scores of landers sent by Russia, the U.S. and the Chinese have explored the moon’s surface, so far, no other agency has landed in the southern hemisphere. ISRO hopes to be still the first to do so.

A new launch port for ISRO

The Tamil Nadu government has started acquiring 2,300 acres of land in Thoothukudi district for ISRO’s second launch port. Thoothukudi offers a locational advantage to launch towards India’s South.

- Currently satellites are launched from the Sriharikota launch centre in Andhra Pradesh.
- When ready, the new port will handle mainly the small satellite launch vehicle (SSLV) that is under development. SSLVs are meant to put a payload of up to 500 kg in space.

Lunar mission with Japan
Another lunar mission is being discussed with Japanese space agency JAXA (Japan Aeronautics Exploration Agency) but its elements have not been finalised.

Source: The Hindu

Kerala for steps to curb alien plants™ growth in NBR
GS-III | 02 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about Senna Spectabilis: threat posed by it and measures taken to check its spread

**News:** The Kerala Forest and Wildlife department is gearing up to adopt comprehensive steps to arrest the rampant growth of invasive alien plants, especially tree species like 'Senna Spectabilis', in the forest areas of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR), including the Wayanad wildlife sanctuary.

**Threats by invasive species (Senna Spectabilis)**

- The spread of invasive plants, especially Senna Spectabilis, is posing a major threat to the forest areas of the reserve, **owing to its quick growth and coppicing character.**

- The tree species had been found in nearly 10 km sq area of 344.44 sq km of the sanctuary around five years ago. But now it has invaded more than 50 sq km of the sanctuary in a short span of time. This showed its high invasive nature.
A recent study of the Ferns Nature Conservation Society with the support of the Forest department recorded the presence of the plant on 78.91 sq km area of the sanctuary.

The plant started to invade in adjacent tiger reserves, including Bandipur and Nagarhole in Karnataka and the Mudumalai tiger reserve in Tamil Nadu.

Earlier, it was planted as avenue trees along roadsides in Wayanad. Due to massive flowering and drying of bamboo species in the Wayanad, lots of open spaces were created which were occupied by Senna Spectabilis.

An adult tree grows up to 15 to 20 metres in a short period of time and every year distributes thousands of seeds after the gregarious flowering. The thick foliage arrests the growth of other indigenous species of trees and grass, and causes food shortage for the wildlife population, especially herbivores, during summer. Moreover wildlife would not feed on the leaves of the tree as it was not palatable for them.

How does it hampers the growth of other plant species?

The ‘vayal’ ecosystem (marshy land) of the forest area now houses this plant in large numbers. The allele-chemicals produced by this plant adversely affect the germination and growth of the native species.

Measures taken up to prevent it from spreading

- The KFRI has developed some physical and chemical measures to tackle the threat of the plant.
- Though physical method was being followed to tackle the issue for the past five years, it was yet to make any desired effect. Hence it is being planned to adopt an integrated method by combining the physical as well as chemical...
measures to address the issue.

- As the same threat is being faced by the adjacent tiger reserves, managers of the reserves agreed to follow the similar steps to tackle the threat.

Source: The Hindu

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**RBI launches app to help visually impaired identify notes**

*GS-III | 02 January, 2020*

**Syllabus subtopic:** Science and Technology - developments and their applications and effects in everyday life; Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** About the MANI app and its significance

**News:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday launched the Mobile Aided Note Identifier (MANI), a mobile application for aiding visually impaired persons to identify the denomination of Indian banknotes.

**Features of MANI app**

- It has features like capability of identifying the denominations of Mahatma Gandhi series and Mahatma Gandhi (new) series banknote by checking front or reverse side/part of the note including half-folded notes at various holding angles and broad range of light conditions.

- As per the RBI, Indian banknotes contain several features which enable the visually impaired (colour blind, partially sighted and blind people) to identify them, including intaglio printing and tactile mark, variable banknote size, large numerals, variable colour, monochromatic hues and patterns.
Significance

Technological progress has opened up new opportunities for making Indian banknotes more accessible for the visually impaired, thereby facilitating their day to day transactions.

Source: Indian Express

Free trade agreement with Mauritius near finalization

GS-II | 02 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India’s interests

Prelims and Mains focus: about the proposed India-Mauritius FTA and its significance; India-Mauritius economic relations

News: India is close to finalising a proposed free trade agreement (FTA) with Mauritius, with several rounds of negotiations to improve market access between the two countries having been completed, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry said on Wednesday.

Background

Seven rounds of India-Mauritius CECPA negotiations have been held till now. During these rounds, negotiations focussed on various aspects including trade in goods, trade in services, rules of origin, technical barriers to trade and sanitary and phyto-sanitary (SPS) measures, trade remedies and dispute settlement.

About the proposed FTA
The proposed India-Mauritius Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) seeks to mutually benefit both countries in the areas of trade in goods and services.

Why countries opt for FTA?

Countries enter into FTAs to make it easier to exchange goods and services between them. This is usually done by reducing or eliminating trade barriers like tariffs and quotas that these countries would have imposed on these goods and services.

India-Mauritius economic relations

- India had a trade surplus of around $1.09 billion with Mauritius in 2018-19, which means that it had exported more goods to the island nation than it imported from it.

- Mauritius was the second top source of foreign direct investment (FDI) into India in 2018-19. India received $8 billion (about Rs 56,000 crore) foreign inflows from the country.

- India exports petroleum products, pharmaceuticals, cereals, cotton and electrical machinery, apparel and clothing accessories to Mauritius.

- The island nation’s exports to New Delhi include iron and steel, pearls, precious/semi-precious stones and optical, photographic and precision instruments.

Way ahead

- The government plans to promote India-Africa trade and economic relations through regular reviews of trade ties through institutional mechanisms like Joint Commission Meetings, Joint Trade Committees and Joint Working
Groups, the Ministry’s release added.

- Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal in May 2019 had held digital video conferences with Indian business communities in African regions like Madagascar, Tanzania, Mauritius, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, Zambia, Mozambique, Ghana, Botswana, Nigeria, Morocco, Senegal, Zimbabwe, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia and Egypt in order to promote India’s exports to the region.

Source: Indian Express
Success of facial recognition tech depends on data

Syllabus subtopic: Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies

Prelims and Mains focus: About the AFRS system and its uses in various fields; about NCRB: its objectives and functions

News: Facial recognition software is now an integral part of policing, globally. Last month, the police used its automated facial recognition system (AFRS) to screen crowds at PM Modi’s rally on the citizenship law in Delhi.
What is the purpose of AFRS software?

- AFRS is a software that recognizes, records and matches faces against
various government databases from photos and videos taken from public and private sources.  
• Its purpose is to find missing children, who may be recorded on CCTV; track criminals across a country; and in the case of Modi's rally, recognize people who were likely to raise protest slogans at the rally, based on footage recorded from earlier protests. According to reports, people at Delhi’s Ramilla Maidan had to pass through a metal detector, during which a camera captured a photo of their faces and scanned it against a database in a matter of seconds.

How does the software work?

The police’s AFRS is different from the facial recognition systems used on smartphones. The latter is based on the ISO 19794-5 standard meant for consumer biometrics; the police’s software is more “restrictive”, as per the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) document seeking proposals for the system. It measures facial features and uses the measurements to create a “template” to be matched against others, says an American Bar Association study. Law enforcement’s software is meant to work in various light conditions; detect make-up, plastic surgery or ageing; and work against sketches of subjects.

Can facial recognition technology be beaten?

A review of the London Metropolitan Police’s facial recognition system by academics from the University of Essex in July 2019 showed that the system had erred in 81% of the cases. However, law enforcement bodies worldwide have adopted the system, although there are enough reports for and against the software.

Which databases does AFRS have access to?

The NCRB document says AFRS should be able to check against various databases. Besides the criminal database, it mentions the passport database; the Aadhaar database that includes your photo may be used too. It mentions the Immigration, Visa and Foreigners’ Registration Tracking database, the ministry of
women and child development’s Khoya-Paya and the National Automated Fingerprint Identification System. It can match a photo against many and compare one photo with another. The more the data, the better is the output.

What is the scope of India’s AFRS?

NCRB’s proposal clearly states that while a centralized web application will be hosted in the crime record bureau’s data centre in Delhi, it will be made available to “all police stations of the country”. That means AFRS certainly stretches on a national scale. Furthermore, Delhi Police also required the software to work on Android, iOS and Windows platforms. “NCRB has already proposed the provision of mobile data terminals to each police station,” states the proposal document.

About National Crimes Record Bureau (NCRB)

- NCRB was set-up in 1986 to function as a repository of information on crime and criminals so as to assist the investigators in linking crime to the perpetrators based on the recommendations of the Tandon Committee to the National Police Commission (1977-1981) and the MHA’s Taskforce (1985).

- NCRB was entrusted with the responsibility for monitoring, coordinating and implementing the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS) project in the year 2009. The project connects 15000+ police stations and 6000 higher offices of police in the country.

- NCRB launched the National Digital Police Portal. It allows search for a criminal/suspect on the CCTNS database apart from providing various services to citizens like filing of complaints online and seeking antecedent verification of tenants, domestic help, drivers etc.
Functions:

- Entrusted to maintain National Database of Sexual Offenders (NDSO) and share it with the States/UTs on a regular basis.
- Designated as the Central Nodal Agency to manage technical and operational functions of the ‘Online Cyber-Crime Reporting Portal’ through which any citizen can lodge a complaint or upload a video clip as evidence of crime related to child pornography, rape/gang rape.
- Serve as a principal reference point to policymakers, police, criminologists, researchers and media, both in India and abroad.
- IT-based Public Services like Vahan Samanvay (online matching for Stolen/Recovered vehicles) and Talash (matching of missing persons and dead bodies) is maintained.
- Maintains Counterfeit Currency Information and Management System (FICN) and Integrated Monitoring on Terrorism (iMoT) applications.
- Assists various States in capacity building in the area of Information Technology, CCTNS, Finger Prints, Network security and Digital Forensics through its training centres.
In Haryana, scientists develop India’s own brain template, Brahma

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

Prelims and Mains focus: about the Brahma brain template; its need and significance

News: A team of scientists led by senior scientist Pravat Mandal at the Neuroimaging and Neurospectroscopy Laboratory (NINS) of the National Brain Research Center (NBRC), in Manesar, Haryana, has developed a brain template, Brahma, which will show intrinsic details about the anatomy of the Indian brain.

Background

This comes close on the heels of Mandal in December leading a team that had developed a technology that uses the brain’s stress levels and pH for early identification of brain disorders such as Alzheimer’s disease, Parkinson’s disease, depression and schizophrenia.

What is a brain template?

- Brain template is a gross representation from various brain images to understand brain functionality in diseased conditions.
- Studies have so far been conducted to develop a standard brain template that is compatible to different populations, though the human brain is highly
Significance of Brahma

- Brahma will be a crucial guide for Indian brain scientists as doctors have so far relied solely on US and Canadian brain templates for anatomical details for surgery and treatment of Indian patients. However, the American template may differ from the Indian one.

About the Brahma project

- The project, funded by the department of science and technology (DST), took more than two years to complete.
- The research was conducted taking volunteers from across India, from all states, for true representation of an Indian brain template. The critical data was generated at NBRC using the state-of-the-art magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans using 3T Philips Scanner.
- Brahma can be used for research and later can be validated for clinical use for surgical procedure. This template will be available for academic use free of charge.

Significance of Brahma

- Brahma will be a crucial guide for Indian brain scientists as doctors have so far relied solely on US and Canadian brain templates for anatomical details for surgery and treatment of Indian patients. However, the American template may differ from the Indian one.

- How Brahma is important is simple to understand. If we want to go to any part of India, we use Google maps and we reach there. Similarly, for any brain study or surgical procedure in India, scientists and clinicians previously used US or Canadian MNI (Montreal Neurological Institute)
The brain has huge complexity and brain functionality is not completely understood till date. It will be immensely important to conduct multimodal brain study to understand psychiatric disorders such as depression, schizophrenia and bipolar disorders. The development of the Indian brain template will be helpful to achieve more accurate and precise allocation of brain regions in neurosurgery.

Source: Livemint

Air defence command plan on GS-III | 03 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate

Prelims and Mains focus: about the move and its significance; CDS: mandate and functions

News: In his first meeting with the officials of the Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff, the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Bipin Rawat, outlined priorities towards creating an air defence command and common logistics support pools as part of measures to create jointness and synergy among the three services.

- The areas identified for jointness and synergy include creation of common logistics support pools in stations where two or more services have their presence.

- Gen. Rawat directed various branch heads to come up with
recommendations for interservice synergy and jointness in a time-bound manner.

- Emphasising collegiate system of functioning, he directed that all three services and the Coast Guard must be consulted and their views obtained in a time-bound manner. Decisions will, however, be taken to ensure optimisation of resources.

- Efforts will be made to cut out infructuous ceremonial activities, which are manpower intensive.

Significance of the move and concerns associated

- The air defence command and common logistics support pools are steps towards creating theatre commands in future, which is also in the mandate of the CDS. However, there is no consensus among the services on theatre commands and the Indian Air Force (IAF) has been especially opposed to the move.

- On this issue, Gen. Rawat stated after assuming charge on Thursday that “we are copying western methods and what others have done” and “we have to find a system which suits India.”

- Defence officials said a joint services Act is also being worked out which is being formulated by the Army AdjutantGeneral’s branch in coordination with the Navy and the IAF. The three services are currently guided by their respective Service Acts.

Mandate of CDS

The broad mandate of the CDS includes bringing about jointness in operations,
logistics, transport, training, support services, communications, repairs and maintenance of the three services, **within three years of the first CDS assuming office.**
India, Nepal to hold talks on Kalapani
GS-II | 03 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** India and its neighbourhood relations.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the Kalapani dispute between India and Nepal; about the Treaty of Sagauli

**News:** Nepal and India will resolve the Kalapani border issue through dialogue, the Ministry of External Affairs said on Thursday.

**Context:**

- Nepal has raised objections after India released its new political map in November last year following the reorganisation of Jammu and Kashmir.

- Nepal claimed that Limpiyadhura, Lipulek, and Kalapani areas were shown under India's territory even though they lie within the Nepalese territory.

- India has said the new map accurately depicts its sovereign territory and it has in no manner revised its boundary with Nepal.

**Background**

- Nepalese territories including Darjeeling were handed to the British East India Company as concessions under the Sugauli treaty which was signed...
in 1816 on the conclusion of the **Anglo-Nepalese War**.

- Under the treaty, the Nepalese-controlled territory that was ceded included all areas that the king of Nepal had won in earlier wars such as the kingdom of Sikkim in the east and Kumaon and Garhwal in the west.
UPSC "PT" DNA (Daily News Analysis)
India records less than 100 tiger deaths for the first time in three years

GS-III | 03 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the tiger population stats across the country; about NTCA: functions and significance

**News:** For the first time in the past three years, the number of tiger deaths in a year in the country has been less than 100.

**Context:**

- According to data from the **Ministry of Forest Environment and Climate Change (MoEFCC)**, there were 84 cases of tiger deaths in the country and 11 cases of seizures (in which a tiger is presumed dead on the basis of body parts seized by authorities). Both put together, the number of tiger deaths in 2019 was 95.

- In **2018**, the number of tiger deaths recorded was 100 (93 mortalities and seven seizures). The number was 115 (98 mortalities and 17 seizures) in **2017**, and 122 (101 mortalities and 21 seizures) in **2016**.
Significance

- These figures should be seen in the context that tiger numbers in the country were growing.
The last tiger census report, released in July 2019, had placed the number of tigers in India at 2,967, up by a third when compared with the numbers reported in 2014.

Reasons for reduction in tiger deaths

- The reduced numbers of tiger mortalities are because of surveillance, good management of Tiger Reserves and a lot of awareness and education programmes on tiger conservation.

- Using technology to maintain surveillance on tigers has also come as an added advantage.

Tiger deaths across states

- Madhya Pradesh, which has the highest number of tigers in the country (526, as per the last census), recorded the most number of cases (31) of tiger deaths.
- This was followed by Maharashtra, which reported 18 deaths. Karnataka, another State with high tiger population, recorded 12 deaths, and Uttarakhand recorded ten deaths.
- Tamil Nadu recorded seven cases of tiger deaths.
- Deaths were also recorded from nontiger bearing States like Gujarat, where a tiger had strayed into the State and died.

Way ahead

With the increase in tiger numbers, more areas in the country need to be declared Tiger Reserves. Currently, there are 50 Tiger Reserves in India with an area of about 73,000 sq. km.

About National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)

- It is a statutory body under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and
Climate Change constituted under enabling provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, as amended in 2006, for strengthening tiger conservation, as per powers and functions assigned to it under the said Act.

- It has been fulfilling its mandate within the ambit of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 for strengthening tiger conservation in the country by retaining an oversight through advisories/normative guidelines, based on appraisal of tiger status, ongoing conservation initiatives and recommendations of specially constituted Committees.

Functions

- Ensuring normative standards in tiger reserve management
- Preparation of reserve specific tiger conservation plan
- Laying down annual/audit report before Parliament
- Instituting State level Steering Committees under the Chairmanship of Chief Minister and establishment of Tiger Conservation Foundation.
- According approval for declaring new Tiger Reserves.
Northeast monsoon ends, country records 30 per cent surplus rain
GS-I | 03 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone etc., geographical features and their location-changes in critical geographical features (including water-bodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes.

Prelims and Mains focus: About the monsoon: its features and impact; South-west and north-east monsoon

News: 2019 was a year of bountiful rain. The year’s Northeast monsoon ended on a high, with the season’s total rainfall recorded remaining 30 per cent surplus.

Northeast Monsoon (Retreating Monsoon)

- **India Meteorological Department (IMD) recognizes October to December as the period for Northeast monsoon.**

- During this period, where rainfall is experienced over southern states, mainly over Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh along with some parts of Telangana and Karnataka.

- In areas around Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and along the northeast, precipitation during this period reported is either in the form of rainfall or snowfall (due to Western disturbances).
Monsoon in India

- Monsoon is seasonal changes in atmospheric circulation and precipitation associated with the asymmetric heating of land and sea.
- The southwest monsoon brings rains towards the end of summer as the high pressure built in the Indian Ocean pushes the wind masses towards the low pressure formed on land.
- **Temperature Gradient:** It's the temperature variation between the sea and the landmass.

Southwest V/s Northeast monsoon

- The **northeast monsoon**, or winter monsoon, blows from land to sea, whereas **south-west monsoon**, or summer monsoon, blows from sea to land after crossing the Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea, and Bay of Bengal.

- The southwest monsoon brings most of the rainfall in the country - approximately 75 per cent of India’s annual rainfall.
Source: Indian Express
Economy braces for a crude shock after US airstrike kills Iran general

GS-II | 04 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Prelims and Mains focus: Escalating US-Iran tensions and its impact on India's economy

News: Investors in India were rattled on Friday after a US airstrike killed a top Iranian general, sending crude oil prices soaring, a development that could further strain the finances of the world's third largest crude importer and deepen an economic slowdown.
Context:
Crude oil futures in London and New York surged by more than 4% to levels not seen since the attacks on Saudi Arabia’s oil production facility in September. The strike near Baghdad airport killed Qasem Soleimani, the Iranian general who led the Revolutionary Guards’ Quds force, according to a US defence department statement.

Escalating tensions between US and Iran

While no oil installations or production were hit, the killing of one of Iran’s most powerful generals is a provocation that ratchets up tension between Washington and Tehran, heightening fears of an armed confrontation that could pull in other countries. As focus shifts to how Iran will react, the country’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, vowed “severe retaliation” awaits the killers of Soleimani.

Impact on India’s economy

- The surge in prices is worrying for New Delhi as India imports more than 80% of its fuel requirements. Analysts forecast that Brent crude oil prices could breach $70-72 a barrel in the coming weeks if Teheran retaliates.

- Even though New Delhi has slashed its crude imports from Iran to negligible levels since a US sanctions waiver on its purchases ended in May last year, a bulk of India’s crude oil supplies are routed from West Asian nations through the Strait of Hormuz—a narrow passageway that carries one-fifth of the world’s oil—which could be vulnerable in the case of a wider US-Iran conflict.

Significance of Strait of Hormuz

Bounded to the north by Iran and to the south by Oman and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Strait of Hormuz connects the Gulf with the Arabian Sea.
Iranian officials had in April threatened to block the Strait of Hormuz in retaliation to US sanctions. India had deployed naval assets in the region to protect its supplies in the wake of mine attacks on oil tankers in the region.

With India’s gross domestic product growth slowing to a six-and-a-half-year low of 4.5% in the September quarter, there are serious concerns that high fuel prices could hurt economic recovery.

Another worry, according to government officials, is that tensions between Iran and the US could affect India’s trade with the region, which now stands at $78 billion (from Gulf Cooperation Council member countries—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman), according to April-November figures from India’s commerce ministry.

West Asia is the source of some $200 billion in remittances and investments for India.

The jitters over the potential economic impact saw the rupee on Friday closing at a six-week low against the dollar, while the benchmark BSE Sensex fell 0.39% to 41,464.61 points.

Source: Livemint

Special provisions likely for J&K residents in jobs, land rights

Syllabus subtopic: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.
Prelims and Mains focus: about the Centre’s decision on J&K and its significance; About scrapping of Article 35A and 370 and changes thereto

News: The Centre is all set to provide protection to domiciles of Jammu and Kashmir in government jobs, educational institutions and land rights, a senior government official said on Friday.

What is it about?

• The Centre is exploring the option of implementing the mandatory requirement of continuous stay in the region for a minimum of 15 years before applying for a job in the government sector and for admissions in schools and colleges in the Union Territory of J&K.

• The special provisions were being examined on the lines of those in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. The provisions pertain to regulating ownership and transfer of land to conserve the limited resources available for development.

• The regulations also ensure that the State preserves its unique identity.

What is Article 371 about?

• There are 12 States including Himachal Pradesh where provisions of special status under Article 371 of the Constitution apply. The Centre was considering a proposal to grant special status to J&K. After the new UT of J&K was carved out, several groups in Jammu expressed concerns about losing special status and apprehension of losing land and jobs to outsiders.

• Most of the States that have been accorded special provisions under Article 371 are in the northeast and the special status aims to preserve their tribal culture.
Background

On August 6, the Centre revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 and Article 35A of the Constitution and downgraded and bifurcated the State into two Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh.

What were Article 35A and Article 370 for?

The two provisions of the Constitution that were revoked let the J&K legislature decide the “permanent residents” of the State, prohibiting a non-J&K resident from buying property in the State and ensuring job reservation for its residents.
CAA will leave many children stateless: plea
GS-II | 04 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the concerns raised by the plea; about CAA 2019 and its significance

**News:** The citizenship law which differentiates children on the basis of their date of birth will leave many stateless, a petition filed in the Supreme Court on Friday contended.

**What did the plea challenge?**

Besides challenging the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, for discrimination in the grant of citizenship on the basis of religion, the petition filed by Association for Protection of Civil Rights, an NGO, challenged the validity of Section 3 (1) of the original Citizenship Act, 1955.

**What does Section 3(1) of the Citizenship Act, 1955 say?**

Section 3(1) creates three scenarios:

1. It mandates that children born in India on or after January 26, 1950, but before July 1, 1987, are entitled to citizenship by birth.
2. **Secondly,** it says children born in India on or after July 1, 1987, but before December 3, 2004, would be entitled to Indian citizenship by birth only if either of the parents is an Indian citizen.
3. **Thirdly,** it provides that children born in India on or after December 3, 2004,
would be entitled to Indian citizenship by birth only if both of parents are citizens or one of the parents is a citizen and the other is not an illegal migrant.

What does this mean?

Hence, while there are conditions for children born between 1950 and 1987, children born in the second and third time-frame may end up stateless.

- Those children who were born in India on or after July 1, 1987, but before December 3, 2004, whose parents were illegal migrants would not be granted citizenship but would not even be considered illegal migrants within Section 3(2) (b) of the Citizenship Act, 1955.
- Similarly, those children who were born in India on or after December 3, 2004, either of whose parents was an illegal migrant, would again not be granted citizenship," the petition contended.
- The court will hear the petitions against the CAA and the NRC on January 22.
Centre approves 2,636 auto charging stations

GS-II | 04 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by
the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Prelims and Mains focus: About FAME India scheme; its features and significance

News: The Centre has approved setting up of 2,636 charging stations in 62 cities across the country under the FAME India scheme, which will encourage original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) to launch new electric vehicle models, Union Minister Prakash Javadekar said on Friday.

- Of the 2,636 stations, **1,633 will be fast charging stations**. About 14,000 chargers will be installed across the selected cities.

About FAME India scheme

- FAME India is a part of the National Electric Mobility Mission Plan (NEMMP). Main thrust of FAME is to encourage electric vehicles by providing subsidies.
- Vehicles in most segments – two wheelers, three wheelers, electric and hybrid cars and electric buses obtained the subsidy benefit of the scheme.
- FAME **focuses on 4 areas** i.e. Technology development, Demand Creation, Pilot Projects and Charging Infrastructure.
UPSC "PT" DNA (Daily News Analysis)
Maharashtra to present plan on women’s cyber safety

GS-II | 04 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the agenda of the Western Zonal Council; about Zonal Council: Composition; Objectives and functions

News: Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray will cochair the next meeting of the Western Zonal Council (WZC), which will have, among other issues, women safety on top of the agenda.

Other details

- The 25th meet of the council will be held this month under the chairmanship of Union Home Minister Amit Shah.
- Maharashtra, the lead coordinator this time, will present a roadmap for the safety of women online and ways to curb cyber bullying as its priority agenda, called the ‘Cyber Safe Women’ programme.

Western Zonal Council

- The council, functioning under the aegis of the Ministry of Home Affairs’ Inter-State Council Secretariat, comprises Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra, the Union Territories of Daman and Diu, and Dadra and Nagar Haveli.

About Zonal councils
These are statutory bodies established under the States Reorganisation Act 1956 and not constitutional bodies. They are only deliberative and advisory bodies.

- **Aim**: to promote interstate cooperation and coordination.

There are **5 Zonal councils** namely:


2. The **Central Zonal Council**, comprising the States of Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

2. The **Eastern Zonal Council**, comprising the States of Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, and West Bengal.

2. The **Western Zonal Council**, comprising the States of Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra and the Union Territories of Daman & Diu and Dadra & Nagar Haveli.

2. The **Southern Zonal Council**, comprising the States of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and the Union Territory of Puducherry.

The **North Eastern States** i.e. (i) Assam (ii) Arunachal Pradesh (iii) Manipur (iv) Tripura (v) Mizoram (vi) Meghalaya (vii) Sikkim and (viii) Nagaland are not included in the Zonal Councils and their special problems are looked after by the **North Eastern Council**, set up under the **North Eastern Council Act, 1972**.
Organisational structure of Zonal Councils

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

The **main objectives** of setting up of Zonal Councils are:

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

**Functions**

In particular, a Zonal Council may discuss, and make recommendations with regard to:

- any matter of common interest in the field of economic and social planning;
- any matter concerning border disputes, linguistic minorities or inter-State transport;
- any matter connected with or arising out of, the re-organization of the States under the States Reorganisation Act, 1956.
NHRC tells Rajasthan to explain Kota deaths
GS-II | 04 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies

Prelims and Mains focus: About the recent deaths of children in Kota, Rajasthan; NHRC: composition, vision and significance

News:
The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on Friday issued a notice to the Rajasthan government in connection with the deaths of over 100 children at the government-run J.K. Lon hospital in Kota in December.

- Taking **suo motu cognisance** of media reports, the Commission issued a notice to the Chief Secretary, asking for a detailed report within four weeks.

Background

According to the reports, as many as 10 children died in just 48 hours between December 23 and 24, 2019 at the hospital.

Suo motu cognisance?

- A Suo motu cognizance is a **Latin term** which means an action taken by a government agency, court or other central authority **on their own apprehension**.

- A court takes a Suo Motu Cognizance of a legal matter when it receives information about the violation of rights or breach of duty through media or a third party’s notification.
In India, Article 32 of the Indian Constitution and Article 226 of the Indian Constitution lay down the provisions for filing Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in India in Supreme Court and High Courts respectively. This has given rise to the court's power to initiate legal action on their cognizance of a matter. Suo Motu's actions by Indian courts are a reflection of activism by the judiciary and captivated the general public with the speedy delivery of justice by the courts. Suo Motu cases in India are generally taken up by the Supreme Court.

About NHRC

- The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of India was established on 12 October, 1993. The statute under which it is established is the Protection of Human Rights Act (PHRA), 1993 as amended by the Protection of Human Rights (Amendment) Act, 2006.

- It is in conformity with the Paris Principles, adopted at the first international workshop on national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights held in Paris in October 1991, and endorsed by the General Assembly of the United Nations by its Regulations 48/134 of 20 December, 1993.

- The NHRC is an embodiment of India’s concern for the promotion and protection of human rights.

- Section 2(1)(d) of the PHRA defines Human Rights as the rights relating to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual guaranteed by the Constitution or embodied in the International Covenants and enforceable by courts in India.

Composition

The NHRC consists of:

- A Chairperson, who has been a Chief Justice of India or a Judge of the
Supreme Court

- One member who is, or has been, a Judge of the Supreme Court of India
- One member who is, or has been, the Chief Justice of a High Court
- Three Members, out of which at least one shall be a woman to be appointed from amongst persons having knowledge of, or practical experience in, matters relating to human rights
- In addition, the Chairpersons of National Commissions (Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Women, Minorities, Backward Classes, Protection of Child Rights) and Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities serve as ex officio members.
- The sitting Judge of the Supreme Court or sitting Chief Justice of any High Court can be appointed only after the consultation with the Chief Justice of Supreme Court.

Vision & Mission
The NHRC has been set up by an Act of Parliament under the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 for the protection and promotion of human rights. The functions of the Commission as stated in Section 12 of the Act and apart from enquiry into complaints of violation of human rights or negligence in the prevention of such violation by a public servant, the Commission also studies treaties and international instruments on human rights and make recommendations for their effective implementation to the Government.

The Commission is responsible for spreading of human rights awareness amongst the masses and encouraging the efforts of all stake holders in the field of human rights literacy not only at the national level but at international level too.

NHRC is a unique institution because it is one of the few National Human Rights Institutes (NHRIs) in the world whose Chairperson is the former Chief Justice of the country. The world looks at NHRC of India as a role model in promoting and monitoring effective implementation of promotion and protection of human rights.

The NHRC, India plays an active role in coordinating with other NHRIs of the world to enhance awareness from the perspective of human rights. It has also hosted delegations from UN Bodies and other National Human Rights Commissions as well as members of civil society, lawyers and political and social activists from many countries.

Source: The Hindu

Fears of surge in oil price, Govt looks outside Gulf

GS-III | 04 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.
Prelims and Mains focus: Escalating tensions in West Asia and its impact on Indian economy

News: As oil prices surged after the killing of Iranian commander, General Qassem Soleimani, in a US drone strike in Baghdad, senior officials of the Finance Ministry and the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas held a high-level meeting Friday to assess the impact and review contingency measures.

Why?

- There’s a possibility of a disruption to oil supplies impacting India’s external debt situation and restricting the headroom to counter the slowdown.

Why is it a worrying issue?

- The concerns stem from the fact that the quartet of Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Iran and the UAE are the top crude suppliers to India, all of which are in the geographical zone likely to be impacted. It is estimated that a $10-per-barrel increase in the price of oil would negatively impact India’s growth by 0.2-0.3 percentage points and worsen the Current Account Deficit (CAD) by $9-10 billion dollars.

- While Indian refineries import crude oil from diverse sources, depending on their technical and commercial considerations and keeping in view the domestic requirement, imports from the OPEC bloc has progressively been brought down from 85.4 per cent in FY’17 to 75.4 per cent in the April-September period of FY’20.

- A rise in global crude prices leads to an increase in the domestic price of crude products, thereby fuelling higher domestic inflation.

- A surge has both a direct and indirect impact on the consumer price index.
(CPI) — firstly, with crude products themselves figuring as constituents in the CPI and seeing a price impact and then, indirectly, a rise in retail prices of all other commodities manufactured using crude as an input reflecting as a cascading impact, which pushes up the CPI again.

- Crude oil import is denominated in the US Dollar and higher import prices raise the country’s import bill, leading to a worsening of the CAD — a measurement of a country’s trade balance when the value of the imported goods and services exceeds the value of the products it exports.

- CAD, however, is only a part of the country’s Balance of Payments accounting, which is dependent on various factors that include supply and demand of Rupee versus US Dollars, interest rate differentials and capital flows.

- India’s current account and fiscal deficits could worsen if oil prices remain at the elevated level, the RBI has warned in its last review. Experts said a sustained level above $70 a barrel could dent the country’s import bill and hence, fiscal math for the current fiscal.

- The RBI, in its latest Monetary Policy Committee review, had flagged crude oil prices as among six factors that could influence inflation outlook, with the rider that “crude oil prices are expected to remain range bound, barring any supply disruptions due to geo-political tensions” even as it revised the CPI inflation projection upwards to 5.1-4.7 per cent for the second half of FY’20.

- A further escalation of the crisis could potentially force the RBI to extended the pause in its rate-cutting cycle.

What was discussed in the meeting?
- Both short-term and long-term diversification measures to reduce
dependence on the West Asian region, especially in the wake of a protracted escalation of the crisis, were discussed.

- They included **alternative import options**, including a status update on an agreement entered into with the US and ongoing talks with Russia for crude supplies.
- Indian refineries are being progressively encouraged to import crude from sources such as the US, Canada and Mexico, apart from the discussions with Russia. An emphasis on expediting these negotiations has also been done.

Source: Indian Express
Syllabus subtopic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the problems faced by the govt. in GST collections and its impact on the fiscal deficit

News: The budgeted fiscal deficit for 2019-20 stands at Rs. 7.04 trillion. However, the fiscal deficit for the period April-November is higher than this and stands at Rs. 8.08 trillion.
Why has the fiscal deficit crossed Rs. 8 trillion?

The fiscal deficit of Rs. 8.08 trillion for April-November is nearly 15% more than the budgeted fiscal deficit for the year, with data for four months yet to be available. Fiscal deficit basically has two entries: the total expenditure of the government and its total earnings. The total expenditure during the first eight
months of the fiscal is Rs. 18.20 trillion. This is a little over 65% of the expenditure that the government plans to make during the year. Hence, things are all right on the expenditure front. The problems are on the earnings front, in particular the tax revenues that the government had hoped to earn during this fiscal.

What’s wrong with the tax revenue growth?

The gross tax revenue collected by the government during the first eight months of the fiscal was Rs. 11.74 trillion, around 0.8% higher than during the same period last year. Hence, tax collections have been largely flat this year. The interesting thing is that the gross tax revenue needs to grow 18.3% from last year’s collections for the government to earn what it has projected in the budget. Finance ministry bureaucrats were not expecting the economy and tax collections to slow down as much as they have. The economy grew by a little over 7% in the first half of this fiscal. The growth in tax collections hasn’t matched that.

How do things look for the remaining part of this fiscal?

The gross tax revenue that the government had hoped to earn this fiscal is Rs. 24.61 trillion. It has barely earned around 48% of this in the first eight months of the fiscal. It is highly unlikely for the government to earn the remaining 52% between December 2019 and March 2020. This means there is a large hole in its budget for the current fiscal.

Can disinvestment solve this problem?

The disinvestment of public sector enterprises (PSEs) was supposed to bring in Rs. 1.05 trillion this fiscal. Until November, only Rs. 18,099 crore or 17% of the projected amount had been earned. Media reports seem to suggest major disinvestments that the government has planned won’t go through this year. That basically leaves the government with two ways of trimming the fiscal deficit: cutting down on expenditure or not showing it. Reducing expenditure when government spending is driving growth would be a bad idea.
What does it mean not to show expenditure?

Over the years, the government hasn’t paid the food subsidy dues of the Food Corporation of India (FCI) on time. It can try this trick this time as well. Given that the government works on cash accounting, when it decides not to pay for an expenditure it doesn’t show up in the books of the government. Of course, FCI has to borrow this money to keep functioning. Banks lend to FCI mainly because they believe they are lending to the government.

Note: to read more about the Food Corporation of India click on the following link
https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/agri-business/with-stocks-piling-up-fci-is-in-deep-trouble/article29268321.ece

Source: Livemint

Uptick in GST collections doesn’t suggest the economy is firing up
GS-III | 06 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Prelims and Mains focus: About the decisions made in GST Council regarding Input Tax Credit (ITC); trends in GST collections and its impact on fiscal deficit and the overall Indian economy.

News: Goods and services tax (GST) collections in December accelerated to cross the Rs. 1 trillion mark for the second consecutive month, up 8.9% year-on-year. This should normally suggest green shoots. However, changed GST
What are the changed norms of claiming img credit?

- The changed norms mandate companies to match their purchase invoices with those uploaded by their vendors.
- Input credit claims have been limited to 20%, which is now further reduced to 10%, where details are not uploaded by suppliers.
- As a result, a larger number of companies have to upload GST returns with corresponding invoices into the system.
- This led to an increase in GST returns filed in December for sales in November, from 7.2 million a year ago to 8.1 million now. This means about 1 million filers have been added in 2019.
- The overall img tax credit may have decreased in the system, because of which taxpayers would have paid more GST. So, cash collections seem to have gone up.
Overall tax collections and performance of various sectors

- In contrast, overall tax collections have been anaemic. The government’s gross tax revenue declined 1% year-on-year until November.
- Also, the output of core industries contracted, slipping 1.5% year-on-year in November, the fourth consecutive month of decline.
- Auto volumes remain weak and the slight pickup in passenger vehicle sales could be explained by the increase in year-end discounts.
- Demand has been slowing down across the board because of weak income generation. This is more pronounced in the rural economy, the small and medium enterprises and the unorganized sector.
- All this hampers a broad-based pickup in consumption.
- Structural income generation in the economy at the middle and bottom of the pyramid has been affected.
- Rural income growth has been really low. This has led to a change in consumption patterns.
- Anaemic credit pickup among companies worsens the slowdown. Companies are barely raising more cash to fund operations and growth. The sluggish corporate bond and commercial paper market is an indicator of this. Fundraising from commercial papers and bonds, including corporate bank credit, has barely risen. Banks have hardly been lending.
- Besides, there is a lack of good borrowers. So, credit expansion is just not happening.

What about the fiscal deficit?

- GST collection trends may need to sustain in a big way in the next few months to bridge an increasing fiscal gap. The fiscal deficit has inched up to 115% of the budget estimates until November.
- This is higher than the typical 85-100% deficit seen till November in the past. This hampers the government’s ability to heavy-lift the economy. The room for propping up infrastructure and construction spends is limited.
- The growth numbers are easily getting a bump-up because of a lower offtake last year.
- The government’s heavy-lifting in the economy also has to sustain. However, the delicate fiscal situation is not making it any easy. So, unless GST picks up substantially, real income in the rural economy will hardly grow.
Conclusion

Though the economy seems to have bottomed out, in the light of weak GST and fiscal collections, the outlook is clouded. GST collections need to fire up and fire up in a big way.

Source: Livemint

India faces a year of tough trade talks

Syllabus subtopic: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India’s interests

Prelims and Mains focus: about the challenges India will be facing in negotiating trade deals this year; about RCEP, CECA, BTIA, GSP: their significance

News: After walking out of negotiations on the 16nation Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) free trade agreement, the government said it would renegotiate its existing free trade agreements (FTA) and redouble its efforts to conclude other trade negotiations. The task is likely to swamp negotiators of both the Commerce and Industries and External Affairs Ministries in 2020.

RCEP walkout

- To begin with, the RCEP walkout is not cast in stone yet, as the other 15 countries, including 10 ASEAN members and their FTA partners China, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and South Korea, will complete legal reviews by June and are only expected to sign the deal in November 2020.
• In the interim, many countries, most notably Japan, Australia and even China, have said they would be keen to work with India to convince the government to rejoin the RCEP.
India-Australia CECA

While the RCEP is being wrapped up, India's long-pending negotiations with Australia for a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA), as well as Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal’s plans to reopen the existing FTAs with ASEAN, Japan and South Korea will have to take a back seat.
Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA)

The next big trade focus for the government will be during the **EUIndia summit expected in March**, when PM Modi is expected to travel to Brussels, to meet the new European Commission President Ursula Von Der Leyen, and discuss restarting **EUIndia Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA)** talks. However, this is easier said than done, given that the talks that began in 2007 and stalled in 2013 over tariff issues, have not been resumed despite several efforts.
Bridging gap with U.S.

Finally, the two Ministries will focus on closing talks with U.S. Trade Representatives. In 2019, President Trump rescinded India’s GSP special status for exporters, which has led to more bitterness over the issue. Mr. Modi and Mr. Trump discussed the trade issues on two occasions when they met in
2019, but negotiators have been unable to forge any kind of deal, despite visits by Mr. Goyal to the U.S.

In the New Year, both sides hope a package of smaller agreements can be announced, but a free trade agreement could be several years away, as it hasn’t even been discussed officially yet.
UPSC "PT" DNA (Daily News Analysis)
Way ahead

Given all the challenges, the government is actively considering a sharper and leaner trade negotiating team that merges the best strengths of Commerce Ministry officials and External Affairs diplomats, on the lines of countries with a consolidated Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

With the world being carved up into regional trading blocs and India’s only regional Bloc, for SAARC nations (SAFTA) stalled, the odds of concluding more bilateral trading agreements will be that much harder in 2020.

Source: The Hindu

UPSC to conduct separate exam for Railway Service
GS-II | 06 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies

Prelims and Mains focus: about the recent reform in the railway service and its advantages; UPSC: structure and functions

News: The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) will conduct an exclusive examination for recruitment of officers to handle specialized services in the newly created Indian Railway Management Service (IRMS) following unification of eight different Railway services. The exam is expected to be held in the next recruitment circle of 2021

What will be the recruitment procedure?

- The UPSC will be given information about the requirement of cadre in various wings for the services, engineering etc. and the number of posts will be notified accordingly.
- Candidates from engineering will have to take the main examination on their
Reasons behind move

- The objective behind the “historic” massive restructuring of the management of the Indian Railways is to remove the “departmentalism” culture which has seeped all the way up to the Railway Board and ensure there is “one service and officers from one batch should get promotion in on go” and not as has been happening thus far.
- The 350odd officers joining the Railway service annually will all have an equal opportunity of reaching the top posts of Divisional Railway Managers (DRMs) and above, including General Managers, as well as to the Railway Board.
What was the practice till now?

Till now, only those chosen to become 34 DRMs each year based on their UPSC marks and date of birth had opportunity to reach higher posts, with the rest not even evaluated.

Changed procedure

- For the IRMS, there would be benchmark performance and personal integrity for all those joining service based on their 15year tenure by a group of three senior officers.
- The CRB has already clarified that existing officers would not be discriminated against in terms of promotions or posts as a Group of Ministers would be looking into the issue to make necessary adjustments even in creating new posts to accommodate performers.
About UPSC

Article 315 provides there will be one UPSC and State public service commission for every state, however two or more states may agree to have joint PSC and in that case the President shall be law provides for appointment of joint PSC.

Appointments

- Chairman and members of union public service commission are appointed by the President.
- Chairman and members of joint public service commission are appointed by the President.
- Chairman and members of state public service commission are appointed by the Governor.

As far as possible one half of the members of every public service commission should be those members which have held office for at least 10 years under the government of India or under the government of a state.

Functions

Under Article 320 of the Constitution of India, the Commission is, inter-alia, required to be consulted on all matters relating to recruitment to civil services and posts. The functions of the Commission under Article 320 of the Constitution are:

1. Conduct examinations for appointment to the services of the Union.
2. Direct recruitment by selection through interviews.
3. Appointment of officers on promotion/ deputation/ absorption.
4. Framing and amendment of Recruitment Rules for various services and posts under the Government.
5. Disciplinary cases relating to different Civil Services.
6. Advising the Government on any matter referred to the Commission by the President of India.

Tenure: All chairman and members are appointed for 6 years of until in case of UPSC they attain the age of 65 years and in case of joint and state commission is 62 years whichever is earlier.
Re-Appointment: No member of chairman of any public service commission will be eligible for reappointment to the same office. A member of a state commission may become chairman of that state commission or member of chairman of any commission including union public service commission. Members of UPSC may become chairman of state public service commission or of union public service commission. However, after the cease to hold the office they will not hold any office under the government of state or union government.

Removal:

Grounds:

1. Members and chairman can be removed on the ground of misbehaviour after the supreme court on reference being made to it by president after holding enquiry it is reported that any member or chairman should be removed.
2. When he is adjudged as insolvent.
3. When he accepts any paid employment outside the duty of his office.
4. When he is infirmity of mind of body.

All members of chairman of any commission (UPSC or State PSC) can be removed only by the President.

Article 317(1) - President in case of UPSC and Joint PSC and governor in case of State PSC may suspend chairman or any other member until the president has passed the order for removal on reference being made to the Supreme Court.

Source: The Hindu

NAL wants govt. push for Saras takeoff
GS-III | 06 January,2020

Syllabus subtopic: Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.
Prelims and Mains focus: about SARAS aircraft and its significance; about UDAN scheme

News: The government needs to be the “launch customer” to make Saras Mk2 commercially viable, the National Aerospace Laboratory (NAL), which has developed the first indigenous light transport aircraft, told the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science and Technology.

About Saras aircraft

- The 19seater aircraft, developed with a target cost of Rs. 50 crore, is at least 2025% lower in cost than other aircraft in the similar category.
- The aircraft has been in the making for long. The first prototype flew in 2004. But without the initial push from the government, the manufacturing capacity required for commercial production could not be set up, the NAL said.
- Presently, the NAL has only one order from the Indian Air Force for 15 aircraft.
Connecting SARAS to UDAN

- The NAL has been pitching Saras Mk2 for the government’s UDAN (Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik), since it has the capacity to operate in “ill-equipped”, “semiprepared” and “unpaved airstrips”.

About UDAN scheme

- UDAN is an acronym for “Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik”.

It is a Regional Air Connectivity Scheme (RCS) which attempts to connect smaller towns with bigger cities to develop the regional aviation market. The scheme UDAN envisages providing connectivity to un-served and under-served airports of the country through revival of existing air-strips and airports. It will create affordable yet economically viable and profitable flights on regional routes so that flying becomes affordable to the common man even in small towns. It was officially launched in 2016. Under the first two phases of UDAN, airlines are already operating on 120 routes to 37 un-served and underserved airports.

**UDAN Round 3:**

Under the latest round of the scheme, 73 proposals were awarded to 11 airlines that will connect a total of 39 airports. These include 16 unserved airports, 17 underserved airports and six water aerodromes.

**Key Features of UDAN 3 included –**

- Inclusion of Seaplanes for connecting Water Aerodromes,
- Inclusion of Tourism Routes suggested by the Ministry of Tourism and
- Bringing in a number of routes in the North-East Region under the ambit of UDAN.

**Way ahead**

- The NAL has said in its report that the government should be the “launch customer”, and place an order for at least 5060 aircraft, which can be used for VIP services or tackling emergencies in times of natural calamities.
- With the firm commitment for procurement from the government, industries will come forward to set up manufacturing infrastructure. This will also push the growth of the micro, small and medium enterprises and allied service sector.

**About NAL**
National Aerospace Laboratories (NAL), is India’s second largest aerospace firm after Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL). The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) established it in 1959 in Delhi and its headquarters was later moved to Bangalore in 1960. The firm closely operates with HAL, DRDO and ISRO and has prime responsibility of developing civilian aircraft in India.

Source: The Hindu

Global Drosophila conference
GS-II | 06 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India’s interests

Prelims and Mains focus: About the Conference and its significance; about the Drosophila fly

News: Pune is set to host the fifth edition of the Asia Pacific Drosophila Research Conference (APDRC5), which is being organised in the country for the first time by the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER).

About the Conference

- This biennial conference, which is to be held between January 6 and 10, aims to promote the interaction of Drosophila researchers in the Asia-Pacific region with their peers in the rest of the world.

- It will bring together scientists from all over the world who use the fruit fly, Drosophila, as a model organism to address basic and applied questions.
The event will feature 430 delegates: 330 Indian and 100 foreign. It will see the participation of two Nobel laureates, professors Eric Wieschaus and Michael Rosbash, known for their seminal contribution to the fields of development biology and chronobiology respectively.

This event is one of the largest meetings of Drosophila researchers in the whole world and attracts scientists working in diverse disciplines ranging from cell and molecular biology to ecology and evolution.

A total 57 talks and 240 posters on topics ranging from gametogenesis and stem cells, morphogenesis and mechanobiology, hormones and physiology, cellular and behavioural neurobiology, infection and immunity and ecology and evolution are scheduled for the conference.

One of the highlights of this conference is that we are explicitly encouraging undergraduates from various institutes of the world to participate in it. There is a preconference symposium called ‘signals from the gut’ in collaboration with the National Centre for Cell Science, as well as a preconference microscopy workshop on superresolution microscopy. This will feature microscopes from fluorescence imaging to super resolution imaging (50 nm resolution) which are vital for certain kinds of fly work.

The last four editions of this conference took place in Taipei, Seoul, Beijing and Osaka.

What is Drosophila?

Drosophila is one of the most widelyused and preferred model organisms in biological research across the world for the last 100 years. Several
discoveries in biology have been made using this.
- Its genome is entirely sequenced and there is enormous information available about its biochemistry, physiology and behaviour.

**Note:** To read more about the Drosophila fly, click on the link below:

https://theconversation.com/animals-in-research-drosophila-the-fruit-fly-13571
Non-tribal communities can never claim to be indigenous: AAKS

Syllabus subtopic: Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India.

Prelims and Mains focus: About the ethnic tribes in Assam; Assam Accord and its significance

News: Non-tribal communities living in Assam can never claim to be ‘khilonjia’ or indigenous, said the All Assam Kochari Samaj (AAKS) that represents the earliest ethnic communities inhabiting the State.

Significance of the statements:

The samaj’s statement assumes significance ahead of a report to be submitted by a 15-member panel enlisting the communities that qualify to be called ‘khilonjia’ for implementing Clause 6 of the Assam Accord of 1985.

What is Assam Accord?

- The Assam Accord (1985) was a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) signed between representatives of the Government of India and the leaders of the Assam Movement in New Delhi on 15 August 1985.
- The accord brought an end to the Assam Agitation and paved the way for the leaders of the agitation to form a political party and form a government in the state of Assam soon after.
- As per the Accord, those Bangladeshis who came between 1966 and
1971 will be barred from voting for ten years. The Accord also mentions that the international borders will be sealed and all persons who crossed over from Bangladesh after 1971 are to be deported.

- Though the accord brought an end to the agitation, some of the key clauses are yet to be implemented, which has kept some of the issues festering.

What does Clause 6 state?

Clause 6 of the Assam Accord “envisaged that appropriate constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.”

1881 census

- The 1881 census recorded 19 groups within the Kochari classification but some got isolated from the parental stock. Today, it comprises communities such as Bodo, the largest plains tribe in the northeast, Deuri, Dimasa, Rabha, Sonowal Kachari, Thengal Kachari and Tiwa.

- Large swathes of Assam are under autonomous or development councils specifically for these communities.

Kochari kingdom

- Kochari kings began ruling areas under presentday Assam and beyond 1,500 years before the Mahabharata era. But the nontribal have pushed the tribal history aside despite the United Nations specifying that only the aborigines can be called indigenous.

- The samaj claimed many traits representative of mainstream Assamese culture today were appropriated from the tribes. These include the floral ‘gamosa’, or cloth-towel, that has become a symbol of the anti-CAA protest.

- The Kochari group also pointed out that the Ahoms, who came from Thailand some 800 years ago, were nonindigenous. The Ahoms are one of six communities demanding Scheduled Tribe status, which the Kocharis enjoying ST status are opposed to.
Ethnic groups in Assam

- Assam is acknowledged as the settling land for a lot of cultures. A number of tribal grouping have landed in the soils of Assam in the course of diverse directions as the territory was linked to a number of states and many different countries.
- **Austro-Asiatic, Mongoloids, and Indo-Aryans** had been the most important traditional groups that arrived at the site and lived in the very old Assam. They were well thought-out as the ‘aborigines’ of Assam and yet at the moment they are essential elements of the “Assamese Diaspora”.

- The **greater Bodo-kachari group** encompasses the 18 major tribes of Assam, both plain and hills, viz., **Boro, Dimasa, Chutia, Sonowal, Mech, Tiwa, Garo, Rabha, Sarania, Hajong, Tripuri, Deori, Thengal, Hojai, Koch, and others**.

- The ancient land of ‘Kirat’ is also referred to the land of the Kachari. **Bodo Kacharis were historically the dominant group of Assam**, who were later dominated in the 1500s by the Tai Ahoms, the ethnic group who along with the Upper Assam Bodo-Kachari groups like **Chutias, Morans and Borahis** were associated with the term "Assamese".

- Along with Tai Ahoms, they were other prominent groups that ruled Assam valley during the medieval period, those belonging to the Chutiya, Koch, and Dimasa communities. The first group ruled from 1187 to 1673 in the eastern part of the state, the second group ruled Lower Assam from 1515 to 1949, while the third group ruled southern part of Assam from the 13th century to 1854.

- Bodos are the dominant group in BTAD (Bodoland Territorial Council). They speak the Bodo language among themselves along with using Assamese to communicate with other indigenous Assamese communities as the lingua-
Most of the indigenous Assamese communities today have actually been historically tribal and even the now considered non-tribal population of Assam were actually tribes which have slowly been converted into castes through Sanskritisation.

Actually, more than 70-75% or more of the now considered non-tribal population of Assam actually have Mongoloid roots and origin and thus were historically tribal. Some of the tribal groups were able to enter into the Hindu upper caste society while some of them remained in the tribal or lower caste society. Thus, Assam has always been a historically tribal state.

Ahoms along with Chutiya, Moran, Motok, and Koch are still regarded as semi-tribal groups who have nominally converted to Ekasarana Dharma even though keeping alive their own tribal traditions and customs. Various indigenous Assamese communities in Assam like Chutiya, Koch-Rajbongshi, Moran, Motok, Ahoms etc (all having tribal origin) have slowly been converted into a caste through Sanskritisation.

As per latest development Moran, Chutiya, Motok, Tea tribes, Tai Ahoms and Koch have realised the above-mentioned points and have applied for ST status. This will make Assam a predominantly tribal state having wider geo-political ramifications.

Source: The Hindu
Spectre of fresh NPAs looms over banks this year

GS-III | 07 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the NPA crisis in the banking sector: its causes and impact; evergreening of loans

News: The Reserve Bank of India’s (RBI) Financial Stability Report (FSR) said the gross non-performing assets (GNPA) ratio of banks remained the same between March and September 2019, but could rise to 9.9% by September 2020.
What has been the trend on NPAs?
The recognition of NPAs of banks improved after RBI initiated an asset quality review (AQR) in 2015. Prior to that, banks had been hiding bad loans rather than disclosing them transparently in their books. As a result of the AQR, the GNPA ratio shot up from 4.3% in March 2015 to 9.3% in March last year. This ratio could increase to 9.9% by September 2020, according to the latest FSR. The reasons given by the banking regulator for the expected increase include the changes in the macroeconomic scenario, marginal increase in slippages and the denominator effect of declining credit growth.

Does RBI have the full picture on NPAs?

The AQR brought transparency to the NPA recognition mechanism. However, RBI may not have a full measure of the problem of bad loans even now. The December 2018 FSR had indicated a recovery in NPAs. The next one, in June 2019, had said that the bulk of the legacy NPAs had already been recognized in the books of banks. The report even projected a further drop in the GNPA ratio from 9.3% in March 2019 to 9.0% in March 2020. However, the December 2019 FSR says the GNPA ratio would rise close to 10% in September this year. RBI was unable to anticipate that the pile of bad loans would increase.

Is the recognition of bad loans nearing completion?

The central bank says so. However, what has to be kept in mind is that no AQR of non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) has been initiated so far. If NBFCs, especially those that intermediate in the real estate sector, are rolling over or evergreening loans they took from banks, the extent to which banks’ NPAs would rise if such loans turn bad remains unknown.

What about under-reporting of NPAs?

Between the release of the June and December 2019 FSRs, RBI’s risk assessments showed at least 10 banks had understated GNPAAs for March 2019. The discrepancies discovered by RBI were disclosed to stock exchanges by the banks. They totalled Rs. 26,546.45 crore. The disclosures follow guidelines of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) issued in October 2019 that...
directed banks to intimate stock exchanges of all under-reporting of bad loans by
them, within 24 hours of RBI’s risk assessment reports.

**What is the impact of under-reported NPAs?**

If the aggregate discrepancies of Rs. 26,546.45 crore disclosed by the 10 banks
are incorporated into the GNPA ratio for March 2019, the figure rises to 9.3%. But
the GNPA ratio for March 2019 given in RBI’s December FSR is the same as that
in the June FSR. Whether RBI will restate the figure to account for banks' under-
reporting of GNPAs that its own risk assessments had found isn’t clear. RBI
needs to give the full picture on under-reported NPAs' impact on GNPA ratio.

**What is evergreening of loans?**

Evergreening in banking is a practice of providing a fresh loan to repay an old
loan. For example, a bank can lend money to a company to pay another bank’s
loan. In this way, the first bank can maintain its balance sheet and reduce its non-
performing assets (NPAs). The first bank can then extend a similar service to a
company which is unable to pay the debts of the second bank. So through
evergreening practice banks try to ‘manage’ their balance sheets by
circumventing banking laws.

Ever-greening of loans has unfortunately been a widespread practice adopted
by banks in the past to ever-green their stressed accounts (and avoid
classification of NPAs which would require higher provisioning, compliances and
impact profitability). This has led to huge debts getting piled up with borrower
entities who clearly have no capacity to repay such loans, and ultimately results in
a situation of hundreds (and in many cases thousands of crores) of bank debt
remaining unpaid, a consequence much against the public interest at large.

Source: Livemint
How automation affects global FDI flows

Syllabus subtopic: Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.

Prelims and Mains focus: about automation: its advantages and impact on economy

News: Across the world, the rise of automation has raised concerns over its impact on employment, especially in poor countries.
Is automation a threat?

- New research, however, suggests that these fears may be overblown. While automation will disrupt the flow of capital from rich to poorer countries, the poorest countries could actually gain from automation.

- A World Bank study uses data sets on greenfield foreign direct investments
(FDI) and industrial robot usage between 2004 and 2015 to investigate the relationship between automation and FDI flows.

- During the period, because of outsourcing, high-income countries (HICs) such as the European nations and the US, witnessed the largest FDI outflows, measured in terms of project announcements, into low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

- Besides, leading sectors in HICs witnessed a huge rise in automation. The study measures automation in terms of the intensity of robot use (robots per 1,000 employees).

- They find that electronic and automobile sectors were the most automated while textiles was the least automated. The study finds that as automation increases, FDI flows from HICs to LMICs fall.

- However, encouragingly, this relationship is non-linear. A 10% increase in the intensity of robots in HICs is associated with a 5.5% increase in the growth rate of FDI flows to LMICs. But above a certain threshold of automation in HICs, FDI inflows into LMICs grow at a diminishing rate and lead to reshoring with HICs investing in their own countries.

- For the poorest countries, automation actually leads to greater FDI inflows, but from a smaller pool of countries. Because of this, the study argues that fears of technological advancement displacing labour may be overstated, at least for the time being.

What does Automation mean?

- Automation is the creation of technology and its application in order to control and monitor the production and delivery of various goods and services. It performs tasks that were previously performed by humans.
Automation is being used in a number of areas such as manufacturing, transport, utilities, defense, facilities, operations and lately, information technology.

- Automation can be performed in many ways in various industries. For example, in the information technology domain, a software script can test a software product and produce a report. There are also various software tools available in the market which can generate code for an application. The users only need to configure the tool and define the process. In other industries, automation is greatly improving productivity, saving time and cutting costs.

- Automation is evolving quickly and business intelligence in applications is a new form of high-quality automation. In the technology domain, the impact of automation is increasing rapidly, both in the software/hardware and machine layer. However, despite advances in automation, some manual intervention is always advised, even if the tool can perform most of the tasks.

Source: Livemint

Climate change claimed 1,659 lives in 2019, the 7th warmest year on record

GS-III | 07 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Prelims and Mains focus: about IMD’s State of Climate Report, 2019 and its findings

News: Extreme weather events driven by climate change claimed as many as 1,659 lives across India in 2019, which ended as the seventh warmest year on
Remarks of IMD

- It was an extreme year in terms of weather. There were deadly heatwaves in summer and intense cold waves during winter. Several studies have shown that it is all linked to climate change.
- **Heavy rain- and flood-related incidents took the maximum toll**, claiming more than 850 lives across states, according to the *State of the Climate Report-2019* prepared by government’s weather department, which was released on Monday.

State-wise toll

- Bihar bore the brunt with 650 lives lost in the state, out of which 306 were lost in the floods triggered by heavy monsoon rain. Heavy showers also claimed several lives in Maharashtra (136), Uttar Pradesh (107), Kerala (88), Rajasthan (80), and Karnataka (43). Lightning and thunderstorm in these states led to the death of 380 people.

- The toll is derived from government reports and the actual toll could be higher. However, it is true that **floods are causing the maximum casualty**. This is one area that IMD is focusing on, developing early flood warning systems for cities. However, the management on ground based on those warnings has to be quick and adequate as well.

- The **searing temperatures during summer led to heat-waves**, killing 350 people. Of these, 292 were reported from Bihar alone, followed by 44 in Maharashtra, and 13 in Jharkhand.

- If summer was dominated by heatwaves, **severe cold wave and cold conditions swept large parts of northwest India in December**, killing more than 28 people in Uttar Pradesh.
Snowfall and avalanche-related incidents killed 33 people in Jammu and Kashmir and 18 in Leh.

The national capital recorded the longest cold spell of 18 days, with the maximum day-time temperature plummeting to the lowest ever (since 1902) of 9.4°C on 30 December.

Severe impact

However, the most evident impact was seen on the oceans, with one of the most intense cyclone seasons ever. As many as eight cyclonic storms formed over the Indian seas, including five in the Arabian Sea, compared to the usual one per year.

The assessment showed that India’s annual mean surface air temperature was +0.36°C above the 1981-2010 period average during all the four seasons in 2019, with the monsoon (June-September) being the warmest since 1901.

The temperature was substantially lower than the surface air temperature in 2016, but scientists warned that the threat of climate change, if not dealt with, could lead to many more extreme weather events.

The year 2016 remains the warmest year on record for India so far, followed by 2009, 2017, 2010, and 2015.

Way ahead

Extreme weather events are on the rise and we have been seeing this for the last few years. The challenge is to work on our early warning systems and prepare in advance.
Stressed urban cooperative banks to face PCAÂ-like curbs

GS-III | 07 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Prelims and Mains focus: About the RBI’s move: reasons and merits; about PMC crisis; UCBs and their significance

News: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to impose restrictions on urban cooperative banks (UCBs) for deterioration of financial position, in line with the prompt corrective action (PCA) framework that is imposed on commercial banks.

Context: The move comes in the wake of the recent crisis at the PMC Bank.

What are these restrictions?

- Under this revised Supervisory Action Framework (SAF), UCBs will face restrictions for worsening of three parameters:
  1. when net non-performing assets exceed 6% of net advances,
  2. when they incur losses for two consecutive financial years or have accumulated losses on their balance sheets, and
  3. if capital adequacy ratio falls below 9%.

- Action can be also taken if there are serious governance issues.
- For breach of such risk thresholds, UCBs will be asked to submit a board-approved action plan to correct the situation like reducing net NPAs below 6%, for restoring the profitability and wiping out the accumulated losses, and increasing capital adequacy ratio to 9% or above within 12 months.
The board of the UCB will be asked to review the progress under the action plan on quarterly/monthly basis and submit the postreview progress report to the RBI.

The RBI may also seek a boardapproved proposal for merging the UCB with another bank or converting itself into a credit society if CAR falls below 9%. It can impose restrictions on declaration or payment of dividend or donation without prior approval if any one of the risk thresholds is breached.

Some of the other curbs include restricting fresh loans and advances carrying risk weights more than 100% on incurring capital expenditure beyond a specified limit and on expansion of the balance sheet.

What does the RBI say?

The RBI said actions such as imposition of allinclusive directions under Section 35A of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949, and issue of showcause notice for cancellation of banking licence may be considered when continued normal functioning of the UCB is no longer considered to be in the interest of its depositors/public.

What are Cooperative Banks

Cooperative banks were set up to supplant indigenous sources of rural credit, particularly money lenders, today they mostly serve the needs of agriculture and allied activities, rural-based industries and to a lesser extent, trade and industry in urban centres. They work under the "No Profit No Loss" model.

Co-operative banks in India are registered under the States Cooperative Societies Act. The Co-operative banks are also regulated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and governed by the

- Banking Regulations Act 1949

Features of Cooperative Banks:
Customer Owned Entities: Co-operative bank members are both customer and owner of the bank.

Democratic Member Control: Co-operative banks are owned and controlled by the members, who democratically elect a board of directors. Members usually have equal voting rights, according to the cooperative principle of “one person, one vote”.

Profit Allocation: A significant part of the yearly profit, benefits or surplus is usually allocated to constitute reserves and a part of this profit can also be distributed to the co-operative members, with legal and statutory limitations.

Financial Inclusion: They have played a significant role in the financial inclusion of unbanked rural masses.

Classification of Cooperative Banks

1. Urban Cooperative Banks
2. Rural Cooperative Banks
   - State Cooperative Banks
   - District: Central Cooperative banks
   - Village: PACS (Primary agricultural cooperative society)
Source: The Hindu
State can regulate minority institutions: SC

GS-II | 07 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Indian Constitution- historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the SC judgement and its significance; constitutional provisions regarding minorities

News: The Supreme Court on Monday held that the State is well within its rights to introduce a regulatory regime in the “national interest” to provide minority educational institutions with well-qualified teachers in order for them to “achieve excellence in education.”

Background

- The judgment came on a challenge to the validity of the West Bengal Madrasah Service Commission Act of 2008.

- The State Act mandated that the process of appointment of teachers in aided madrasahs, recognised as minority institutions, would be done by a Commission, whose decision would be binding.

What did the SC say?

- The managements of minority institutions cannot ignore such a legal regime by saying that it is their fundamental right under Article 30 of the Constitution to establish and administer their educational institutions according to their choice.

- The regulatory law should however balance the dual objectives of ensuring standard of excellence as well as preserving the right of the
Constitutional Provisions:

The term "Minority" is **not defined in the Indian Constitution**. However, the Constitution recognises only religious and linguistic minorities.

1. **Article 29**: It provides that any section of the citizens residing in any part of India having a distinct language, script or culture of its own, shall have the right to conserve the same.
   - It **grants protection to both religious minorities as well as linguistic minorities**. However, the **Supreme Court held** that the scope of this article is not necessarily restricted to minorities only, as use of the word ‘section of citizens’ in the Article **that include minorities as well as majority**.

2. **Article 30**: Under the article, all minorities shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.
   - The protection under Article 30 is **confined only to minorities** (religious or linguistic) and does not extend to any section of citizens (as under Article 29).

3. **Article 350-B**: Originally, the Constitution of India did not make any provision with respect to the Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities. But, the Seventh Constitutional Amendment Act of 1956 inserted Article 350-B in the Constitution.
   - It provides for a Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities appointed by the President of India.
   - It would be the duty of the Special Officer to investigate all matters relating to the safeguards provided for linguistic minorities under the constitution.
New satellites will help Gaganyaan crew
GS-III | 07 January, 2020

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

Prelims and Mains focus: About the proposed IDRSS: its aim and significance

News: India plans to ring in its own era of spacetospace tracking and communication of its space assets this year by putting up a new satellite series called the Indian Data Relay Satellite System (IDRSS).

Objective of IDRSS

- The IDRSS is planned to track and be constantly in touch with Indian satellites, in particular those in low-earth orbits which have limited coverage of earth.
- In the coming years, it will be vital to Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), whose roadmap is dotted with advanced LEO missions such as space docking, space station, as well as distant expeditions to moon, Mars and Venus. It will also be useful in monitoring launches.
- The first beneficiary would be the prospective crew members of the Gaganyaan mission of 2022 who can be fully and continuously in touch with mission control throughout their travel.
UPSC "PT" DNA (Daily News Analysis)
How is it going to be implemented?

- Work on the two IDRSS satellites planned initially has begun. The first of them will be sent towards the end of 2020. It will precede the pre-Gaganyaan experimental unmanned space flight which will have a humanoid dummy. A second one will follow in 2021. The two will offer near total tracking, sending and receiving of information from the crew 24/7.
- IDRSS satellites of the 2,000 kg class would be launched on the GSLV launcher to geostationary orbits around 36,000 km away. In such apparently fixed orbits, they would be covering the same area on earth. A satellite in GEO covers a third of the earth below and three of them can provide total coverage.

Why is IRDSS significant?

During the launch of the human mission and also when the crew craft orbits earth from a distance of 400 km, at least one ground station must see and track it. But with available ground stations, that would not be the case. Without data relay satellites, ISRO would have to create a large number ground stations everywhere or hire them globally and yet the crewed spacecraft would not be visible all the time.

Is India the first country to employ relay satellites?

No. Older space majors such as the U.S. and Russia started their relay satellite systems in the late 1970s80s and a few already have around 10 satellites each. They have used them to monitor their respective space stations Mir and the International Space Station, and trips that dock with them, as well as the Hubble Space Telescope.

Source: The Hindu

ICAR to set up innovation fund to help farmers
Syllabus subtopic: e-technology in the aid of farmers.

Prelims and Mains focus: About the new Fund to be set up and its significance; about ICAR: role and mandate

News: A system will soon be put in place to scientifically validate, scale up and propagate the innovations of progressive farmers as the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) is poised to set up a Farmers' Innovation Fund (FIF).

What is it about?

- As part of this system, an innovation centre would be established in New Delhi where the innovations would be scientifically validated.
- Farmers would also be allowed to pursue research under the system.
- Though innovations of farmers were being documented by the Krishi Vigyan Kendras, the additional system would encourage farmers to continue their work.
- The intention was to link farmers and farming with science and to ensure that their farm practices were sciencebased.
- As part of efforts to encourage use of technology in the farm sector, a linkage had been created between 105 startups with farmers.

Why science is crucial for agriculture?

Agriculture is pure science. If we do not apply the principles of science to agriculture, then we will fail. Various revolutions in agricultural and allied sectors, including green revolution and white revolutions, happened because of scientific approach and use of technology.
About Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)

- It is an autonomous organisation under the Department of Agricultural Research and Education (DARE), Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India.

- Formerly known as Imperial Council of Agricultural Research, it was established on 16 July 1929 as a registered society under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 in pursuance of the report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture. The ICAR has its headquarters at New Delhi.

- The Council is the apex body for co-ordinating, guiding and managing research and education in agriculture including horticulture, fisheries and animal sciences in the entire country. With 101 ICAR institutes and 71 agricultural universities spread across the country this is one of the largest national agricultural systems in the world.

- The ICAR has played a pioneering role in ushering Green Revolution and subsequent developments in agriculture in India through its research and technology development that has enabled the country to increase the production of food grains by 5 times, horticultural crops by 9.5 times, fish by 12.5 times, milk 7.8 times and eggs 39 times since 1951 to 2014, thus making a visible impact on the national food and nutritional security. It has played a major role in promoting excellence in higher education in agriculture. It is engaged in cutting edge areas of science and technology development and its scientists are internationally acknowledged in their fields.

Mandate

The mandate of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research is:

- To plan, undertake, aid, promote and coordinate education, research and its application in agriculture, agroforestry, animal husbandry, fisheries, home science and allied sciences.
To act as a clearing house of research and general information relating to agriculture, animal husbandry, home science and allied sciences, and fisheries through its publications and information system; and instituting and promoting transfer of technology programmes.

To provide, undertake and promote consultancy services in the fields of education, research, training and dissemination of information in agriculture, agroforestry, animal husbandry, fisheries, home science and allied sciences.

To look into the problems relating to broader areas of rural development concerning agriculture, including postharvest technology by developing co-operative programmes with other organizations such as the Indian Council of Social Science Research, Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, Bhabha Atomic Research Centre and the universities.

To do other things considered necessary to attain the objectives of the Society.

Source: The Hindu
Syllabus subtopic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Prelims and Mains focus: about India’s aim of becoming a $5 trillion economy; TFP and how it impacts the economy

News: The slowdown has revived interest in India’s growth rate as it aspires to become a $5 trillion economy. This would require growing at 8% in real terms, along with a 0.7% rise in total factor productivity (TFP).
What are the factors for economic growth?
Economic growth is a function of the quantity of inputs such as labour and capital employed for productive purposes, along with factor productivity. It is intuitive that if more people are employed, more goods and services would be produced. Over time, due to a rise in population, labour employed increases and due to accumulation, capital also increases in an economy.

A rise in productivity enables an economy to grow faster with the same set of labour and capital being employed. It is important to recognize the factors responsible for growth to address the current slowdown.

What is total factor productivity?

- Total factor productivity (TFP) is derived as a ratio of the total production and weighted average of inputs such as labour and capital. The measure gives us the growth in real output, which is in addition to the growth in inputs such as labour or capital employed for productive purposes. So TFP gives us the relationship between the quantity of factors employed and the output in an economy.

- A higher TFP implies higher growth with the same set of labour and capital employed. TFP as a concept was first discussed by Nikolaas Tinbergen (1942) and George Stigler (1947); Robert Solow (1957) developed the framework further.

How has India’s TFP growth evolved over the years?

As per the Total Economy Database (TED), India’s adjusted GDP growth in 2005 was 9%, while TFP growth was 3.5%; in 2006, growth was 9.3% and TFP growth 3.3%; in 2007, the figures were 10.1% and 3.1%, respectively. Evidently, growth came with a substantial improvement in TFP. In 2016 India’s TFP growth was 3.5%, in 2017 it was 1.6% and in 2018 it was 2.4%.

What is the global trend on TFP growth?
Since 2008, TFP growth has been slower for most nations; for China it has been negative since 2012. TED and Federal Reserve Economic Data on TFP and GDP growth show most economies with 8% or higher growth had TFP growth above 3%. These countries also saw a substantial rise in private capital formation in that period. Recent evidence indicates TFP might impact GDP growth more than fixed capital. Better TFP does seem to have a positive impact on growth of an economy, whether emerging or developed.

What are the factors affecting TFP?

India can improve its TFP by undertaking bold market and structural reforms that will unshackle its productive capacity, stuck in the primary sector of the economy. Such reforms can cause reallocation of land and labour from primary to other sectors of the economy, thus enhancing productivity. Investments in physical infrastructure such as highways, dedicated freight corridors, and human capital will also increase TFP.

Source: Livemint

5% growth cloud over budget
GS-III | 08 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the recent economic slowdown in the Indian economy and the measures to be taken to overcome it in the upcoming budget

News: India’s economy is expected to grow 5% in the current fiscal, the statistics ministry said on Tuesday, signalling what would be the slowest pace of annual growth since the current 2012-13 data series was introduced.
Yet, the estimate, which is in line with the central bank’s latest projection made in December, raises hopes that the second half of the fiscal may turn out to be better than the first.

The economy expanded at 6.8% in FY19. The latest projection indicates that the economy is expected to grow at 5.25% in the second half, after expanding 5% in April-June and 4.5% in July-September, its slowest pace in 25 quarters. Economists said any recovery that this suggests may be weak.

Background

- Asia’s third-largest economy has been witnessing a sharp deceleration in growth, which slid from 8.2% in FY17 to 6.8% in FY19.
- In recent months, the government has taken several steps to try and arrest the slowdown, including a cut in corporate tax rates, while the central bank has offered a monetary stimulus.
- The upcoming Union budget is widely expected to announce more measures to counter the slowdown.

Context: The advance estimate, based on data available so far, comes as the Narendra Modi administration prepares to present the Union budget for FY21 in a matter of weeks. The latest figure may prompt the government to explore more steps to bolster growth.

- Equally, the suggestion that the economic slowdown could be bottoming out will reassure the government that the steps taken so far to boost consumption and private investment are beginning to bear fruit.

- The figures clearly show that government consumption is driving the economy and private sector contribution to growth is low. To keep the momentum, the government will have to maintain its spending.
What does the data show?

- Official data showed a **2.8% growth in farm output in FY20**, nearly the same level seen in the year before, although it is an improvement from the June and September quarters.

- The **employment-intensive manufacturing sector** will see a **paltry 2% expansion in FY20** against a growth of 6.9% in the year before, but here again, the full-year output expansion contrasts sharply with the 1% contraction seen in the September quarter and the negligible 0.6% growth in the June quarter.

- **Construction**, another employment-intensive sector, too is projected to record a slower growth this fiscal—3.2% against 8.7% a year ago.

**Conclusion**

- The 5% GDP growth confirms the continuing slowdown in momentum, but what is even more significant in the first advance estimate is the fall in nominal GDP growth to 7.5% in FY20 as compared to the previous peak of 13.8% in FY13, down 6.3 percentage points.

- This fall translates into a fall in tax revenues and an increase in the fiscal deficit, which are both detrimental to growth.

- The fiscal deficit as a share of nominal GDP will look magnified when the denominator shrinks. The budget for FY20 presented in July by finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman had assumed a 12% nominal GDP growth in FY20 from a year ago.

- Economists said various indicators had suggested a modest improvement in economic growth in the second half of the fiscal, and that any reduction in public spending now could pose a risk.
Statistics panel on economic data holds 1st meet
GS-III | 08 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about SCES: mandate and significance; About IIP

**News:** The newly constituted **Standing Committee on Economic Statistics (SCES)**, chaired by former Chief Statistician of India Pronab Sen, in its first meeting on Tuesday decided to form three sub-groups.

What are the functions of the three sub-groups?

One sub-group will **look into the details of the Periodic Labour Force Survey and time use survey**; the second group will **look into Index of Industrial Production (IIP) and Annual Survey of Industries (ASI)**; and the third group will look into **details of Annual Survey of unincorporated sector enterprises and services sector data**.

**Minutes of the 1st meet**

- The committee, in its first meeting, did a stock taking exercise, taking note of the present datasets, one of the members said. Detailed presentations were made on Annual Survey of Industries.
- The three sub-groups will now look into details of two datasets each and make the necessary suggestions. The main committee has decided to hold a meeting on a quarterly basis.

**About the SCES**
To review statistics related to economic activity, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) had last month constituted a Standing Committee on Economic Statistics chaired by Pronab Sen, in a bid to improve the quality of data amid criticism over the government’s handling of economic data.

The panel has 27 members in total, including representatives from the United Nations, Reserve Bank of India, Finance Ministry, NITI Aayog, two industry chambers, Tata Trust, and economists and statisticians from several educational institutions.

The government had also got critics onboard the committee, with three members (now two, after the resignation of Jawaharlal Nehru University professor CP Chandrasekhar) who had, in March last year, signed a joint statement of 108 economists and social scientists that flagged concerns over “political interference” in influencing statistical data in the country.

Mandate of SCES

- The new Standing Committee on Economic Statistics, with 10 non-official members and 15 official members, has been mandated to review the framework for economic indicators pertaining to the industrial sector, the services sector and the labour force statistics.

- It has subsumed four existing committees —
  1. Standing Committee on Labour Force Statistics (SCLFS),
  2. Standing Committee on Services Sector (SCSS),
  3. Standing Committee on Industrial Statistics (SCIS) and
  4. Standing Committee on Services Sector and Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (SCSSUSE).

About Index of Industrial Production (IIP)

- Index of Industrial Production (IIP) is an index that shows the performance of
different industrial sectors of the Indian economy.
- The IIP is estimated and published on a monthly basis by the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO). As an all India index, it gives general level of industrial activity in the economy.

**Importance of IIP**

- The IIP is used by public agencies including the Government agencies/departments including that in the Ministry of Finance, the Reserve Bank of India etc. for policy purposes. The all-India IIP data is used for estimation of Gross Value Added of Manufacturing sector on quarterly basis.
- Similarly, the data is also used extensively by analysts, financial intermediaries and private companies for various purposes.

**Index of Industrial Production (IIP) – New series**

Any index is to be updated regularly by including new items, updating the base year, changing the methodology in the estimation of index to reflect the changing environment. Here, the CSO brought a new IIP by incorporating certain new elements. This is needed to accommodate the changes happening in the financial sector. Latest changes were made on 12th May 2017.

**Modification of the Index of Industrial Production**

- The modification made by the CSO is to bring a new base year of 2011-12. Besides the new base year, different sectors have been amended based on National Industrial Classification (NIC), 2008.

- **National Industrial Classification (NIC)** is an indigenized version of the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) developed by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD).

- Significance of the new series is that it uses an improved ISIC version. The NIC 2004 version with the base 2004-05 was based on ISIC version 3.1, whereas the NIC 2008 version adopted in the new series of IIP with base
2011-12 uses the revised ISIC 4 version.

Following are the main changes brought in the new series of IIP:

- Base year has been updated to 2011-12 by upgrading the item basket and weighting structure.
- National Industrial Classification (NIC) 2008 has been adopted in the new series of IIP.
- Items in the item basket are selected at NIC 3-digit level to increase representativeness.
- Number of item groups has increased from 399 to 407 out of which 149 are new/ emerging items.
- Electricity generation from renewable energy sources has been included under the ‘Electricity’ sector.
- Weights are rationalised to appropriately to reflect the actual value addition of each sector incorporating effects of subsidies.
- New use-based classification has been adopted with following categorisation: (i) Primary goods, (ii) Capital goods, (iii) Infrastructure/ construction goods, (iv) Intermediate goods, (v) Consumer durables, and (vi) Consumer non-durables.
- A review mechanism has been introduced through a Technical Review Committee.

Data collection for IIP

- The IIP is constructed by the CSO using secondary data. Data is sourced from 14 source agencies in various Ministries/Departments. But the major source of data for IIP is the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion that supplies data for 322 out of 407 item groups with a weight of 47.54% in overall IIP.
- IIP is released every month in the form of Quick Estimates with a time-lag of 6 weeks as per the norms of IMF.

Components of IIP

- The IIP is basically divided into three sectors though a use-based classification is also provided by the CSO.
- The UNSD recommends inclusion of Mining & Quarrying; Manufacturing;
Electricity, Gas steam and Air-conditioning supply; as well as Water supply, Sewerage, Waste management and Remediation activities in IIP. But due to constraints of the data availability on monthly basis, the modified IIP has been limited to Mining, Manufacturing and Electricity sectors only.

Following are the three sectors of the IIP as per the revision based on 2011-12 series.

(i) Mining,
(ii) Manufacturing and
(iii) Electricity as in the old series.

Table: Sectors, number of item groups and weight as per the 2011-12 IIP series

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Number of item groups</th>
<th>Weight (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mining</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Manufacturing</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>77.633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Electricity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>407</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Number of item groups has been increased from 399 under 2004-05 series to 407 under the 2011-12 series. Each item group may contain several sub-industries.

- In the new base year (i.e. 2011-12), the 407 item groups are divided under three sectors i.e. Mining (1 item group), Manufacturing (405 item groups) and Electricity (1 item) with weights of 14.37%, 77.63% and 7.99% respectively.

Use-based classification of industries under Index of Industrial Production

Besides the main classification of the index into three sectors i.e., mining,
manufacturing and electricity sectors, the IIP is also prepared based on Use based classification. Here, the industries are divided into six use-based sectors:

- Primary Goods,
- Capital Goods,
- Intermediate Goods,
- Infrastructure/ Construction goods,
- Consumer durables and
- Consumer nondurables.

Table: Weights of the different sectors under the used based classification – 2011-12 series

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Number of groups</th>
<th>Weights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary Goods</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>34.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital Goods</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>8.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate Goods</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>17.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure/ Construction</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goods</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer durables</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>12.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer nondurables</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>15.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Core industries in the IIP

- The Eight Core Industries comprise 40.27 % of the weight of items included in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP). These industries are:

Coal, Crude Oil, Natural Gas, Refinery Products, Fertilizers, Steel, Cement and Electricity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coal</td>
<td>10.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crude oil</td>
<td>8.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table here shows the eight core industries and their weights. Refinery products has the largest weights among the core industries.

Source: Indian Express

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**Genome of Indian cobra sequenced**

**GS-III | 08 January, 2020**

**Syllabus subtopic:** Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life; Achievements of Indians in science & technology; Indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** About the genome mapping of Indian Cobra and its relevance for India; Genome sequencing and its significance

**News:** A consortium of scientists, including some from India, have **mapped the genome of the Indian Cobra, among the most poisonous snakes in the country.**

**Background**

- Every year, approximately five million people worldwide are bitten by venomous snakes resulting in about 400,000 amputations and more than 100,000 deaths. Each year, about 46,000 people die and 140,000 people are disabled in India from snakebites by the ‘**Big 4**’ — the **Indian cobra, the common krait, Russell’s viper, and the sawscaled viper.**
Significance of genome sequencing

- Knowing the sequence of genes could aid in understanding the chemical constituents of the venom and contribute to development of new anti-venom therapies, which have remained practically unchanged for over a century.

- High quality genomes of venomous snakes will enable generation of a
Why is it important for India?

- Sequencing a genome is an **important step to making antivenom** but **wouldn’t on its own solve the problem** of making and supplying enough of the product to address the huge volume —and variety — of snakebites in India, according to independent scientists.

- **India is the snakebite capital of the world.** Though bites from 60 of 270 species of Indian snakes are known to kill or maim, antivenom now available is only effective against the 'Big 4.'

- **These 4 species are not found in northeastern India but the region reports a significant number of snake bites.** That implies we need new kinds of antivenom against species here. The **krait in Punjab produces a venom chemically different from the krait in South India.**

About Genome Sequencing

- Genome sequencing is **figuring out the order of DNA nucleotides**, or bases, in a genome—the order of As, Cs, Gs, and Ts that make up an organism’s DNA. The human genome is made up of over 3 billion of these genetic letters.

- Today, DNA sequencing on a large scale—the scale necessary for ambitious projects such as sequencing an entire genome—is mostly done by high-tech machines. Much as your eye scans a sequence of letters to read a sentence, these machines "read" a sequence of DNA bases.

Why is genome sequencing so important?
Sequencing the genome is an important step towards understanding it.

- At the very least, the genome sequence will **represent a valuable shortcut**, helping scientists find genes much more easily and quickly. A genome sequence does contain some clues about where genes are, even though scientists are just learning to interpret these clues.

- Scientists also hope that being able to study the entire genome sequence will help them understand how the genome as a whole works—how genes work together to direct the growth, development and maintenance of an entire organism.

- Finally, genes account for less than 25 percent of the DNA in the genome, and so knowing the entire genome sequence will help scientists study the parts of the genome outside the genes. This includes the regulatory regions that control how genes are turned on and off, as well as long stretches of "nonsense" or "junk" DNA—so called because we don't yet know what, if anything, it does.

Source: The Hindu

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**Army gets working on GOCO model to improve efficiency**

GS-II | 08 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** About the GOCO model and its significance

**News:** Army has **started identifying potential industry partners** to implement
the Government Owned Contractor Operated (GOCO) model for its base workshops and ordnance depots.

Background

The GOCO model was one of the recommendations of the Lt. Gen. DB Shekatkar (Retd.) committee to “enhance combat capability and rebalance defence expenditure.”

How is it going to be implemented?

- A Request For Information was issued on December 19, 2019 to shortlist service providers with experience in “warehousing, logistics and supply chain management” for Central Ordnance Depot, Kanpur. The Army has also started evaluating the GOCO model for Army Base Workshops (ABW) to drive “higher operational efficiencies”.

- The agenda of these interactions would be to understand from interested industry participants their views on opportunities envisaged and issues/concerns if ABWs were to be run under GOCO model.

- The tasks undertaken by these workshops include depotlevel repairs; overhaul of T72 and T90, guns, mortars and small arms, vehicles, communication systems, radars, air defence systems, armoured personnel carriers; manufacture of spares and overhaul of aviation rotables.

Source: The Hindu

â€”It is up to States to provide 10% quotaâ€™
GS-II | 08 January,2020

Syllabus subtopic: Government policies and interventions for development in
Prelims and Mains focus: About the 10% reservation introduced by the Constitution 103rd Amendment Act and related issues

News: The Centre on Tuesday informed the Supreme Court that it would be the States’ prerogative to provide 10% economic reservation in government jobs and admission to education institutions.

Context: The Centre was responding to a writ petition from Supreme Court advocate G.S. Mani complaining that the economic reservation law was not being implemented in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

Centre’s response: Whether or not to provide reservation to the economically weaker section in appointment to State government jobs and admission to State government educational institutions, as per provisions of the newly inserted Articles 15(6) and 16(6) of the Constitution, is to be decided by the State government concerned.

However, the Centre said its Department of Social Justice and Empowerment “has no role in deciding the reservation policy of any State government”.

About the reservation under EWS

- As per the notification issued by the Department of Personnel and Training on January 19, 2019, persons whose family has a gross annual income below Rs.8 lakh are identified as those belonging to the economically weaker section.
- It said the 10% reservation law was enacted to promote the welfare of the poor not covered by the 50% reservation policy for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes and the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes.
It has been nearly six months since a Bench, led by Justice Sharad A. Bobde, now the Chief Justice of India, has reserved orders on the preliminary question that whether a bunch of writ petitions challenging the economic reservation law should be referred to a Constitution Bench.

The court had refused to pass any interim order to stay or hamper the implementation of the Constitution (103rd Amendment) Act, which provides for the 10% reservation.

**Key changes made by the 103rd CAA**

**Amendment of Article 15:**

In Article 15 of the Constitution, after clause (5), the following clause shall be inserted, namely:—

“(6) Nothing in this article or sub-clause (g) of clause (1) of Article 19 or clause (2) of Article 29 shall prevent the State from making,—

(a) any special provision for the advancement of any economically weaker sections of citizens other than the classes mentioned in clauses (4) and (5); and

(b) any special provision for the advancement of any economically weaker sections of citizens other than the classes mentioned in clauses (4) and (5) in so far as such special provisions relate to their admission to educational institutions including private educational institutions, whether aided or unaided by the State, other than the minority educational institutions referred to in clause (1) of Article 30, which in the case of reservation would be in addition to the existing reservations and subject to a maximum of ten per cent. of the total seats in each category.”

**Amendment of Article 16:**

In Article 16 of the Constitution, after clause (5), the following clause shall be inserted, namely:—
“(6) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any economically weaker sections of citizens other than the classes mentioned in clause (4), in addition to the existing reservation and subject to a maximum of ten per cent of the posts in each category.”

For the purposes of Article 15 and Article 16, “economically weaker sections” shall be such as may be notified by the State from time to time on the basis of family income and other indicators of economic disadvantage.
Govt. may cut spending to curb deficit

GS-III | 08 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the govt’s move to cut expenditure and its implications on the economy; about fiscal deficit

News: The government is likely to cut spending for the current fiscal by as much as Rs. 2 trillion (Rs. 2 lakh crore) as it faces one of the biggest tax shortfalls in recent years.

Background

Economic growth slowed for six consecutive quarters to 4.5% in July-September, despite a 135 basis point cut in interest rates by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) since February 2019.

Likely implications of the move

- Asia’s third largest economy, which is growing at its slowest pace in over six years because of lack of private investment, could be hurt further if the government cuts spending.

- But with a revenue shortfall of about Rs. 2.5 trillion, the government has little choice to keep its deficit within “acceptable limits”.

- The Centre has spent about 65% of the total expenditure target of Rs. 27.86...
A Rs. 2 trillion reduction would be about a 7% cut in total spending planned for the year. In October and November, government spending increased by Rs. 1.6 trillion, nearly half the Rs. 3.1 trillion it spent in September. Lack of demand and weak corporate earnings growth in the economy led to lagging tax collections this year. Analysts said growth will be hurt.

Now, even the RBI seems to have become more worried about inflation rising. It kept its key lending rate on hold on December 5, though it slashed its growth forecast for the current fiscal to 5%, which would be the lowest in a decade. Even a surprise corporate tax rate cut announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman earlier this year failed to spur private investment in the economy.

Way ahead

The Centre is likely to keep fiscal deficit under 3.8% of GDP. It is likely to announce additional borrowing of Rs.300500 billion for the current year to match the revised fiscal deficit.

About fiscal deficit

- The fiscal deficit is the difference between the government’s total expenditure and its total receipts (excluding borrowing).
- Fiscal deficit in layman’s terms corresponds to the borrowings and liabilities of the government.
- As per the technical definition, Fiscal Deficit = Budgetary Deficit + Borrowings and Other Liabilities of the government.

Note:

1. Deficit differs from debt, which is an accumulation of yearly deficits.
elements of the fiscal deficit are revenue deficit and capital expenditure.
2. Revenue deficit is the difference between the government’s revenue expenditure and total revenue receipts.

Source: The Hindu
**Syllabus subtopic:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** the ongoing economic slowdown and its impact on India’s GDP; measures to be taken in the upcoming budget

**News:** As per the government’s first advance estimate, gross domestic product (GDP) growth for FY20 is likely to be 5%— the lowest since the global financial crisis of 2008-09, when it fell to 3.1%.
Why is GDP growth likely to fall to 5%?
Private consumption expenditure, the money people spend on buying things, has comprised 56-57% of India’s GDP (in real terms, adjusted for inflation) over the past few years. In FY20, it is expected to grow at 5.8%, after growing at over 7.4% in each of the last four fiscals. This can clearly be seen in the fall in sales of cars, two-wheelers and tractors, and the slower volume growth of FMCG companies. People are not spending as much money on buying things as they used to, given the lack of confidence they have in their economic future. This is reflected in slow growth of private consumption expenditure.

What is investment’s part in the fall?

Investment is a key driver of consumption. Investment growth in FY20 is expected to collapse to 1%, the lowest since FY06 (i.e., as far back as growth data for the current GDP series goes). Without proper investment growth, jobs can’t be created. And without jobs, there won’t be a source of income for the million Indians entering the workforce every month. Only when people earn can they spend. Also, one man’s expenditure is another man’s income—creating a cycle. Hence, a slowdown in investment growth is bound to affect private consumption, which, in turn, will slow down GDP growth in FY20.

What is the state of government expenditure?

Government expenditure—growing 9.3% in FY19 and 15% in FY18—has driven growth between 2017-19. In FY20, it is expected to grow 10.5%, the fastest among all constituents of GDP (others being private consumption expenditure, investment and net exports). This fiscal, the government’s share in the economy will reach 11.3%, the highest in a decade.

What about the non-govt part of economy?

If we leave government expenditure out of the GDP, what remains is the non-government part of the economy. This part is expected to grow at 4.3% in FY20.
— the lowest since 2008-09, when it had grown 2.2%. This is hardly surprising given the slow private consumption growth and plunging investment growth. The non-government component forms around 90% of the economy, and it’s this part that needs a boost if the overall economy is to be revived. Higher government spending can only do so much.

So what can the government do?

In the short run, consumption growth needs to be revived, without which investments are unlikely to improve. Companies invest when people consume. To ensure this, the government can put more money in the hands of people via a personal income tax cut, and spend more on social schemes, such as MGNREGS. Also, the GST Council needs to stop fiddling around with the goods and services tax and go for a comprehensive overhaul.
Centre opens up coal sector

GS-II | 09 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Prelims and Mains focus: About the govt.’s move and its significance; about
News: The Union cabinet on Wednesday approved opening up of coal mining and further disinvestments. It also extended the validity period of mining lease clearances ending in 2020 by two years.

Context: Govt.’s move comes at a time when the window for fossil fuels is rapidly closing, and the global energy landscape evolving, with fundamental changes to the investment culture amid growing climate concerns.

Background
It comes against the backdrop of India’s gross domestic product growth decelerating to a six-and-a-half-year-low of 4.5% in the September quarter amid slowing domestic and external demand.

About the govt.’s move and its significance
- In an attempt to attract investments in coal mining, the Cabinet approved the promulgation of Mineral Laws (Amendment) Ordinance 2020.
- Under the Ordinance, requirement of previous approval in cases where allocation of blocks was made by Centre has been dispensed with to speed up the process of implementation of projects and ease of doing business.
- The ordinance allows coal mining by any company present in sectors other than steel and power, and does away with the captive end-use criteria.
- While the move will help create an efficient energy market, usher in competition and reduce coal imports, it may also bring an end to state-run Coal India Ltd’s (CIL) monopoly.
- The move will also help India gain access to sophisticated technology for underground mining used by global miners.
India’s Coal Sector

- Despite having the world’s fourth largest coal reserves, India imported 235 million tonnes (mt) of coal last year, of which 135mt valued at Rs.171,000 crore could have been met from domestic reserves.

- The Centre has set a mining target of 1.5 billion tonnes of coal by 2020. Of this, 1 billion tonnes was to be from CIL and 500 million tonnes from non-CIL sources, in line with the government’s push to raise natural resources production to kickstart economic growth. This has now been revised down to 1 billion tonnes of coal by 2023-24.

- The government has been progressively liberalizing the coal sector over the last several months to attract new investments, and getting rid of this archaic end-use restriction was a key step. It is expected that the government will also address other procedural issues that add to time delays and upfront cost of developing a mine.

Govt.’s decisions on disinvestment

- As part of the NDA government’s disinvestment agenda, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs gave ‘in-principle’ approval for strategic disinvestment of equity shareholding of Minerals & Metals Trading Corp. Ltd (49.78%), National Mineral Development Corp. Ltd (10.10%), MECON (0.68%), Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (0.68%) and two Odisha state government units—Industrial Promotion and Investment Corporation of Odisha Ltd (IPICOL) (12.00%) and Odisha Mining Corp. (OMC) (20.47%) in Neelachal Ispat Nigam Ltd.

- The government has set an ambitious disinvestment target of Rs.1.05 trillion for FY20, of which it has managed to garner only Rs.17,364 crore so far.

What does the term ‘disinvestment’ mean?
The term 'disinvestment' literally means the opposite of investment. Disinvestment is the process of reducing the share of government in public sector undertakings (PSUs). It is the sale of shares of the government in these companies to financial institutions, employees or the public at large.

In disinvestment, also called divestment, there is no change in the management of PSUs from the public to private hands as the government still holds majority equity (51 percent). Even when the government’s share falls below 51 percent, the rest of the equity may be sold in such a way that no one institution or individual holds enough stake to take control of the management.

Disinvestment is primarily a money-raising exercise. The proceeds of disinvestment are treated as non-debt creating capital receipts. Though the government can technically hold a stake less than 51 percent and still be the largest shareholder in PSUs, it was not done on a large scale. This is because a PSU ceases to be a public sector company post such exercise.

Types of Disinvestment

Disinvestment of a minority stake in PSUs can be done in the following ways:

1. Initial Public Offering (IPO): an offer of shares by an unlisted PSU to the public for the first time.
2. Follow-on Public Offering (FPO): also known as Further Public Offering, it's an offer of shares by a listed PSU.
3. Offer for sale (OFS): shares of a PSU are auctioned on the platform provided by the stock exchange. This mode has been used extensively by the government since 2012.
4. Institutional Placement Programme (IPP): under this, only selected financial institutions are allowed to participate and the government stake is offered to only such institutions. E.g., mutual funds, insurance, and pension funds such as LIC etc.
5. CPSE Exchange Traded Fund (ETF): Through this route, the government can divest its stake in various PSUs across diverse sectors through a single offering. This mechanism allows the government to monetize its shareholding in those PSUs which form part of the ETF basket.
6. Cross-holdings: in this method, one listed PSU takes up the government
Disinvestment of a majority stake in PSUs:

- **Strategic sale:** it is the sale of a substantial portion of government shareholding, 50 percent or higher, in a PSU, along with the transfer of management control.

- **Privatization:** it's a type of strategic sale in which the government divests its entire shareholding, along with the transfer of management control, to a private entity.

Source: Livemint

Rising oil prices may hit Budget math

GS-II | 09 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the geopolitical tensions between U.S. and Iran and its impact on India’s economy

**News:** The prices of crude oil constituting the Indian basket has been increasing since October and is **likely to exceed $70 a barrel** this month on escalating U.S. Iran tensions.

**Background**

- Major General Qassem Soleimani, the **Iranian Revolutionary Guards commander**, was recently killed in a US strike at Baghdad International
Airport. He was the long-serving head of Iran’s Quds ("Jerusalem") Force and has been seen as a deadly adversary by America and its allies.

- Rising oil prices had already led to an increase in the prices of petrol and diesel by about 54 paise a litre and 83 paise a litre respectively since January 1, 2020. The Indian basket of crude oil was pegged at $59.70 per barrel in October 2019, rising to $62.54 per barrel in November and to $65.52 in December. It is currently hovering around $70 per barrel.
What is the reason behind this increase in oil prices?

- The price of benchmark Brent oil went up to $71.75 per barrel after Iran retaliated against the U.S. by attacking the latter’s bases in Iraq, but softened to $67.50 a barrel after Iran said that it did not want to further
escalate the tensions.
Impact on India’s economy

- Higher crude oil prices is ‘bad news’ for the Indian economy that imports over 85% of its crude oil requirements.

- Higher crude oil prices will be bad for India’s current account deficit and it will further tighten our fiscal situation.

- Further, divestment of oil PSUs will become difficult due to higher crude oil prices.

- Rising crude oil prices could impact corporate earnings of several sectors, including auto and oil marketing companies, according to analysts.

Source: The Hindu

Re-grassing is mandatory after mining, rules SC

Syllabus subtopic: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Prelims and Mains focus: about the judgement and its significance; Mining and its harmful impact on the environment

News: The Supreme Court on Wednesday ordered that mining lease holders should be held responsible for regrassing mined areas, so that biodiversity gets a second chance in these scarred landscapes.
About the Judgement

- A Bench led by Chief Justice of India S.A. Bobde ordered the government to include re-grassing of mined areas as a **mandatory condition** in every mining lease, environmental clearance and mining plan across the country.

- The government was ordered to file an action taken report in three weeks. The Bench also directed the government to devise methods to ensure compliance by mining lease holders. The cost of regrassing the mined area and wherever damage was caused, would be entirely borne by the licence holder.

- The mandatory regrassing would be in addition to the other conditions imposed on the licence holder in the mine closure plan, to restore biodiversity.

Environmental impacts of mining

Environmental issues caused by mining include *erosion*, formation of *sinkholes*, *loss of biodiversity*, and *contamination of soil, groundwater* and *surface water* by chemicals from mining processes, and the effects persist for years.
Conclusion
An area which is mined results in complete elimination of grass, which in turn denies fodder to the herbivores. The only solution can be regrassing of such mined areas. It is not in dispute that regrassing technology is available in India.

Note: to read more about the mining sector in India, click on the link below:


Source: The Hindu

Revised norms for data-led probes

GS-II | 09 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the guidelines issued by MHA, significance of data preservation; about the 24/7 network

News: The Union Home Ministry (MHA) has said that before seeking information about a person’s email account hosted on servers in foreign countries, investigating agencies will have to establish that it is linked to a crime.

Background

- Most intermediaries and social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Google, Yahoo!, Twitter and YouTube have their servers outside India.
- The Centre introduced the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 in the Lok Sabha last month that seeks to provide for protection of personal data of
individuals and establishes a Data Protection Authority for it.
UPSC "PT" DNA (Daily News Analysis)
Guidelines issued by the MHA

- The Ministry said it was not enough to show that the accused had an email account as “the account must have something to do with the crime being investigated” and it was “the lowest legal standard required of all investigative processes”.

- The Ministry issued revised guidelines to streamline the process of seeking legal assistance from foreign countries in criminal matters, issuing directives on drafting and processing letters rogatory, mutual legal assistance requests and service of summons, notices and other judicial documents.

- In the guidelines issued to the States and other agencies, the Ministry stressed “data preservation” as it was the key to the investigation of cyberoffences and those involving digital evidence.

- The Ministry said the G8 countries’ 24/7 Network was one such channel that could be used to place request for preserving data in real time.

- The requested country has to be informed about the time period for which the data is required. Such period shall be consented by the requested country.

- The transferred data shall be kept for no longer than the period required for the purpose for which it has been received and shall be returned to the requested country or deleted at the end of the period specified.”

Importance of Data Preservation

- Accessing the Internet through an Internet Service Provider (ISP) creates important records and other information such as customer records, connection information and stored data. This is very important evidence to
prove the guilt intention of the accused.

- Since this type of evidence can disappear quickly, it is of paramount importance to get the data preserved expeditiously through appropriate channels. The request may be sent to the service provider or to the CBI — the contact point in respect of G8 24/7 Network.

About the G8 24/7 Network

- The G8 network allows law enforcement agencies to make urgent preservation requests of the digital data before it perishes.
- The network, established among the G8 nations in 1997, has since grown to 55 member countries, all of which have dedicated cyber crime investigators who can respond to fast-moving cases at a moment’s notice—often with the ability to “fast freeze” e-mail traffic and other stored electronic data, which can preserve a crook’s otherwise fleeting digital footprint.
Northeast Gas Grid
GS-III | 09 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.
About the project

- It aims to connect all the eight states (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura) of the Northeast with a 1,656-km network of natural gas pipeline for Rs 9,265 crore.

- The VGF amount is 60 per cent of estimated project cost and will not be linked to project cost escalation.

- It is being executed by Indradhanush Gas Grid Limited under the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.

- It is only the second instance of the government directly funding a gas pipeline.

- The Cabinet Committee of Economic Affairs, chaired by PM Modi, also decided that a committee comprising officials from the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Development of North East Region, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, and Department of Fertilizers, will periodically review the progress in implementation of the project.

- The capital grant will provide natural gas supplies to various types of consumers like industrial, PNG(domestic), CNG (transport) and others.
The government’s aim through this project is to substitute liquid fuels like kerosene and firewood traditionally prevalent in the region.
Natural gas Scenario in India

- About 20 per cent of India’s natural gas production comes from the Northeast. Of about 75 million standard cubic meters per day of gas output, 15 mmscmd come from Northeast.

- Currently, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura have established gas production potential while there are possibilities for the same in Nagaland and Manipur.

- **Gas Pipeline** infrastructure is an economical and safe mode of transporting the natural gas by connecting gas sources to gas consuming markets. Gas pipeline grid determines the structure of the gas market and its development. Therefore, an interconnected National Gas Grid has been envisaged to ensure the adequate availability and equitable distribution of natural gas in all parts of the country.

- At present, there are about 16800 km long Natural Gas pipeline network which is operational in the country. In order to make available natural gas across the country, it has been envisaged to develop additional about 14,300 km pipelines to complete the National Gas Grid and same are at various stages of development. This would ensure easy availability of natural gas across all regions and also potentially help to achieve uniform economic and social progress.

Conclusion

Availability of natural gas across the region is expected to boost industrial growth without impacting the environment and would offer better quality of life to the people in general due to use of cleaner and green fuel.

About Natural Gas
Natural gas is the **cleanest fossil fuels** among the available fossil fuels. It is **used as a feedstock** in the manufacture of fertilizers, plastics and other commercially important organic chemicals as well as **used as a fuel** for electricity generation, heating purpose in industrial and commercial units. Natural gas is **also used for cooking** in domestic households and a transportation fuel for vehicles.

Source: Indian Express
China, Pakistan navies deploy submarines in strategic Arabian Sea

GS-II | 09 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: India and its neighborhood - relations.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the exercise; Gwadar and Chabahar ports; China incursions in India’s neighborhood and its implications

News: Navies of China and Pakistan, holding nine-day exercises in the Arabian Sea to enhance their all-weather strategic partnership, have for the first-time deployed submarines, providing a rare major exposure to the Chinese navy in the region.

About Pakistan-China Joint maritime exercise

- The joint maritime exercises began on Monday in the North Arabian Sea, regarded strategically significant for China which is now developing Pakistan's deep water Gwadar port there.
- The joint exercises are expected to be the first of many to come, as China and Pakistan have now developed a series of joint exercises covering the navy, army and air force.
- The exercise is also the first between China and Pakistan that will feature anti-submarine and submarine rescue training, indicating a high-level of strategic mutual trust.

About Gwadar port

- Gwadar is being connected through the over USD 60 billion China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to China's Xinjiang province, providing a key land route to China to access the warm waters of Arabian Sea. India has objected to China over the CPEC as it is being laid through the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).
• The Gwadar is also located close to Iran's Chabahar Port being jointly developed by Iran, India and Afghanistan to ensure a trade corridor for Indian exports to Afghanistan.
Strategic importance of Arabian Sea for India

- The Arabian Sea region is strategically important for India as **major ports** including Kandla, Okha, Mumbai, Nhava Sheva (Navi Mumbai), Mormugão, New Mangalore, and Kochi are located there.

- The Arabian Sea provides entry to the Indian Ocean where China currently has built a logistics base at Djibouti in the **Horn of Africa**.

Source: Indian Express

What’s next in U.S.-Iran conflict?

**Syllabus subtopic:** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India’s interests, Indian diaspora.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the escalation in US-Iran tensions and its geopolitical implications

**News:** Five days after Major General Qassem Soleimani, the Qods Force chief, was killed in a U.S. air strike outside Baghdad airport, Iran on Wednesday launched ballistic missile attacks at American troops in two military bases in Iraq.
What did the attack achieve?

- President Donald Trump has said that there were no American casualties in the attacks on the Erbil and al-Asad bases and the damage caused was minimal. However, the strike is still a pivotal moment in the U.S.-Iran tensions as this is the first time Iran is launching a direct attack at the U.S. troops and owning it up.

- Practically, these are acts of war. First, the U.S. took out an Iranian military leader in a third country and now Iran has struck U.S. troops. Javad Zariff, the Iranian Foreign Minister, said, “Iran took and concluded proportionate measures in selfdefence under Article 51 of the UN Charter targeting base from which the cowardly armed attack against our citizens and senior officials were launched.” The Article allows states to take action in selfdefence when they are under attack. Mr. Zariff has added that Iran doesn’t seek “escalation or war, but will defend ourself against any aggression”.

Was the attack imminent?

- The Iranian response was expected. The call for revenge was reverberating throughout the funeral processions of Soleimani. A mosque in the Shia holy city of Qom in Iran had unfurled a red flag indicating that war was coming.

- Kataib Hezbollah, a unit in the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF), the umbrella organisation of Iraqi Shia militias that Soleimani helped build, had asked Iraqi forces to stay away from the bases that house American soldiers, indicating that U.S. troops in Iraq could be targeted.

- Iran has launched a calculated, limited strike that doesn’t cause much damage to the Americans but yet makes good on its pledge for revenge. It was an escalating step, but not yet an allout war.
By hitting the U.S. base in Erbil, the capital of the Iraqi Kurdistan, Iran may also be sending a message to Washington. Erbil houses not just American soldiers but also a large American consulate.

The U.S. has deep ties with the Iraqi Kurdistan and it would like to keep some U.S. troops in the autonomous region even if its forces are forced to pull back from the rest of Iraq. It’s to be noted that most Kurdish lawmakers had boycotted Sunday’s Iraqi Parliament session, in which lawmakers passed a resolution to expel American troops from the country.

For the U.S., some troops in Iraq are necessary to retain its presence in Syria. So Iran’s message could be that, ‘you’re not safe in Erbil’.

So what are the possible scenarios?

President Trump has already indicated that he’s backing away from further conflicts with Iran. In a televised speech from the White House, he said Iran appears to be standing down, and urged European countries as well as Russia and China to break away from the nuclear deal and negotiate a new one. He has also threatened to slap Iran with more sanctions. But despite his message of de-escalation, the risks of further conflicts still remain.

The Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has hinted that more actions will follow to force the U.S. to retreat from West Asia (read Iraq and Syria).

The Revolutionary Guard’s commander Hossein Salami threatened on Wednesday before a mourning crowd in Kerman, Solaimani’s hometown, that Iran would set ablaze “the place the U.S. loves”, in a reference to Israel.

Iran could target U.S. troops inside Iraq through its proxies such as the Badr Brigade and Kataib Hezbollah, like it did before the killing of Soleimani. That
could drag the U.S. into a deeper conflict. Also, the Shia militias in the region operate with relative autonomy. Infuriated by the loss of their commander, they could act without authorisation from Tehran against U.S. troops in Iraq, which could trigger a harsher response from the U.S. against Iran, dragging both countries into war.

All these suggest that West Asia remains on the brink.

Source: The India
Syllabus subtopic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Prelims and Mains focus: About the economic slowdown and its impact on this year’s budget; measures to be taken to address it; About PMI

Context: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present her second budget at a time when the economy has hit rock bottom, with growth plummeting to a six-and-a-half-year low and dismal revenue growth, besides ongoing tensions in West Asia threatening to set oil price soaring to unsustainable limits.

- Therefore, the FM will have to walk a tight rope in boosting demand without allowing fiscal deficit to go off-track.

Background

- The Indian economy had decelerated for the sixth consecutive quarter to 4.5% in the three months ended September, on the back of sagging domestic and overseas demand, while investment recovery remained tepid.

- The latest data by the statistics ministry shows that economic growth may have revived marginally in the second half to help achieve 5% gross domestic product (GDP) growth for 2019-20.
Performance of various indicators

- Recently, there have been some signs of bottoming out of the economy. The manufacturing Purchasing Managers’ Index (PMI) for India shot up in December—the highest since February—after recording a two-year low in October.
- With improvements in a number of leading indicators, including goods and services tax (GST) collections, infrastructure sector growth, automobile sales and non-oil merchandise exports, experts expect factory output to turn positive in November after contracting in September.

What has been the approach of the govt. so far?

- The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government’s approach so far has been to take incremental sector-specific, supply-side measures.
- The big supply push though came in the form of a cut in corporate tax rates to attract investments by technology companies looking for avenues outside China, amid Beijing’s ongoing trade war with Washington. While it expected to see a big shift in investment activity, the numbers are yet to show up.

Performance on the fiscal front?

- While the fiscal deficit for 2019-20 has been set at 3.3% of GDP, the Centre had already exceeded the full-year target by around 15% in just eight months. Low direct and indirect tax collections, and the tardy pace of the government’s strategic disinvestments, are likely to miss its over-optimistic revenue collection targets in budget 2020 by a fair margin.
- In fact, the corporate tax rate cuts will further dent direct tax collections. The underperformance of the Centre’s tax revenues will also affect the capacity of the state governments to spend.
- However, non-tax revenue receipts, excluding the transfers from the central bank, may look a lot better next fiscal year if the government manages to successfully privatize Bharat Petroleum Corp. Ltd (BPCL), Container Corp. of India Ltd (Concor) and Air India.
**Leveraging the FFC**

- The government may heave a sigh of relief that the **tenure of the 15th Finance Commission**, which will submit a fresh fiscal consolidation road map for both the Centre and states, **has been extended by a year**.
- This may allow the finance minister to digress from the fiscal consolidation path one last time, while committing to the fresh road map. However, what could complicate matters is rising crude prices.

**Concerns for India’s GDP**

- The **rising oil prices is a cause for concern**. It will adversely impact inflation, fiscal deficit and current account deficit, as well as GDP growth. In such a scenario, the government’s capacity to intervene will remain constrained.
- **Low nominal GDP growth** will weaken the government’s capacity to introduce strong fiscal stimulus measures, because it constraints growth in tax revenues.
- Thus, in spite of the low growth, **countercyclical policy**, both in the form of monetary or fiscal stimulus, remains constrained. There is thus a likelihood of the current economic slowdown stretching itself for a few more quarters, reflecting in a U-shapes, rather than a V-shaped recovery.
- **Lower real GDP growth** and **subdued inflation** in most part of the current fiscal year has **led to the nominal GDP growing at 6.1%** in the third quarter. For FY20, the statistics ministry has estimated it at **7.5%**.

**What should the govt. do?**

- Under the current circumstance of weak growth impulses, the government needs to **boost consumption demand**. Consumption demand has been a casualty during the economic downturn and government needs to support that.
• The govt. should direct resources towards spending, which increases consumer demand through PM-KISAN, NREGA or construction activity.
• It should take some more measures in the residential real estate sector, which has been doing badly. It has announced a subvention scheme, but it needs to provide support for purchase of houses.

About Purchasing Managers’ Index

PMI or a Purchasing Managers’ Index (PMI) is an indicator of business activity — both in the manufacturing and services sectors. It is a survey-based measure that asks the respondents about changes in their perception of some key business variables from the month before. It is calculated separately for the manufacturing and services sectors and then a composite index is constructed.

How is the PMI derived?

The PMI is derived from a series of qualitative questions. Executives from a reasonably big sample, running into hundreds of firms, are asked whether key indicators such as output, new orders, business expectations and employment were stronger than the month before and are asked to rate them.

How does one read the PMI?

A figure above 50 denotes expansion in business activity. Anything below 50 denotes contraction. Higher the difference from this mid-point greater the expansion or contraction. The rate of expansion can also be judged by comparing the PMI with that of the previous month data. If the figure is higher than the previous month’s then the economy is expanding at a faster rate. If it is lower than the previous month then it is growing at a lower rate.

What are its implications for the economy?

The PMI is usually released at the start of the month, much before most of the
official data on industrial output, manufacturing and GDP growth becomes available. It is, therefore, considered a good leading indicator of economic activity. Economists consider the manufacturing growth measured by the PMI as a good indicator of industrial output, for which official statistics are released later. Central banks of many countries also use the index to help make decisions on interest rates.

What does it mean for financial markets?

The PMI also gives an indication of corporate earnings and is closely watched by investors as well as the bond markets. A good reading enhances the attractiveness of an economy vis-a-vis another competing economy.

Source: Livemint

NCRB Report 2018
GS-II | 10 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: 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 key findings of the NCRB 2018 report and its significance; About NCRB; mission and objectives

News: The National Crime Records Bureau published the annual Crime in India Report 2018 on Wednesday. It was published with provisional data, as five States — West Bengal, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Sikkim — did not send clarifications sought by the NCRB.
Background

The 2017 annual crime report was published on October 21 last year, after a delay of two years.
Findings of the report

- According to the report, 3,78,277 cases of crime against women were reported, up from 3,59,849 in 2017.
- Uttar Pradesh topped the list with 59,445 cases, followed by Maharashtra (35,497) and West Bengal (30,394).
- The conviction rate in rape related cases stood at 27.2% even though the rate of filing chargesheets was 85.3% in such cases.
- Cruelty by husband or his relatives (31.9%) followed by assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty (27.6%) constituted the major share of crimes against women.

NCRB’s Accidental Death and Suicides in India 2018

- The NCRB also released the Accidental Death and Suicides in India 2018 report, which said that 10,349 people working in the farm sector ended their lives in 2018, accounting for 7.7% of the total number of suicides in the country.

- The total number of people who committed suicide in 2018 was 1,34,516, an increase of 3.6% from 2017 when 1,29,887 cases were reported. The highest number of suicide victims were daily wagers — 26,589, comprising 22.4% of such deaths.

- The majority of the suicides were reported in Maharashtra (17,972) followed by Tamil Nadu (13,896), West Bengal (13,255), Madhya Pradesh (11,775) and Karnataka (11,561).

- West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Uttarakhand, Meghalaya, Goa, Chandigarh, Daman & Diu, Delhi, Lakshadweep and Puducherry reported zero suicides by farmers/cultivators as well as agricultural labourers.

Other findings
The incidents registered under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes related Acts saw a decline from 6729 incidents reported in 2017 to 4816 in 2018.

A total of 29,017 cases of murder were registered in 2018, showing an increase of 1.3% over 2017 (28,653 cases).

West Bengal reported the maximum number of political murders in 2018. The number of murders due to “political reason” in the State stood at 12, followed by nine in Bihar and seven in Maharashtra. In all, 54 political murders were reported in the country in 2018. In 2017, the number of such cases stood at 98.

About National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)

NCRB was set-up in 1986 to function as a repository of information on crime and criminals so as to assist the investigators in linking crime to the perpetrators. It was set up based on the recommendation of the Task force, 1985 and National Police Commission, 1977 by merging the Directorate of Coordination and Police Computer (DCPC), Inter State Criminals Data Branch of CBI and Central Finger Print Bureau of CBI. Earlier Statistical Branch of Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D) was also merged with NCRB, but was later de-merged.

Mission

- To empower Indian Police with Information Technology and criminal Intelligence to enable them to uphold law and protect people.
- To provide leadership and excellence in crime analysis particularly for serious and organized crime.

Objectives

- Create and maintain secure sharable National Databases on crimes and criminals for law enforcement agencies and promote their use for public
service deliver.
• Collect and process crime statistics at the national level and clearing house of information on crime and criminals both at National and International levels.
• Lead and coordinate development of IT applications and create an enabling IT environment for Police organizations.
• National repository of fingerprints of all criminals.
• To evaluate, modernize and promote automation in State Crime Records Bureaux and State Finger Print Bureaux.
• Training and capacity building in Police Forces in Information Technology and Finger Print Science.

Source: The Hindu

Green Credit Scheme
GS-III | 10 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Prelims and Mains focus: About Green Credit Scheme and its significance, About FAC

News: The Forest Advisory Committee (FAC), an apex body tasked with adjudicating requests by the industry to raze forest land for commercial ends, has approved a scheme that could allow “forests” to be traded as a commodity.

• If implemented, it allows the Forest Department to outsource one of its responsibilities of reforesting to nongovernment agencies.

About the scheme

• The proposed ‘Green Credit Scheme’ allows agencies — they could be
The FAC discussed the ‘Green Credit Scheme’ in a December 19, 2019 meeting. It was first developed by the Gujarat state government and was pending for approval from the MoEF&CC since 2013.

**What is the current scenario?**

- In the current system, industry needs to make good the loss of forest by finding appropriate non forest land — equal to that which would be razed under the provisions of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980.

- It also must pay the State Forest Department the current economic equivalent — called Net Present Value — of the forest land.

- It’s then the department’s responsibility to grow appropriate vegetation that, over time, would grow into forests.

**Why this action has been taken?**

- Industries have often complained that they find it hard to acquire appropriate nonforest land, which has to be contiguous to existing forest.

- Nearly Rs.50,000 crore had been collected by the Centre over decades, but the funds were lying unspent because States were not spending the money on re-growing forests.

- The Supreme Court intervened, a new law came about with rules for how
this fund was to be administered.

- About Rs. 47,000 crore had been disbursed to States until August, but it has barely led to any rejuvenation of forests.

**About Forest Advisory Committee**

The FAC is a body under the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) and is responsible for regulating forest diversion.

Source: The Hindu

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India, Sri Lanka foreign ministers™ meet

GS-II | 10 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** India and its neighbourhood- relations.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** About the recent meet between the foreign ministers and the discussions held; about ETCA and its significance; About Mahabodhi Temple

**News:** India and Sri Lanka on Thursday discussed the “entire gamut of bilateral ties”, during talks between the visiting Sri Lankan Minister of Foreign Relations, Skills Development, Employment and Labour Relations, Dinesh Gunawardena, and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Thursday.

**Background**

The visit by the Sri Lankan Minister, his first visit abroad after taking charge, comes after the visit by Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in November.
Discussions held in the meeting

- **Emphasis on Skilling and opportunities for people to people ties:** The Sri Lankan Foreign Minister reiterated the importance laid by President Rajapaksa on exploring newer areas of cooperation with India with **emphasis on skill development, vocational training and capacity building** and requested India’s support.

- The ministers also discussed issues of **climate change** and **terrorism**.

- However, officials declined to comment on whether the meeting with the new Sri Lankan Foreign Minister had discussed taking forward some of the commitments made by the previous Sri Lankan government on **infrastructure projects in Trincomalee and Colombo** as well as the Northern region, or about taking forward the **Economic and Technical Cooperation (ETCA) preferential trade agreement** talks that have been stalled for several years.

Mr. Gunawardena will also visit the **Mahabodhi temple in Bodhgaya**.

**India-Srilanka ETCA**

- The Economic and Technical Co-operation Agreement (ETCA) is a proposed diplomatic arrangement that **seeks to add to the existing free trade agreement** between the Republic of India and the Republic of Sri Lanka, primarily in **relation to trade-in services** and the **service sector**; it **seeks to emulate** a **proto freedom-of-movement system** and a **single market**.

- The proposal is championed by supporters as a method to introduce low-cost goods for low-income people in Sri Lanka and increase sales of high-end
goods to India, while also making Sri Lanka more attractive for FDI. But many lobby groups have become concerned that India would flood Sri Lanka with cheaper labour, with the IT industry in particular worried about the influx of cheaper Indian tech workers. The high unemployment rate of India has been pointed out by many nationalist groups.

- The proposed agreement's impact has been estimated to be an increase of $500 billion to the common economy. It has been likened to the economic union undertaken between the North-East Asian countries of Taiwan and People's Republic of China called the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement, and both agreements share issues with the island nation's people worrying about being undercut by cheaper labourers from the mainland.

About Mahabodhi Temple

- The Mahabodhi Temple Complex in Bodh Gaya is located in the central part of the state of Bihar, in the northeastern part of India. It is the part of the great Ganges plains.
- The Mahabodhi Temple is located at the place of Lord Buddha's enlightenment.
- Bihar is one of the four holy sites related to the life of the Lord Buddha, and particularly to the attainment of Enlightenment.
- The first temple was built by Emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century B.C., and the present temple dates from the 5th or 6th centuries.
- It is one of the earliest Buddhist temples built entirely with brick, still standing in India, from the late Gupta period.
- The site of the Mahabodhi Temple provides exceptional records of the events associated with the life of Buddha and subsequent worship, particularly since Emperor Ashoka built the first temple, the balustrades, and the memorial column. The sculpted stone balustrades are an outstanding early example of sculptural relics in stone.
LOKPAL
GS-II | 10 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the Lokpal Act of 2013; the office of Lokpal and Lokayukta: composition, ambit and powers

**News:** Lokpal member Justice Dilip B. Bhosale (retd.) has resigned from his post citing personal reasons.

**Background:** The govt. had appointed the Lokpal last year

**The Lokpal and Lokayukta Act of 2013:**

- The Act allows setting up of anti-corruption ombudsman called Lokpal at the Centre and Lokayukta at the State-level.

- **Composition:** The Lokpal will consist of a chairperson and a maximum of eight members.

- **Applicability:** The Lokpal will cover all categories of public servants, including the Prime Minister. But the armed forces do not come under the ambit of Lokpal.

- The Act also incorporates provisions for attachment and confiscation of
property acquired by corrupt means, even while the prosecution is pending.

- The States will have to institute Lokayukta **within one year** of the commencement of the Act.

- The Act also ensures that public servants who act as **whistleblowers are protected.**

**Who can become the Chairperson?**

The person who is to be appointed as the chairperson of the Lokpal should be either of the following:

- Either the former Chief Justice of India Or the former Judge of Supreme Court Or an eminent person with impeccable integrity and outstanding ability, having special knowledge and expertise of minimum 25 years in the matters relating to anti-corruption policy, public administration, vigilance, finance including insurance and banking, law and management.

**Who can become a member?**

- Out of the maximum eight members, half will be judicial members.
- Minimum fifty per cent of the Members will be from SC / ST / OBC / Minorities and women.
- The judicial member of the Lokpal should be either a former Judge of the Supreme Court or a former Chief Justice of a High Court. The non-judicial member should be an eminent person with impeccable integrity and outstanding ability, having special knowledge and expertise of minimum 25 years in the matters relating to anti-corruption policy, public administration, vigilance, finance including insurance and banking, law and management.

**Who cannot become the chairperson?**

The following persons cannot become chairperson of Lokpal:
MPs and MLAs Persons convicted of any offense involving moral turpitude Less than 45 years of age, Members of Panchayats or Municipality, A person who was removed or dismissed from the public service, A person who holds any office of trust / profit; if so, he would need to resign from Lokpal. A person who is affiliated to a political party carries on some business / profession; if so, he would need to quit some business.

Term of Office:

- The term of office for Lokpal Chairman and Members is 5 years or till attaining age of 70 years.
- The salary, allowances and other conditions of service of chairperson are equivalent to Chief Justice of India and members is equivalent to Judge of
Supreme Court. If the person is already getting the pension (for being a former judge), the equivalent pension amount will be deducted from the salary.

- The source of salary for Lokpal and Members is Consolidated Fund of India.
- If the chairperson dies in office or has resigned from the post, President can authorise the senior-most Member to act as the Chairperson until new chairperson is appointed. If chairperson is not available for certain functions due to leave, his job will be done by senior most member.

**Powers:**

- The Lokpal will have the power of superintendence and direction over any investigation agency including CBI for cases referred to them by the ombudsman.
- As per the Act, the Lokpal can summon or question any public servant if there exists a prima facie case against the person, even before an investigation agency (such as vigilance or CBI) has begun the probe. Any officer of the CBI investigating a case referred to it by the Lokpal, shall not be transferred without the approval of the Lokpal.
- An investigation must be completed within six months. However, the Lokpal or Lokayukta may allow extensions of six months at a time provided the reasons for the need of such extensions are given in writing.
- Special courts will be instituted to conduct trials on cases referred by Lokpal.

**Ambit of the Lokpal:**

- For a wide range of public servants from the PM, ministers and MPs, to groups A, B, C and D employees of the central government various rules are in place.
- If a complaint is filed against the PM, the Act says, “Lokpal shall inquire or cause an inquiry to be conducted into any matter involved in, or arising from, or connected with, any allegation of corruption made in a complaint”.
- However, certain conditions will apply. The Act does not allow a Lokpal inquiry if the allegation against the PM relates to international relations, external and internal security, public order, atomic energy and space.
- Also, complaints against the PM are not to be probed unless the full Lokpal bench considers the initiation of an inquiry and at least two-thirds of the
members approve it.

- Such an inquiry against the Prime Minister (if conducted) is to be held in camera and if the Lokpal comes to the conclusion that the complaint deserves to be dismissed, the records of the inquiry are not to be published or made available to anyone.

**Is Lokpal subjected to the law itself?**

- The Act also includes the Lokpal’s own members under the definition of “public servant”.
- The Chairperson, Members, officers and other employees of the Lokpal shall be deemed, when acting or purporting to act in pursuance of any of the provisions of this Act to be public servants.
- It shall apply to public servants in and outside India.
- It clarifies that a complaint under this Act shall only relate to a period during which the public servant was holding or serving in that capacity.

Source: The Hindu

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**Electoral Bonds**

**GS-II | 10 January, 2020**

**Syllabus subtopic:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** Key features of Electoral Bonds Scheme and its significance; merits and demerits of electoral bonds

**News:** The State Bank of India (SBI) has been authorised to sell and encash electoral bonds, the 13th such sale since the scheme started in 2018, from January 13 to 22, a Finance Ministry statement said on Thursday.

- The bonds will be **sold through 29 authorised SBI branches** and the
About Electoral bonds:
Electoral bonds allow donors to pay political parties using banks as an intermediary.

**Key features:** Although called a bond, the banking instrument resembling promissory notes will not carry any interest. The electoral bond, which will be a bearer instrument, will not carry the name of the payee and can be bought for any value, in multiples of Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10 lakh or Rs 1 crore.

**Eligibility:** As per provisions of the Scheme, electoral bonds may be purchased by a citizen of India, or entities incorporated or established in India. A person being an individual can buy electoral bonds, either singly or jointly with other individuals. Only the registered Political Parties which have secured not less than one per cent of the votes polled in the last Lok Sabha elections or the State Legislative Assembly are eligible to receive the Electoral Bonds.

**Need:** The electoral bonds are aimed at rooting out the current system of largely anonymous cash donations made to political parties which lead to the generation of black money in the economy.
Merits of electoral bonds

- The previous system of cash donations from anonymous sources is wholly non-transparent. The donor, the donee, the quantum of donations and the nature of expenditure are all undisclosed.
- According to government the system of Bonds will encourage political...
donations of clean money from individuals, companies, HUF, religious groups, charities, etc. After purchasing the bonds, these entities can hand them to political parties of their choice, which must redeem them within the prescribed time.

- Some element of transparency would be introduced in as much as all donors declare in their accounts the amount of bonds that they have purchased and all parties declare the quantum of bonds that they have received.

**Related Concerns**

- The bonds could be misused, given the lack of disclosure requirements for individuals purchasing electoral bonds.
- Electoral bonds **make electoral funding even more opaque**. It will bring more and more black money into the political system.
- With electoral bonds there can be a legal channel for companies to round-trip their tax haven cash to a political party. If this could be arranged, then a businessman could lobby for a change in policy, and legally funnel a part of the profits accruing from this policy change to the politician or party that brought it about.
- Electoral bonds eliminate the 7.5% cap on company donations which means even loss-making companies can make unlimited donations.
- Companies no longer need to declare the names of the parties to which they have donated so shareholders won’t know where their money has gone.
- They have potential to **load the dice heavily in favour of the ruling party** as the **donor bank and the receiver bank know the identity of the person**. But both **the banks report to the RBI which, in turn, is subject to the Central government’s will to know**.
Digital Sky Platform
GS-III | 10 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Science and Technology – developments and their applications and effects in everyday life

Prelims and Mains focus: about the likely regulations to be imposed on the registration of drones; Digital Sky Platform and its significance

News: The Centre is likely to tighten its drone regulations. The move to “step back” on the drone policy has been prompted by fresh red flags raised by security agencies.

Background
The move comes in the wake of two major global attacks involving unmanned aircraft systems over the last few months — the first in September, on Saudi Arabian refineries that impacted nearly half of the country’s global crude supply, and the other last week, when Iran’s top military commander General Qassem Soleimani was killed in Baghdad.

Likely safeguards to be implemented
• A newly launched, first-of-its-kind national unmanned traffic management mechanism called the “Digital Sky Platform” — a live platform for registration of manufacturers and operators of drones —
could see fresh safeguards being built into the certification process.

- A ‘National Counter Rogue Drone Guidelines’, that seeks to lay down measures to be deployed in response to threats to vital installations from unmanned aircraft systems, which was in the works, could now be expedited.

India’s Drone policy

- While globally, the drone industry is seeing a boom, with an over 35 per cent annual market growth and an estimated 2,75,000 units reported to have been sold commercially, India has been measured in opening up its skies to drones (or Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems, as they are referred to in technical parlance).

- India has a ‘No Permission-No Takeoff’ (NPNT) clause for aerial unmanned objects, which implies that a drone cannot be operated in Indian skies unless the regulatory permission is received through the Digital Sky Platform. The pilot also needs certification, requiring a remote pilot licence or an ‘Unmanned Aerial Operator Permit’ (UAOP) before operating a drone.

- In August 2018, the Centre came up with the first set of regulatory norms on the use of drones, which classified them based on their total weight with cargo and fuel for motive power (generally a battery), but with the rider that operations have to be limited to the line-of-sight. Then in January 2019, a white paper on drone policy 2.0 was released, that paved the way for wider application of drones, such as the delivery of goods beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS).

- Subsequently, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) floated an expression-of-interest for conducting experimental BVLOS operations of drones, to which 32 proposals were received.

- In August 2019, the work for the development and hosting of the Digital Sky Platform was awarded by the Airports Authority of India (AAI), and the
The Centre’s regulatory policy on the use of drones classifies them based on their total weight — ‘nano’ (up to 250 grams), ‘micro’ (250 g to 2 kg), ‘small’ (2-25 kg), ‘medium’ (25-150 kg) and ‘large’ (over 150 kg).

The Digital Sky Platform regulates all drones in the micro and higher categories and divides the Indian airspace into three broad categories — Red, Yellow and Green.

- Red denotes “no fly zone” (includes airspace near international borders, vital assets like Parliament House, nuclear installations, major airports);
- Yellow signifies airspace requiring Air Defence Clearance or Air Traffic Control clearance; and
- Green signifies unrestricted airspace zones. However, even for the Green zone, there is a need to get clearance from the Digital Sky Platform to commence operations.

**Conclusion**

The regulatory environment is a key factor impacting the pace of adoption of drone-powered solutions by government and business entities. The fresh security imperative could prompt a reset of the regulatory regime for commercial drones.

**About Digital Sky Platform:**

- The Digital Sky Platform is the first-of-its-kind national unmanned traffic management (UTM) platform that implements “no permission, no takeoff” (NPNT).
Users will be required to do a one-time registration of their drones, pilots and owners. For every flight (exempted for the nano category), users will be required to ask for permission to fly on a mobile app and an automated process permits or denies the request instantly. To prevent unauthorized flights and to ensure public safety, any drone without a digital permit to fly will simply not be able to takeoff. The UTM operates as a traffic regulator in the drone airspace and coordinates closely with the defense and civilian air traffic controllers (ATCs) to ensure that drones remain on the approved flight paths.
Syllabus subtopic: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Prelims and Mains focus: about the man-tiger conflict in India; about NTCA and its functions

News: On Wednesday, two orders issued by Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (Wildlife), to capture three different tigers, underscored the urgency of the situation like never before.

Why?

- The impressive growth in the number of tigers in Chandrapur district of Maharashtra has been punctuated by growing incidence of man-tiger conflicts over the past decade and more.

- Chandrapur has a forest area of 5,206 sq km, roughly 45 per cent of the district’s geographical area of 11,441 sq km. The main reason for increasing levels of man-tiger conflict in Chandrapur is its vast human-dominated and fragmented forest landscapes.

What are the rules for capturing/killing of tigers?

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) allows the capture or shooting of tigers only when they cause death or injury to humans, and in rare cases, for those straying inside human settlements.

About NTCA

- The National Tiger Conservation Authority is a statutory body under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change constituted under enabling provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, as amended in 2006, for strengthening tiger conservation, as per powers and functions.
assigned to it under the said Act.

- The National Tiger Conservation Authority has been fulfilling its mandate within the ambit of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 for strengthening tiger conservation in the country by retaining an oversight through advisory/normative guidelines, based on appraisal of tiger status, ongoing conservation initiatives and recommendations of specially constituted Committees.

**Functions:**

- Ensuring normative standards in tiger reserve management
- Preparation of reserve specific tiger conservation plan
- Laying down annual/audit report before Parliament
- Instituting State level Steering Committees under the Chairmanship of Chief Minister and establishment of Tiger Conservation Foundation.
- According approval for declaring new Tiger Reserves.
Source: Indian Express
Syllabus subtopic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Prelims and Mains focus: About the economic slowdown in the Indian economy and its recovery; about IIP, CSO

News: India’s industrial production recovered from three months of contraction to expand by 1.8% in November, signalling an early but weak improvement in the economy.

Background

Manufacturing output had been shrinking for the past three months with a 2.1% contraction in October. It had seen a 0.7% contraction last November.
What contributed to this recovery in IIP?

- The recovery, which comes against the backdrop of near-flat output growth seen in the same month a year ago, was driven by a 2.7% expansion in manufacturing output, official data from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) showed.

- The factory output recovery was also aided by expansion in mining, which
grew by 1.7% in November, after two months of contraction and no growth in the month before.

- **Electricity generation**: however, continued to contract for the fourth month with supply shrinking 5% in November.

- **Production of capital goods**—machinery used in factories—contracted by 8.6% in November, though not as sharply as was seen in the previous month, indicating the continued scarcity of new investments in manufacturing. Official data had shown earlier in the week that gross fixed capital formation, a proxy for investments, which rose nearly 10% in FY19, will barely improve by 1% in FY20.

- **Production of consumer durables**, such as household appliances, too, contracted 1.5% in November, its sixth straight month of de-growth.

- Available data suggests the growth of mining output would strengthen in December 2019, while the pace of contraction in electricity generation would narrow, thereby supporting the overall performance of the IIP.

**What does this recovery signify for this year’s budget?**

- The improvement in industrial production is likely to reassure the Narendra Modi administration, as it gives shape to its Union budget to be presented on 1 February, that the deceleration in economic growth may finally be ending.

- The budget is widely expected to include measures to stimulate the economy and create jobs, with finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman holding extensive consultations with economists and industry experts. PM Modi told business leaders this week that the economy has the strength to bounce back.
About Central Statistics Office (CSO)

- Amid controversies regarding the functioning of India’s official statistical system, the government, last year, decided to merge the Central Statistical Office (CSO) and National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI) into a single entity.

- The new merged entity has been named the National Statistical Office (NSO) and will continue to be headed by the secretary of MOSPI.

- In an order dated 23 May, 2019 MOSPI said the move will streamline and strengthen the current nodal functions of MOSPI and bring in more synergy by integrating its administrative functions within the ministry.

- The allocations of work of the three director-generals of MOSPI have been revamped post merger. At present, the three DGs are allocated Economic Statistics, Social Statistics and Surveys. Under the new work allocation, the DGs will handle Statistics, National Sample Survey and Coordination, Administration and Policy.

- The back-series data released in November 2018, which showed that the Indian economy grew at an average 6.67% in the nine years ended 31 March 2014 when the UPA was in power, slower than the 7.35% achieved in the four years ended 31 March 2018, with Narendra Modi as the Prime Minister, created a stir as the data was released by the NITI Aayog instead of the CSO.

- Later in January, 2019, two members of the National Statistical Commission, including acting chairman P.C. Mohanan and member JV Meenakshi, resigned from their post alleging interference by the government, including refusal to release the employment survey data. A leaked copy of the employment survey later showed unemployment at a 45-year high, which was contested by the government. Experts have also alleged that the GDP
SC judgement on internet shutdown
GS-II | 11 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Indian Constitution- historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

Prelims and Mains focus: About the SC judgement on internet curbs in the valley and its significance; about Article 370

News: The right to internet is protected by the constitution and the Centre should review the sweeping restrictions it has placed on internet access in Kashmir, the Supreme Court ruled on Friday in a landmark judgement.

About the SC judgement

- While recognizing the right of the government to impose internet bans in exceptional circumstances, it questioned the extent of the clampdowns. It drew these conclusions by recognizing that the right to internet is constitutionally protected.

- The court gave the central government and “competent authorities” a week to complete the review into the clampdown that was imposed on the eve of the 5 August revocation of Article 370 that gave the erstwhile state its special status.
The court also directed the Centre to publish all prohibitory orders in force, future orders under Section 144 of the CrPC and orders suspending telecom services, including the internet, so that affected citizens can challenge them in the high court or another appropriate forum.

The SC declared that the freedom of speech and expression and the freedom to practice any profession or carry on any trade, business or occupation over the medium of internet enjoys constitutional protection under Article 19(1)(a) and Article 19(1)(g). The restriction upon such fundamental rights should be in consonance with the mandate under Article 19 (2) and (6) of the Constitution, inclusive of the test of proportionality.

The SC said that the power under Section 144 Criminal Procedure Code, being remedial as well as preventive, is exercisable not only where there exists present danger, but also when there is an apprehension of danger. However, the danger contemplated should be in the nature of an “emergency” and for the purpose of preventing obstruction and annoyance or injury to any person lawfully employed. The power under Section 144 cannot be used to suppress legitimate expression of opinion or grievance or exercise of any democratic rights.

An order passed under Section 144, CrPC should state the material facts to enable judicial review of the same. The power should be exercised in a bona fide and reasonable manner, and the same should be passed by relying on the material facts, indicative of application of mind. This will enable judicial scrutiny of the aforesaid order. Repetitive orders under Section 144, CrPC would be an abuse of power.
What does the research on internet shutdown say?

- Around 4,196 hours of internet blackouts in India cost the economy close to $1.3 billion in 2019, said a 7 January report by UK-based research firm Top10VPN.

- The report analysed every major internet shutdown around the world in 2019 which cost the global economy over $8 billion. India, where over 100 shutdowns were documented, was the third worst-hit after Iraq and Sudan.

- The findings for India are based on internet blackouts in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Jammu and Kashmir, Meghalaya, Rajasthan, Tripura and Uttar Pradesh.

Why SC order on Internet goes beyond J&K?

- Directing the government to mandatorily publish all orders permitting Internet shutdowns, the Supreme Court has for the first time set the stage for challenging suspension orders before courts.

- Although the Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Service) Rules, 2017 issued under the Telegraph Act — the law that deals with restricting Internet access — does not provide for publication or notification of the order suspending Internet, the apex court mandated that such orders must be made available to the public.

- The court declared that it is a “settled principle of law, and of natural justice” that requires publication of such orders, “particularly one that affects lives, liberty and property of people”. “Any law which demands compliance of the people requires to be notified directly and reliably,” it said.
This allows individuals to now challenge the orders before courts in J&K and rest of India. In the wake of protests against the new citizenship law, Internet services were suspended temporarily in parts of Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Karnataka. While suspension orders were always subject to judicial review, lack of availability of such orders in public domain prevented such challenges before courts.

In December last year, the Gauhati High Court directed the Assam government to restore Internet in the state after reviewing suspension orders.

India tops the list of Internet shutdowns globally. According to Software Freedom Law Center's tracker, there have been 381 shutdowns since 2012, 106 of which were in 2019. The ongoing shutdown in Kashmir is the longest ever in any democratic country.

The Supreme Court also highlighted ‘gaps’ in the current Suspension Rules. In favour of the petitioners, the court tightened the window for broad telecom suspensions, stating they had to be “necessary” and “unavoidable”.

While the Solicitor General had argued during the proceedings that blocking only some social media services was not feasible, the Court responded that “the State should have attempted to determine the feasibility of such a measure” and “if such a contention is accepted, then the Government would have a free pass to put a complete internet blockage every time. Such complete blocking/prohibition perpetually cannot be accepted by this Court”.

There should not be excessive burden on free speech even if complete prohibition is imposed, and the government has to justify imposition of such prohibition and explain why lesser alternatives will be inadequate, the bench stated.

Lastly, the court mandated that all orders regarding the Kashmir case be
made public, and to provide essential services such as e-banking and hospitals immediately.

- Once these orders have been reviewed, they are open to be challenged by everybody and can be subject to judicial review. What the state was arguing in this case was that this is a matter of national security given that it pertains to Kashmir with a history of militancy. They said, therefore leave it to the state, armed forces, and security forces to determine what restrictions need to be imposed, and the court should not be reviewing these orders. On that aspect, the court has come down very clearly to say that it will judicially review executive orders.

- This was an unprecedented court recognition of the new important mediums of expression and trade.

- The bench also noted that the law needs to keep pace with technological development: “We need to note that the law should imbibe the technological development and accordingly mould its rules so as to cater to the needs of society. Non-recognition of technology within the sphere of law is only a disservice to the inevitable.”

Source: Livemint

National Strategy for Financial Inclusion (NSFI)  , 2019-2024
GS-III | 11 January,2020

Syllabus subtopic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Prelims and Mains focus: About the financial inclusion strategy and its significance; about PMJDY; PCR
News: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has chalked out an ambitious strategy for financial inclusion till 2024.

Why?

Financial inclusion is increasingly being recognised as a key driver of economic growth and poverty alleviation the world over.

Aim and objectives of the strategy

- It aims to strengthen the ecosystem for various modes of digital financial services in all Tier II to Tier VI centres to create the necessary infrastructure to move towards a less cash society by March 2022.

- One of the objectives of the strategy includes increasing outreach of banking outlets to provide banking access to every village within a 5km radius or a hamlet of 500 households in hilly areas by March 2020.

- The aim was also to see that every adult had access to a financial service provider through a mobile device by March 2024.

- With the aim of providing basic of financial services, a target has been set that every willing and eligible adult, who has been enrolled under the Prime Minister Jan Dhan Yojana, be enrolled under an insurance scheme and a pension scheme by March 2020.

- The plan is also to make the Public Credit Registry (PCR) fully operational by March 2022 so that authorised financial entities could leverage the same for assessing credit proposals from all citizens.
About Prime Minister Jan Dhan Yojana

- The primary aim of this scheme is to provide poor people access to bank accounts.
- The scheme covers both urban and rural areas of India.
All bank accounts will be linked to a debit card which would be issued under the RuPay scheme. RuPay is India’s own unique domestic card network owned by National Payments Corporation of India and has been created as an alternative to Visa and Mastercard.

- Under the first phase of this scheme, every individual who opens a bank account becomes eligible to receive an accident insurance cover of up-to Rs 1 Lakh for his entire family.
- Life Insurance coverage is also available under PMJDY. Only one person in the family will be covered and in case of the person having multiple cards/accounts, the benefit will be allowed only under one card e. one person per family will get a single cover of Rs 30,000.
- The scheme also provides incentives to business and banking correspondents who serve as link for the last mile between savings account holders and the bank by fixing a minimum monthly remuneration of Rs 5000.

About Public Credit Registry

- Public Credit Registry (PCR), created by the Reserve Bank of India, is a public digital registry to capture and store financial information of borrowers in India, both existing and new borrowers.
- The credit registry will collate the borrowing history of both individuals and corporate borrowers. Borrowers will have access to their credit information and seek corrections.
- The PCR is the culmination of recommendations given by the committee headed by Y.M. Deosthalee. The idea behind creating the public registry is to collate the financial information of individual and corporate borrowers under one platform, inclusive of financial delinquencies, pending legal suits, and willful defaulters. The objective was to strengthen the credit culture of the Indian economy.
- The move is a departure from the existing mechanism where there are multiple credit information repositories with varied data objectives and coverage. The lack of credit information gap will be filled by the unified PCR. The data contained in the system will be made available to stakeholders such as banks and private financial institutions on a need-to-know basis.
- It was suggested that the PCR would improve India’s ease of doing business parameters at the World Bank.
The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has approved the rules of business for the newly created Department of Military Affairs (DMA), headed by the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), defence sources said on Friday.

About DMA and its composition

- The DMA is the fifth department in the MoD — the others being the Department of Defence, the Department of Defence Production, the Department of Defence Research and Development and the Department of Ex-Servicemen Welfare.

- The DMA, headed by Gen. Bipin Rawat, will have two Joint Secretaries.
Ambit of DMA

- The training policy, most of the training establishments and cadre management of the Services would be under the purview of the DMA.
- The Services have been brought under the ambit of the DMA, in addition to the Territorial Army and works relating to the three Services and procurement exclusive to the Services, except capital acquisitions.
- Defence imports and procurements would be under the Department of Defence headed by the Defence Secretary.
- Defence diplomacy of the neighbourhood countries would also be under the CDS.
- Similarly, deputations to the training establishments, such as the National Defence Academy, the Indian Military Academy, the Officers Training Academy and the Defence Services Staff College would also be under the CDS.
- Cadre review of Junior Commissioned Officers and Other Ranks will be looked after by the CDS.

Mandate of DMA

The DMA’s mandate includes promoting jointness in procurement, training and staffing for the Services; facilitating a restructuring of the military commands for optimal utilisation of resources by bringing about jointness in operations, including through establishment of joint/theatre commands, and promoting the use of indigenous equipment.
Source: The Hindu
Syllabus subtopic: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Prelims and Mains focus: About the waterbird census in CWS; About Indian skimmer; IUCN

News: The annual bird census will commence in the Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary (CWS) and surrounding wetlands in the Godavari mangrove cover on the east coast from Saturday.

About the census

- The wildlife management authorities are all set to carry out the twoday census of the avian species, assessing the threats and challenges being faced by the water birds.
- The census aims at documentation of migratory and resident birds to be able to prepare a better management plan of the complex ecosystem that supports the waterbird species. It will provide a picture of its present state and results of the conservation being done in the wildlife sanctuary and outside.
- At least 50 personnel — research scholars, volunteers, and bird watchers — will conduct the census. The prime focus will be on the 235.7 sq km area under the CWL and Kumbabhisekham site in the Godavari mangroves that serves as the safe habitat for many bird species.

About the Indian Skimmer

- Indian Skimmer, a water-bird species, has started visiting the Godavari mangroves for three years. The species can be sighted only in three places in the country, including the Chambal river in Central India.
The conservation status of the Indian Skimmer is ‘vulnerable’, according to the Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN).

About IUCN

- It is an international organisation working in the field of nature conservation and sustainable use of natural resources
• Founded in 1948 in Fontainebleau, France.
• HQ : Gland, Switzerland
• It is involved in data gathering and analysis, research, field projects, advocacy, lobbying and education.
• Over the past decades, IUCN has widened its focus beyond conservation ecology and now incorporates issues related to gender equality, poverty alleviation and sustainable business in its projects.
• It publishes IUCN Red List which assesses the conservation status of species worldwide
• IUCN has observer and consultative status at the United Nations
• Both Governments and NGOs are its members.

About IUCN red list of threatened species:

• The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species is the world’s most comprehensive inventory of the global conservation status of plant and animal species.
• It uses a set of quantitative criteria to evaluate the extinction risk of thousands of species. These criteria are relevant to most species and all regions of the world. With its strong scientific base, the IUCN Red List is recognized as the most authoritative guide to the status of biological diversity.

The IUCN Red List Categories:

• The IUCN Red List Categories define the extinction risk of species assessed. Nine categories extend from NE (Not Evaluated) to EX (Extinct).
• Critically Endangered (CR), Endangered (EN) and Vulnerable (VU) species are considered to be threatened with extinction.
International Energy Agency (IEA)
GS-II | 11 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India’s interests

Prelims and Mains focus: About IEA findings on India’s oil demand; about India’s strategic oil reserves; IEA: members and mandate

News: India’s oil demand growth will overtake China by mid-2020s, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said on Friday asking the world’s third-largest energy consumer to raise the capacity of strategic oil storages as insurance against disruptions.

India 2020 ‘Energy Policy Review’
India’s current strategic oil storage of 10 days of its imports is not enough to protect it in the rainy days in the oil market.

India imports more than 80 per cent of its oil needs, of which 65 per cent is from the Middle East through the Strait of Hormuz, the IEA said, adding that the country’s oil refining capacity will rise to about 8 million bpd by 2025 from about 5 million bpd at present.

IEA projected India’s oil demand to reach 6 million barrels per day (bpd) by 2024 from 4.4 million bpd in 2017. China’s demand growth is likely to be slightly lower than that of India by the mid-2020s.

India is the world’s third-largest consumer of oil (behind the US and China), the fourth-largest oil refiner and a net exporter of refined (petroleum) products. The rate of growth of India’s oil consumption is expected to surpass that of China in the mid-2020s, making India a very attractive market for refinery investment.

Its “demand will go up significantly in the next years to come” on the back rise in oil consumption for mobility, as cooking fuel and in the petrochemical industry.

India’s strategic oil reserves

- India has built underground storages at Padur and Vishakapatnam in Andhra Pradesh and Mangalore and Padur in Karnataka to stock 5.33 million tonnes of crude oil. The storage capacity is equivalent to less than 10 days of India’s oil imports.
- In the second phase, similar storages are planned at Chandikhol in Odisha and Padur in Karnataka for another 6.5 million tonnes of oil.
About IEA

- Established in 1974 as per framework of the OECD.
- MISSION – The IEA works to ensure reliable, affordable and clean energy for its 30 member countries and beyond. Our mission is guided by four main areas of focus: energy security, economic development, environmental awareness and engagement worldwide.
- Headquarters (Secretariat): Paris, France.
- A candidate country must be a member country of the OECD. But all OECD members are not IEA members (Ex: Chile, Iceland, Israel, Latvia and Slovenia).
- India currently is an associate member.
- It coordinates the release of strategic petroleum reserves (SPR) among developed countries in times of emergency.

To become member a candidate country must demonstrate that it has:

- crude oil and/or product reserves equivalent to 90 days of the previous year’s net imports, to which the government has immediate access (even if it does not own them directly) and could be used to address disruptions to global oil supply
- a demand restraint programme to reduce national oil consumption by up to 10%
- legislation and organisation to operate the Co-ordinated Emergency Response Measures (CERM) on a national basis
- legislation and measures to ensure that all oil companies under its jurisdiction report information upon request;
- measures in place to ensure the capability of contributing its share of an IEA collective action.

Mandate of IEA

To focus on the “3Es” of effectual energy policy:

1. Energy security.
2. Economic development.
3. Environmental protection.
Reports by IEA:

- World Energy Outlook.
- Energy Technology Perspectives.

About OECD

- Founded in 1961 to stimulate economic progress and world trade
- Headquarter — Paris, France

Origin

- Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) was founded in 1948 to help administer the Marshall Plan.
- In 1961, the OEEC was reformed into the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development by the Convention on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and membership was extended to non-European states
- Intergovernmental economic organisation
- Official United Nations observer
- It works through consensus to develop policy recommendations and other “soft law” instruments to encourage policy reform in member countries.

Membership

- Currently 36 members
- **India is not a member** but key partner (the countries which are invited for annual ministerial conference. Other key partners are — Brazil, China, Indonesia and South Africa)
- It is forum of countries describing themselves as committed to democracy and the market economy.
- Most OECD members are high-income economies with a very high Human Development Index (HDI) and are regarded as developed countries
- It provides a platform to compare policy experiences, seeking answers to common problems, identify good practices and coordinate domestic and international policies of its members.
- Its programs are funded by contributions from member states at varying rates
How it works?

- **OECD Council** — provide direction and guidance to the work of Organisation. Each member country is represented.
- **OECD Substantive Committees** — oversee all the work on each theme (publications, task forces, conferences, and so on)
- **OECD Secretariat** — led by the Secretary-General provides support to Standing and Substantive Committees

Special bodies and entities

- International Transport Forum (ITF) (formally known as the European Conference of Ministers of Transport)
- International Energy Agency
- Nuclear Energy Agency
- Partnership for Democratic Governance (PDG)
- Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC)

Reports and Publications

- OECD Economic survey of India
- Government at a Glance
- Education at a Glance
- Agricultural Outlook 2017-2026 (in association with FAO)
- Multilateral Automatic Exchange of Financial Account Information (MCAA) — multilateral convention on administrative assistance in taxation matters
- Employment Protection Index
- Your Better Life Index

Source: Indian Express

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**WTO: India-US trade dispute**

GS-II | 11 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements
Prelims and Mains focus: About the India-US trade dispute; GSP and its benefits; WTO: structure and functions

News: The World Trade Organisation's (WTO) dispute settlement body has set up a panel to examine the US complaint against India which had increased customs duties on 28 American goods last year.

Background
- The US in July had dragged India to the WTO by filing a complaint against New Delhi's move to increase customs duties, alleging the decision as inconsistent with the global trade norms.

- The US had alleged that the additional duties imposed by India "appears to nullify or impair the benefits accruing to the US directly or indirectly" under the GATT 1994.

- It had stated that India does not impose these duties on products originating in the territory of any other WTO member nation.

About GATT
The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) is a WTO pact, signed by all member countries of the multi-lateral body, aims to promote trade by reducing or eliminating trade barriers like customs duties.

How is a dispute settled in WTO?
- As per the WTO's dispute settlement process, the request for consultations is the first step in a dispute.
Consultations give the parties an opportunity to discuss the matter and find a satisfactory solution without proceeding further with litigation. After 60 days, if consultations fail to resolve the dispute, the complainant may request adjudicated by a panel.

India-US trade dispute

- India’s exports to the US in 2017-18 stood at USD 47.9 billion, while imports were at USD 26.7 billion. The trade balance is in favour of India.

- The US has rolled back export incentives from India under its GSP programme and New Delhi has imposed higher customs duties on 28 American products including almond, pulses, walnut, chickpeas, boric acid and binders for foundry moulds.

- The other products on which duties were hiked include certain kind of nuts, iron and steel products, apples, pears, flat rolled products of stainless steel, other alloy steel, tube and pipe fittings, and screws, bolts and rivets.

- The duties were hiked as retaliation to the US move to impose the highest customs duties on certain steel and aluminium goods.

Generalised System of Preferences (GSP):

The Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) is a U.S. trade program designed to promote economic growth in the developing world by providing preferential duty-free entry for up to 4,800 products from 129 designated beneficiary countries and territories.

What is the objective of GSP?

The objective of GSP was to give development support to poor countries by
promoting exports from them into the developed countries. GSP promotes sustainable development in beneficiary countries by helping these countries to increase and diversify their trade with the United States.

Benefits of GSP:

1. Indian exporters benefit indirectly – through the benefit that accrues to the importer by way of reduced tariff or duty free entry of eligible Indian products
2. Reduction or removal of import duty on an Indian product makes it more competitive to the importer – other things (e.g. quality) being equal.
3. This tariff preference helps new exporters to penetrate a market and established exporters to increase their market share and to improve upon the profit margins, in the donor country.

About World Trade Organisation (WTO)

- Officially commenced on 1 January 1995 under the Marrakesh Agreement, replacing the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which commenced in 1948
- An organization that intends to supervise and liberalize international trade
- HQ – Geneva, Switzerland
- Official language – English, French, Spanish

Evolution of WTO

1944  Bretton Woods conference wanted to make ITO (International Trade Org.) but USA did not ratify. Thus, GATT was born as a stopgap arrangement
1947  GATT (General Agreement on Trade & Tariffs) established aimed to reduce barriers
1986  Uruguay Round of Talks
1994  Marrakesh treaty under Uruguay round of talks at Morroco

All nations signed on agreement & WTO was established on Jan 1, 1995
- India ? Founding member of WTO

WTO Structure
Ministerial Conference
- Supreme Decision Making body
- 164 members, Latest member ? Afghanistan
- Meets once every two years,
- Deliberates on trade agreements
- Appoints Director General

General Council
- Day to day Decision Making body
- Meets regularly at Geneva.
- Implements decision of ministerial conferences
- Has Representative from each member state.
- Has two bodies, with separate chairmen
  - Dispute settlement body
  - Trade policy review body

Director General
- Appointed by ministerial conference
- Has four years term.
- Heads Secretariat at Geneva
Source: Indian Express
Syllabus subtopic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Prelims and Mains focus: about MCLR and its significance; reasons for private banks not passing on the benefits of interest rate cuts to its customers compared to other banks.

News: Private banks were the slowest to pass on the benefits of falling interest rates to their customers in 2019 compared to their state-run and foreign rivals, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data showed.

Background

The process of setting interest rates by banks is at the core of transmission and the central bank has for several years been trying to make it more transparent. This has led to the change from benchmark prime lending rate (BPLR) to base rate to MCLR and finally to external benchmark-based lending rates.

What does the RBI data show?

- The median one-year marginal cost of funds-based lending rate (MCLR) for private banks fell a meagre 12 basis points (bps) to 9.18% between January and December 2019, compared to RBI’s cumulative 135 bps cut in its key policy rate to 5.15%. Most bank loans are typically priced over the one-year MCLR, making it the most tracked rate.

- In the same period, state-run banks have lowered their one-year median MCLR by 45 bps and foreign banks have cut their lending rates by 75 bps.
Foreign banks have the lowest median one-year MCLR rate at 7.9% as of December. Their public counterparts are at 8.3%. For all scheduled commercial banks taken together, the one-year median rate stands at 8.3%.
Why are private banks showing so much reluctance?

- The reason private banks are less eager to cut interest rates lies in their cost of funds.

- They pay the highest interest to their depositors. Private lenders are followed by public sector and foreign banks, respectively. While private banks paid depositors 6.91% interest in November 2019 (latest data), public sector banks paid 6.65% and foreign banks 5.38%, according to RBI data on weighted average deposit rates.

- For public sector banks, credit growth is slow and, therefore, the need to aggressively mobilize deposits by offering a higher interest rate to deposits is little. Accordingly, the deposit rates for private sector banks remain higher.

- Foreign banks, however, pay depositors less than what other categories of banks do and, therefore, their lending rates are among the cheapest. One factor behind it is foreign banks’ limited retail franchises and the presence of large deposits from multinational corporations, which keep their money in the same bank across the world. Hence, in the absence of retail depositors, the need to offer higher deposit rates to attract retail deposits is lower than other banks. These MNCs also maintain large current account deposits instead of term deposits, leading to lower cost of deposits.

About MCLR

- The Marginal Cost of Funds based Lending Rate (MCLR) system was introduced by the Reserve Bank to provide loans on minimal rates as well as market rate fluctuation benefit to customers.

- This system has modified the existing base rate system of providing home loans. In this system, banks have to set various benchmark rates for
specific time periods starting from an overnight to one month, quarterly, semi-annually and annually.

- MCLR replaced the earlier base rate system to determine the lending rates for commercial banks. RBI implemented it on 1 April 2016 to determine rates of interests for loans.

**Its objectives:**

- To improve the transmission of policy rates into the lending rates of banks.
- To bring transparency in the methodology followed by banks for determining interest rates on advances.
- To ensure availability of bank credit at interest rates which are fair to borrowers as well as banks.
- To enable banks to become more competitive and enhance their long run value and contribution to economic growth.
Competition Commission of India (CCI)

GS-II | 13 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies

Prelims and Mains focus: about the govt.'s move; M&As and their impact on
News: Global mergers and acquisitions (M&As) among technology giants that could disturb the competition landscape in India may soon require clearance from the Competition Commission of India (CCI).

About the move and its significance

The Ministry of Corporate Affairs is working on a bill to amend the nearly two decade-old Competition Act of 2002, which is likely to be introduced in the budget session of Parliament.

- The change will incorporate deal size, which is currently not among the criteria for vetting global M&A deals with relevance to the Indian market, in CCI’s merger regulations.

- The change will bring mega deals such as the 2014 acquisition of WhatsApp by Facebook within the ambit of CCI. Facebook’s $19 billion acquisition of WhatsApp escaped CCI assessment.

- This move (of adding deal size as a criterion) will be very useful for regulating M&As involving digital economy giants as the present threshold for regulation based on assets and turnover may not apply to them.

- Even if the asset or turnover of the combined entity is below the threshold specified in the law, if their deal size is above a certain threshold, which is to be decided after deliberations, they may have to refer the case to CCI.

- The proposed change will impact transactions involving domestic digital e-commerce firms, including taxi aggregators and e-commerce companies, which may command huge valuation because of their unique business models or access to user base.
What is the present scenario?

- India has seen several acquisitions in the digital economy space in recent years, including of Myntra by Flipkart and TaxiForSure by Ola.

- Currently, asset size and revenue in an M&A are the only criteria for competition scrutiny. This has proved to be inadequate as new-age technology companies have huge valuations, but their assets and turnover in India keep them out of the purview of local competition law. Their valuations come in part from their access to customer base and data, and India is a huge market for them.

- Individual firms involved in M&As have to seek CCI clearance now if their combined assets in India are worth over ?1,000 crore or their revenue is over ?3,000 crore. Deals involving firms having combined global assets of $500 million or sales of $1500 million need CCI’s approval if they have assets worth at least ?500 crore or sales worth ?1,500 crore in India.

Impacts of M&As deals on competition

- A deal’s impact on competition is assessed on several factors including a reduction in the number of players in the market and the entry barriers created for new players.
- In the case of global transactions among digital economy firms, their nexus with the Indian market has to be established in order to assess whether their M&As impact competition in the local market.
- Whenever global transactions are referred to national competition authorities, they suggest modifications to certain parts of the transaction if competition in the local market is adversely affected.

About Competition Commission of India:

It is a statutory body of the Government of India, responsible for enforcing the Competition Act, 2002 throughout India and to prevent activities that have an adverse effect on competition.
Objectives:

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

Functions:

- It is the duty of the Commission to eliminate practices having adverse effect on competition, promote and sustain competition, protect the interests of consumers and ensure freedom of trade in the markets of India.
- The Commission is also required to give opinion on competition issues on a reference received from a statutory authority established under any law and to undertake competition advocacy, create public awareness and impart training on competition issues.

Competition Act 2002

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

Source: Livemint
other measures.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the failure in implementation of BharatNet project and the govt.’s move to address it; about BharatNet scheme

News: The central government’s flagship BharatNet scheme, which aims to provide last mile internet connectivity to all villages and gram panchayats (GP), has missed the targets set for phase one.

- With connectivity targets set for phase two of the project also likely to be missed owing to current delays, the government is now attempting to rope in the private sector to cover up for the failings of implementing agencies.

Targets missed

- As against the initial target for connecting all the 2.50 lakh GPs by end of March 2019, only 1.18 lakh had been connected till then. With an estimated Rs 19,516.37 crore having been invested in the scheme so far, the utilisation status of the infrastructure created under this so far is discouraging.
- Of the 1.26 lakh GPs that have been made service ready so far, WiFi hotspots are functional only in 15,000. The plan to provide fibre to the home (FTTH) connectivity is operational only at 27,856 GPs till end-December.

Reasons given by the DoT

In its defence, the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) — the nodal agency for implementation of the project — has blamed the network architecture, the connectivity to old BSNL fibre in part of the network operation and maintenance through BSNL as some of the reasons which had held back optimal utilisation of the network.

What govt. plans to do now?
To overcome the failings of nodal agencies involved in the implementation of the project, the Centre now plans to rope in the private sector and complete the phase one as well as phase two part of BharatNet under the public-private-partnership (PPP) model.

A meeting in this regard was held involving officials from the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO), the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and Niti Aayog, where the government policy think tank suggested the PPP model.

Details of the PPP model suggested by the Niti Aayog

- Under the model, private sector will be invited to bid circle-wise for the BharatNet project and the maximum contract duration of the project is likely to be 25 years. The selection criteria for private service partner (PSP) will be their quote for viability gap funding, and the bidders will be expected to provide “on demand” internet connectivity with minimum speeds of 50 Mbps to at least five development institutions in the area.

- The private service partner (PSP) will have the flexibility to re-locate the equipment installed at the BSNL (Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited) exchanges and gram panchayats. It would also have the flexibility to create/upgrade the network.

Challenges in PPP model

Though the Niti Aayog suggested the PPP model, it also flagged some likely challenges if the government opts to rope in private players.

- One such challenge, the agency has said, is to ensure “affordable and fair pricing” which is likely to change if the private players have their way.
- The financial reconciliation of work done so far under phase one of BharatNet, which is pending as final documents from central public sector units have not been received so far, is also likely to be a challenge.
Apart from these, the government think tank is learnt to have warned about the change in the outlook towards BharatNet, which, when envisaged, was mooted as a “national asset with non-discriminatory access to all service providers”.

The handling of Right of Way (RoW) for enhanced architecture and newly created network, along with integration of phase one and two of BharatNet was also flagged as a challenge. DoT will have to find a solution to termination of ongoing work under the scheme and handing it over to the private sector.

Involving private players could affect pricing: The entry of private players for the completion of projects of BharatNet under the PPP model could mean an increase in prices of services being offered nearly free of cost by the government as of now. WiFi services under BharatNet are free till March 2020. If private players are allowed to complete projects, they are likely to look to recover their costs. It is yet to be seen if the upcoming projects will be completed on a sharing basis or the government would look to just facilitate the approvals while leaving infrastructure to the bidders.

Source: Indian Express

Wular Lake
GS-III | 13 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Prelims and Mains focus: about Wular lake and its conservation; Ramsar convention and its significance; WTI
News: The Jammu and Kashmir administration has embarked on a project to cut over 20 lakh trees to “reclaim” the shrinking Wular Lake spread across north Kashmir’s Bandipore and Baramulla districts.

About the move

The Wular Conservation and Management Authority (WUCMA) has started cutting trees on the Ramsar wetland — an area of international importance and once Asia’s largest freshwater lake. The project was started on the basis of a 2007 report by Wetlands International South-Asia, a non-profit organisation that works to sustain and restore wetlands.

Background

In its 2007 report, Wetlands International had suggested removing all trees from inside the lake boundary. Most trees to be cut, fall in Ningli forest range. “Ningli plantation, currently occupying 27.30 sq km, needs to be removed for enhancement of water holding capacity. The removal would help enhancement of water level by at least one meter, which is critical to restoration of biodiversity,” the report states.

Concerns raised

- With the cutting of 2 lakh trees already underway in the first phase, experts advise caution. They call for a study on the ecological impact of cutting trees in such large numbers.
- Another study by Wildlife Trust of India, while recommending the cutting of trees, has called for proper studies to assess the impact. The WTI report says that on an average, 33 kg of carbon dioxide is trapped by each tree annually, making it over 72,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide by 21.84 lakh trees.

About Wular lake
Wular Lake is one of the largest fresh water lakes in Asia. It is sited in Bandipora district in Jammu and Kashmir. The lake basin was formed as a result of tectonic activity and is fed by the Jhelum River. The lake's size varies seasonally from 12 to 100 square miles (30 to 260 square kilometers). In addition, much of the lake has been drained as a result of willow plantations being built on the shore in the 1950s.

The Tulbul Project is a "navigation lock-cum-control structure" at the mouth of Wular Lake. The largest freshwater lake in Jammu and Kashmir, Wular has considerably shrunk over the past eight decades. Officials records show that 27 sq m of the lake has silted up and turned into a land mass. In the 1980s, the central government proposed to dam the water by constructing Wular barrage. The project, however, was shelved after rise in militancy in the state.

About Ramsar convention:

The Ramsar Convention is an international treaty for the conservation and wise use of wetlands. It is named after the Iranian city of Ramsar, on the Caspian Sea, where the treaty was signed on 2 February 1971. Known officially as ‘the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat’ (or, more recently, just ‘the Convention on Wetlands’), it came into force in 1975.

The Convention uses a broad definition of wetlands. This includes all lakes and rivers, underground aquifers, swamps and marshes, wet grasslands, peatlands, oases, estuaries, deltas and tidal flats, mangroves and other coastal areas, coral reefs, and all human-made sites such as fish ponds, rice paddies, reservoirs and salt pans.

Montreux Record:

Montreux Record under the Convention is a register of wetland sites on the List of Wetlands of International Importance where changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring, or are likely to occur as a result of technological developments, pollution or other human
interference.

- It is **maintained as part of the Ramsar List**. The Montreux Record was established by Recommendation of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (1990). Sites may be added to and removed from the Record only with the approval of the Contracting Parties in which they lie.
About Wildlife Trust of India (WTI)

It is a leading Indian nature conservation organisation committed to the service of nature. Its mission is to conserve wildlife and its habitat and to work for the welfare of individual wild animals, in partnership with communities and governments. WTI’s team of 150 dedicated professionals work towards achieving its vision of a secure natural heritage of India, in six priority landscapes, knit holistically together by nine key strategies or Big Ideas.

Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) currently runs 44 projects across India.

Source: Indian Express

Bojjannakonda: Buddhist Site

GS-I | 13 January, 2020

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

Prelims and Mains focus: about the ritual and the Buddhist sites associated; about INTACH and its role in conserving Indian heritage

News: After a sustained campaign, heritage lovers and officials have been successful in almost stopping the stone-pelting ritual at Bojjannakonda, a famous Buddhist site at Sankaram, 3.5 km from Anakapalle and 41 km from Visakhapatnam.

About the ritual on Kanuma day

The villagers, as a part of an ancient ritual, would throw stones at a belly-shaped object at the site, believing it to be a part of a demon.
About the Buddhist sites

Bojjannakonda and Lingalametta are twin Buddhist monasteries dating back to the 3rd century BC. These sites have seen three forms of Buddhism —

1. the Theravada period when Lord Buddha was considered a teacher;
2. the Mahayana, where Buddhism was more devotional; and
3. Vajrayana, where Buddhist tradition was more practised as Tantra and in esoteric form.

The name Sankaram is derived from the term, ‘Sangharama’. The site is famous for many votive stupas, rockcut caves, brickbuilt edifices, early historic pottery, and Satavahana coins that date back to the 1st century AD.

- The main stupa was carved out of rock and then covered with bricks, and a number of images of the Buddha are seen sculpted on the rock face all over the hill.

- At the nearby Lingalametta, one can see hundreds of rockcut monolithic stupas in rows.
UPSC "PT" DNA (Daily News Analysis)
Efforts of NTACH to protect the site from damage

Following the intervention of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), the practice carried out on the Kanuma day during Sankranti has almost been done away with. With the support of the police and the district administration, it has been able to stop pelting of stones for the past few years.

About INTACH

- The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) was founded in 1984 with the vision to spearhead heritage awareness and conservation in India.
- INTACH’s mission is to conserve heritage is based on the belief that living in harmony with heritage enhances the quality of life, and it is the duty of every citizen of India as laid down in the Constitution of India.
- INTACH is recognized as one of the world’s largest heritage organizations and has pioneered the conservation and preservation of not just our natural and built heritage but intangible heritage as well.

Source: The Hindu

Right to property

GS-II | 13 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Indian Constitution- historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the SC judgement; Constitutional provisions related to right of property

News: A citizen’s right to own private property is a fundamental right. The
State cannot take possession of it without following due procedure and authority of law, the Supreme Court held in a judgment on January 8.

About the case

- The court was hearing a plea filed by Vidya Devi, a widow, whose four acres of land was taken over by the Himachal Pradesh government in 1967.
- The appellant (Ms. Devi) being an illiterate widow, coming from a rural background, was wholly unaware of her rights and entitlement in law, and did not file any proceedings for compensation.
- When Ms. Devi, 80, learnt about her rights in 2010 from her neighbours, who had also lost their property, she approached the Himachal Pradesh High Court. However, when the HC asked her to file a civil suit in the lower court, she moved the Supreme Court.

Details of the SC judgement

- The State cannot trespass into the private property of a citizen and then claim ownership of the land in the name of ‘adverse possession’, the court said, adding that grabbing private land and then claiming it as its own makes the State an encroacher.
- In a welfare state, right to property is a human right, said a Bench of Justices Indu Malhotra and Ajay Rastogi.
- A welfare state cannot be permitted to take the plea of adverse possession, which allows a trespasser i.e. a person guilty of a tort, or even a crime, to gain legal title over such property for over 12 years. The State cannot be permitted to perfect its title over the land by invoking the doctrine of adverse possession to grab the property of its own citizens.
- The SC ordered the State to pay her Rs.1 crore in compensation.

Constitutional provisons regarding Right to property

- Before 1978, ‘right to private property was still a fundamental right’ under Article 31 of the Constitution.
- Property ceased to be a fundamental right (and made a legal right under Article 300A) with the 44th Constitution Amendment in 1978.
- Nevertheless, Article 300A required the State to follow due procedure and
authority of law to deprive a person of his or her private property.

Exception of 44th amendment for classes who still enjoy right to property

- If the property acquired belongs to an educational institution established & administered by minority, state must offer full market value as compensation.

- If the state seeks to acquire land cultivated by the owner himself & such land which does not exceed statutory ceiling, then state must offer full market value as compensation.

Fundamental Rights V/S Legal Rights

- Legal rights are protected & enforced by ordinary law of land whereas FRs are protected & guaranteed by written constitution

- In violation of legal rights, one can file suit in subordinate court or by writ application in High court whereas in violation of FRs one can directly approach Supreme court

- Legal rights can be changed by ordinary process of legislation whereas FRs cannot be amended without amending the constitution itself (i.e. by special majority)

- FRs provides protection only against state action not against a private individual except rights pertaining to abolition of untouchability & rights against exploitation

Six Fundamental Rights in India

Article 14 – 18 Right to Equality
Indian Coast Guard Ship (ICGS)- Annie Besant

GS-III | 13 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate

Prelims and Mains focus: details of the two ICGS; contributions of Annie Besant and Amrit Kaur; about Indian Coast Guard

News: Two Indian Coast Guard Ships (ICGS) — Annie Besant and Amrit Kaur — second and third in the series of five Fast Patrol Vessels (FPV) were commissioned by Defence Secretary Ajay Kumar at Kolkata on Sunday

About the ships

- ICGS Annie Besant has been named in honour of Ms Annie Besant, an esteemed socialist and her eminent achievements towards the nation. Ms Annie Besant was a theosophist, women’s rights activist, writer, orator and supporter of Indian freedom. She was also a philanthropist and a prolific author who had written over three hundred books & pamphlets and
contributed in foundation of Banaras Hindu University. In 1916, she established the Indian Home Rule League, of which she became President. The ship is being based at Chennai under the operational and administrative control of Commander, Coast Guard Region East.

- ICGS Amrit Kaur derives her name from Ms Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur who belonged to the ruling family of Kapurthala, Punjab. She took an active part in Salt Satyagraha and Quit India Movement. She served the Independent India as its first Health Minister. She worked towards upliftment of Harijan and progress of women. She was the founder member of All India Womens’ Conference and founder President of Indian Council for Child Welfare. The ship is being based at Haldia under the operational and administrative control of Commander, Coast Guard Region North East.

- The ships are 48.9 mtrs long & 7.5 mtrs wide with a displacement of 308 Tons. The ships are capable of achieving maximum speed of 34 Knots, powered with MTU 4000 Series Engines and propelled by three 71S type III Kamewa waterjet of Rolls Royce. The ships are built indigenously by M/s Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE) Ltd, Kolkata.

- The ships are capable of undertaking multi-faceted tasks such as surveillance, interdiction, Search & Rescue and Medical Evacuation. The ships are fitted with state-of-the-art technology, navigation & communication equipment, sensors and machinery. The ships are also equipped with Bofors 40/60 gun and 12.7 mm SRCG (Stablized Remote Controlled Gun) for enhancing the fighting efficiency of the ship. The ships carry one RIB (Rigid Inflatable Boat) and one Gemini Boat each for swift boarding and Search & Rescue operations.

- Both the ships have complement of 05 Officers and 34 men each.
About Indian Coast Guard

- The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) protects India’s maritime interests and enforces maritime law.
- It has jurisdiction over the territorial waters of India, including its contiguous zone and exclusive economic zone.
- The Indian Coast Guard was formally established on 18 August 1978 by the Coast Guard Act, 1978 of the Parliament of India as an independent Armed force of India.
- It is responsible for marine environment protection in maritime zones of India and is coordinating authority for response to oil spills in Indian waters.
- It operates under the Ministry of Defence.
- HQ : New Delhi

Source: The Hindu

United Nations (UN) report on ‘Levels and Trends in Child Mortality’

Syllabus subtopic: Important International institutions, agencies and fora, their structure, mandate.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the UN report and its significance; child mortality in India and govt.’s efforts to address it

News: India is among the few countries in the world where, in 2018, the mortality for girls under 5 years of age exceeded that of boys, according to the ‘Levels and Trends in Child Mortality’ report by the United Nations (UN) interagency group for child mortality.
Key findings of the report

- Half of all under5 deaths in 2018 occurred in five countries: India, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ethiopia. **India and Nigeria alone account for about a third.**

- In 2018, fewer countries showed gender disparities in child mortality, and
across the world, boys are expected to have a higher probability of
dying before reaching age 5 than girls. But this trend was not reflected in
India.

- In some countries, the risk of dying before age 5 for girls is significantly
  higher than what would be expected based on global patterns. These
countries are primarily located in Southern Asia and Western Asia.

- The major causes of neonatal mortality are preterm birth, intrapartum related
  events, and neonatal infection.

- The report adds that despite advancements made over the past two decades,
a child or a young adolescent died every five seconds in 2018.

- Current trends predict that close to 10 million 5 to 14-year-olds, and 52 million
  children under 5 years of age, will die between 2019 and 2030.

**State specific mortality burden in India**

- According to *India’s 2017 Sample Registration System*, the States with the
  highest burden of neonatal mortality are Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Uttar
  Pradesh, with 32, 33 and 30 neonatal deaths per 1,000 live births,
  respectively. India’s neonatal mortality rate is 23 per 1,000 live births.
- Further, Jharkhand, Bihar and Uttarakhand showed the largest gender gaps
  in under-5 mortality.

**What did UNICEF say about child mortality in India?**

- The burden of child mortality is determined both by the mortality rate (the
  proportion of children who die) and by the estimated population of any given
  State (total number of annual births).
- In this sense, **Uttar Pradesh is the State with the highest number** of
  estimated newborn deaths in India, both because of the high neonatal
  mortality rate and because of the large cohort of births that occur every year.
Kaziranga Wildlife Sanctuary

GS-III | 13 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Prelims and Mains focus: about the findings of the survey and its significance; about Kaziranga Wildlife Sanctuary: flora and fauna found in it

News: Kaziranga recorded 96 species of wetland birds — one of the highest for wildlife reserves in India, according to the second wetland bird count conducted on January 9-10.

Background
The first wetland bird survey in Kaziranga, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1985, was conducted in 2018. Rabindra Sarma, the park's research officer said avian surveys could have been done in the 115-year-old Kaziranga earlier, but no records were maintained.

Key findings of the census

- The survey covered four ranges of the park — Agoratoli, Bagori, Kohora and Burapahar.

- More than half the birds (9,924) and 85 of the 96 species were recorded in
Agoratoli Range. This was because Sohola, the largest of Kaziranga's 92 perennial wetlands, is in this range.

- The survey registered a total of 19,225 birds belonging to 96 species under 80 families. The first waterfowl census in 2018 had yielded 10,412 birds covering 80 species, belonging to 21 families.

- With 6,181 individuals, the barheaded goose led the species count, followed by the common teal at 1,557 and northern pintail at 1,359. All three belong to the family anatidae.

- The other species with sizeable numbers include gadwall, common coot, lesser whistling duck, Indian spotbilled duck, little cormorant, ferruginous duck, tufted duck, Eurasian wigeon, Asian openbill, northern lapwing, ruddy shelduck and spotbilled pelican.

Significance of the survey

Data on avian wealth is important because the wetlands nourish Kaziranga's ecosystem. Increase or decrease in the number of birds is indicative of the park's health.

About Kaziranga Wildlife Sanctuary

- It is located in the Golaghat, Karbi Anglong and Nagaon districts of the state of Assam, India.

- The sanctuary, which hosts two-thirds of the world's great one-horned rhinoceroses, is a World Heritage Site.

- Kaziranga is home to the highest density of tigers among protected areas in the world, and was declared a Tiger Reserve in 2006 (now the highest
The park is home to large breeding populations of elephants, wild water buffalo, and swamp deer.

Kaziranga is recognized as an Important Bird Area by BirdLife International for conservation of avifaunal species.

When compared with other protected areas in India, Kaziranga has achieved notable success in wildlife conservation. Located on the edge of the Eastern Himalaya biodiversity hotspot, the park combines high species diversity and visibility.

Kaziranga is a vast expanse of tall elephant grass, marshland, and dense tropical moist broadleaf forests, criss-crossed by four major rivers, including the Brahmaputra, and the park includes numerous small bodies of water.

Kaziranga has been the theme of several books, songs, and documentaries. The park celebrated its centennial in 1998 after its establishment in 1905 as a reserve forest.
About UNESCO World Heritage Site

- A UNESCO World Heritage Site is a place that is listed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as of special cultural or physical significance.
The list is maintained by the international World Heritage Programme administered by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, composed of 21 UNESCO member states which are elected by the General Assembly.

Each World Heritage Site remains part of the legal territory of the state wherein the site is located and UNESCO considers it in the interest of the international community to preserve each site.

India has 38 world heritage sites (Latest is Japiur city), that include 30 Cultural properties, 7 Natural properties and 1 mixed site.

Source: The Hindu

Libya ceasefire
GS-II | 13 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Prelims and Mains focus: About the crisis in Libya and its impact on the regional and global geopolitics

News: Both sides in Libya’s conflict agreed to a ceasefire from Sunday to end nine months of fighting following weeks of international diplomacy and calls for a truce by powerbrokers Russia and Turkey.

Background
The oilrich North African country has been wracked by bloody turmoil since a NATObacked uprising killed longtime dictator Moamer Kadhaf in 2011, with
Events leading to ceasefire

- Since April last year, the UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli has been under attack from forces loyal to eastern-based strongman Khalifa Haftar, which days ago captured the strategic coastal city of Sirte.

- Late on Saturday, Haftar’s forces announced a ceasefire in line with a joint call by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin.

- Early on Sunday, the head of the GNA, Fayez al-Sarraj, announced his acceptance of the ceasefire, saying it had taken effect on Sunday.

- The UN mission in Libya welcomed the announcements.

Source: The Hindu
Syllabus subtopic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the inflation targeting framework, repo rate; CPI; MPC

News: Last year, there were calls to review RBI’s inflation targeting framework. With the term of the current monetary policy committee ending in September, it’s time to review the performance of the rate-setting framework.
What are the terms of the policy framework?
In 2016, the government amended the Reserve Bank of India Act (1934) and institutionalized a framework for a monetary policy committee (MPC), which was mandated to maintain price stability while keeping the objective of growth. MPC was given a policy tool of the repo rate in order to ensure inflation was within a target level. The inflation target given to MPC was 4%, with 6% as the upper tolerance level and 2% as the lower tolerance level. That is, MPC was supposed to adjust the repo rate in order to ensure that inflation stayed within two percentage points of the target of 4%.

How does the current framework function?

MPC meets every two months and decides the policy rate based on the available data. MPC’s primary mandate is to curb inflation and it looks at consumer price index (CPI) figures as the preferred indicator of inflation. There is a neutral real repo rate, which is the policy rate at which monetary policy is neither accommodative nor contractionary. Therefore, in the event of higher inflation (or higher than potential growth), MPC would have a real policy rate higher than the neutral real rate. That is, it will increase the interest rates. Conversely, in the event of lower-than-target inflation, MPC would cut the repo rate.

Okay, so what is India’s neutral real repo rate?

There is no official paper on India’s neutral real rate. When Raghuram Rajan was RBI governor, it was believed to be 1.5-2%. Since the adoption of the monetary policy framework, in response to a question during the first MPC press briefing, one of the members indicated that the rate could be 1.25%. The neutral real rate is not a constant and changes from time to time.

Why are our real rates higher than the target?

Focusing solely on retail inflation targeting would be problematic at a time when the food inflation is high and actual GDP growth is lower than the potential GDP growth. This could very well be the case in January and next month. Figures released on Monday showed December retail inflation at 7.35%, driven primarily...
by onions and vegetables. There’s evidence to suggest that monetary policy has little or no impact on food inflation. The framework thus needs to be revised to look at our real policy rates.

**What are the changes being argued for?**

The current inflation target given for five years expires in 2021. With MPC’s term ending in September, it is time to objectively look at the performance of the framework. Many believe we have sacrificed growth due to an overtly hawkish stance and that a target for growth rate should be included, besides a mandate for financial stability. Else, revisit the 4% inflation target and mandate that MPC considers wholesale price inflation with CPI while framing monetary policy.

Source: Livemint

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**5G trials in India**

GS-III | 14 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the concerns raised by the operators and the vendors; 5G technology; its advantages and challenges for the govt. in its rollout

**News:** The build-up to introducing 5G services in India is likely to be marred by more acrimony as operators and vendors claimed that onerous conditions laid out by the government will make 5G trials a costly affair even as commercial uses for the new technology have not been established.

**What are the requirements set by the govt.?**
The key requirement for 5G trials is that it has to be stand-alone, which means all the equipment has to be dedicated for 5G only and none of the existing 4G network and IT infrastructure can be integrated and used for trials. This means equipment vendors, who are bearing the entire cost of the trials, will have to import stand-alone gear, which will come into the market only later this year. The cost of a single trial could go up to Rs.80 crore.

Background

- In June, DoT had approved a one-year 5G trial period and a one-time fee of Rs. 5,000 for entities seeking experimental spectrum to conduct trials.

- The government also announced its intention to focus on three big social sectors for deployment of 5G—education, agriculture, waste management and healthcare.

- Department of Telecommunications (DoT) initiated the process for deploying 5G in the country on 31 December by meeting major operators and vendors to discuss the broad road map for the trials, which are expected to happen in January-March.

- The government will allocate the trial spectrum to its licensees, which are telecom service providers that can then choose to partner with vendors such as Nokia, Huawei, Ericsson and Samsung. Operators have to team up with vendors and submit trial proposals by 15 January.

Challenges for operators and vendors

- The biggest worry for vendors is that operators in India are not keen to buy 5G spectrum this year.

- Plus, globally, 5G use-cases are emerging for industrial applications and not for consumer-centric solutions. Why will an Indian consumer pay more to
download a movie in three seconds with 5G when he can do it in one or two minutes with cheaper 4G service?

- **No ready use-cases are available for rural areas**, which the government is pressing for in trials.

- Earlier this month, DoT approved prices for the next spectrum auction that will happen by April. Of the 8,300 megahertz (MHz) of airwaves the government plans to offer, 6,050MHz have been allocated for 5G. The 3,300-3,600MHz band allocated for 5G has been priced at Rs.492 crore per megahertz. The **Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI)**, which represents operators Bharti Airtel, Reliance Jio and Vodafone Idea, believes that these airwaves are too expensive.

- Moreover, each operator and each vendor has to look at three scenarios for 5G trials—rural, semi-urban and urban use-cases. They want DoT to allow more flexibility on this requirement.

**India’s 5G ambition vis-a-vis other countries**

- To be sure, India’s 5G trials and commercial rollout are already far behind those of global peers, which have even deployed commercial networks.

- **South Korea** was the first to commercially start 5G services in April. **China’s** state-run telecom operators China Mobile, China Unicom and China Telecom rolled out 5G services in November to consumers in 50 Chinese cities, including Beijing and Shanghai.

- The **US’s** Verizon Communications kick-started 5G services in October 2018 in Houston, Indianapolis, Los Angeles and Sacramento, using non-standard gear.
About 5G technology

5G is the next generation of wireless technology and will boost data speeds and propel the Internet of Things, with the potential to bring radical changes in agriculture, manufacturing, healthcare and education.

Note: to read about India’s 5G rollout in detail, click on the link below:

https://www.thehindu.com/business/how-will-a-5g-network-power-the-future/article27698653.ece

Source: Livemint

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

GS-II | 14 January 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India’s interests

Prelims and Mains focus: about the SCO meeting to be hosted by India; likely implications of worsening Indo-Pak relations on the meeting; about SCO: members and significance; about RATS

News: Leaders of India and Pakistan are expected to come face-to-face at a meeting of the heads of government of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) to be hosted by India later this year.

About the meeting

- The event will bring together leaders from eight SCO member states—India, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and
Uzbekistan. India and Pakistan joined the SCO as full members in 2017.

- Russia is to host a meeting of the heads of state of SCO countries in July, but this year for the first time India is chairing one of the main SCO bodies, the council of heads of government and prime ministers of the organization’s member states.

- The member states have highly appreciated India’s willingness to host the meeting of prime ministers in autumn 2020.

- Pakistan’s Prime Minister Imran Khan should be attending the meet, according to protocol, as it is a meeting of the heads of government.

- India would need to send an invite to Khan. However, given that tensions have been running high between the two countries for almost a year, the possibility of a high-level visit from Pakistan is far from certain.

India-Pakistan deteriorating relations

- On 1 January, Prime Minister Narendra Modi telephoned leaders of Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and the Maldives to greet them on the New Year but pointedly left out Pakistan.

- Ties between the two countries took a nosedive when a terrorist belonging to the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) drove an explosive laden vehicle into a security convoy killing 40 personnel of the Central Reserve Police Force in February 2019.

- A few days later India bombed a JeM training camp in Pakistan’s Balakot region. A day later Pakistan launched an aerial raid against Indian military targets in Kashmir, which was repulsed by the Indian Air Force.
The situation worsened when India revoked a section in its Constitution that bestowed special status on Kashmir in August and integrated the region more closely with the rest of the country.

Pakistan slammed the Indian move, which took Kashmir off the dialogue table with Pakistan.

Despite the tensions, India and Pakistan did take part in an SCO military exercise hosted by Russia in September. Pakistan, however, did not send any representative to a military medicine conference of SCO member-states hosted by India in the same month.

About Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

- The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, also known as the Shanghai Pact, is a Eurasian political, economic, and military organisation which was founded in 2001 in Shanghai.

- **Founding members**: China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The cooperation was renamed to Shanghai Cooperation Organisation after Uzbekistan joined the organisation in 2001.

- **The SCO’s main goals are**: strengthening mutual trust and neighbourliness among the member states; promoting their effective cooperation in politics, trade, the economy, research, technology and culture, as well as in education, energy, transport, tourism, environmental protection, and other areas; making joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region; and moving towards the establishment of a democratic, fair and rational new international political and economic order.

- **Presently, the SCO comprises eight member states**, namely the Republic of India, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People’s Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Russian Federation,
the Republic of Tajikistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan.

- **The SCO counts four observer states**, namely the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Republic of Belarus, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Mongolia.

- **The SCO has six dialogue partners**, namely the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Armenia, the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, the Republic of Turkey, and the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.
About Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)

- The Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), headquartered in Tashkent,
Uzbekistan, is a permanent organ of the SCO. It serves to promote cooperation of member states against the three evils of terrorism, separatism and extremism. The Head of RATS is elected to a three-year term. Each member state also sends a permanent representative to RATS.

Source: Livemint

Tibet’s new law on ethnic unity

GS-II | 14 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India’s interests, Indian diaspora.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the new law passed by Tibet and its significance; the dalai lama tradition

**News:** For the first time, Tibet has passed a law making ethnic unity mandatory, reflecting the significant role it plays in the sensitive remote Himalayan region’s economic and social development.

**About the new law**

- The People’s Congress of Tibet on Saturday passed the legislation, which will take effect from May 1, guaranteeing ethnic unity in the territory.
- The new law makes it clear that Tibet has been an inalienable part of China since ancient times, and it is the common responsibility for the people of all ethnic groups to safeguard national reunification, strengthen ethnic unity and take a clear-cut stand against separatism.
- This is the first legislation on ethnic unity at the autonomous region level across China.
- The law reflects the important role of ethnic unity in the region’s economic and social development.
Tibet’s demography

- There are more than 40 ethnic minorities accounting for 95 per cent of Tibet’s over three million population.
- Official figures released by China in March last year on Tibet said the region's population has grown from 1.23 million in 1959 to 3.44 million in 2018, with Tibetans accounting for over 90 per cent.

All is not well in Tibet

- China says Tibet for centuries has been its territory well before the People's Liberation Army (PLA) took control of the region in 1950.

- Overseas Tibetan groups allege large scale migration from Chinese mainland to Tibet to exploit the abundant natural resources in the Himalayan region which is resented by the local population.

- About 150 Tibetans have committed self-immolation since 2009 calling for the return of the Dalai Lama from his exile in India and improvement of human rights conditions in the homeland of the top Tibetan Buddhist leader.

- China terms Dalai Lama as a splittist and a separatist.

- In November, China objected to the US plans to take up the issue of the successor to the 84-year-old Dalai Lama to United Nations saying that Washington is misusing UN platform to interfere in its internal affairs. Beijing asserts that his successor should be endorsed by it.

Similar law introduced in Xinjiang 4 years ago

Like Tibet, Xinjiang is a region of China that houses multiple ethnic minorities. Legislation to promote ‘ethnic unity’ was passed in Xinjiang four years ago.
Since then, China has faced severe international criticism for detaining mainly **Uighur Muslims from Xinjiang** in camps that Beijing says are meant to give employment training. The ethnic unity law has been used to crack down on Uighurs in Xinjiang.
Dalai means Ocean and Lama mean Monk. The spiritual leader of Tibetans is therefore called the Dalai Lama since they are assumed to be Oceans of Compassion. They belong to the latest school of Tibetan Buddhism, the “Gelug” or “Yellow Hat” School.

Selection of dalai lama

The process of their selection is also a very unique one. Legend goes that Dalai Lamas are “found” not selected. A few years after the first Dalai Lama passed away, a child proclaimed that he had the spirit of the Dalai Lama. After strong proofs of his enlightenment, the High Lamas took him seriously. He was announced to be the next Dalai Lama. Since then, it is believed that Dalai Lamas are tulkus, enlightened beings who can control when they will be reincarnated and as whom. This is different from popular Hindu belief where reincarnation is due their Karma.

Source: Indian Express

Surrogacy in India

GS-II | 14 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the RS committee’s visit; details of the bill and the concerns raised against the bill

News: With appeals for review of provisions in the proposed surrogacy law, members of the Rajya Sabha select committee, which is examining the Bill, will visit Anand in Gujarat, known as the surrogacy capital of India, to consult stakeholders, even as there are signals that the panel may consider prospects of allowing single parents and live-in couples to opt for surrogacy.
Background

- The Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2019 was introduced by the Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Dr. Harsh Vardhan in Lok Sabha on July 15, 2019.
- When the Bill came up in Rajya Sabha, MPs had expressed reservation on the provision that only a close relative can be a surrogate mother, as also the clause that surrogacy will be permitted for couples after at least five years of marriage. They argued that having a close relative to act as a surrogate will be difficult in a changing society. Many MPs had said the Bill has some “unjust provisions” and impracticalities, and is silent on the question of prior informed consent.

About the committee’s visit to Anand in Gujarat

The 23-member House committee will begin their four-day field visit from January 21 and meet stakeholders, including surrogate parents and doctors at IVF clinics and try to study the clinic system.
Supreme Court on religious practices
GS-II | 14 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Indian Constitution - historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the seven points referred to larger bench; concerns raised by the lawyers; sabarimala case

News: A nine-judge Bench led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde on Monday said its objective was not to review the Sabarimala women entry case but examine “larger issues” of law like the prohibition of women from entering mosques and temples to genital mutilation among Dawoodi Bohras and the banning of Parsi women who married inter-faith from entering the fire temple.

- The Bench, however, clarified that it would not go into the legality of issues such as the practice of polygamy and ‘nikah-halala’ in Islam.

Basis of judicial enquiry

Chief Justice Bobde explained that the basis of the Bench’s judicial enquiry would be seven questions referred to a larger Bench by a five-judge Bench on November 14, 2019.
Background

- On November 14, the five-judge Bench led by then Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi, instead of deciding the Sabarimala review entrusted to it, sought an "authoritative pronouncement" on the Court's power to decide the essentiality of religious practices.

- Framing seven questions, the Bench referred them to a seven-judge Bench.
These referral questions included whether “essential religious practices” be afforded constitutional protection under Article 26 (freedom to manage religious affairs).

- Chief Justice Bobde, who succeeded Justice Gogoi, formed a Bench of nine rather than seven judges to examine these referred questions which concern multiple faiths.

- On Monday, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said the referred questions were too broad and needed fine-tuning.

Directive to lawyers

The CJI asked lawyers involved in the case to hold a conference on January 17 to reframe/add issues to be examined by the nine-judge Bench. The court posted the case for hearing after three weeks.

When lawyers sought to remind the court that the case challenging the Citizenship (Amendment) Act was scheduled for January 22 and the hearing before the nine-judge Bench ought to be heard without a break, the CJI said cases were being heard “chronologically”.

The CJI explained that the nine-judge Bench was only examining propositions of law raised about religious practices believed to be essential to various religions. The Bench would not go into the individual facts of the various petitions that make the body of the case before it.

Concerns raised by the lawyers

- The Supreme Court cannot decide on the essentiality of religious practices. It was outside its jurisdiction.
- Shrirur Mutt judgment of the Supreme Court of 1954: according to the 62-year-old verdict, the essentiality of religious practices should be decided in
accordance with the religious doctrines of each faith. The Supreme Court has limited power of judicial review.

- The 1954 judgment held that any regulation could only extend to religious practices and activities which were economic, commercial or political in their character.
- Lawyers even asked whether the numerically stronger nine-judge Bench was formed to test the Shrirur Mutt verdict delivered by a seven-judge Bench, which had reduced the court’s role and left the question of essentiality of religious practices to the wisdom of religious texts.

Source: The Hindu

Retail Inflation
GS-III | 14 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the spike in retail inflation; its causes and implications

**News:** Retail inflation soared to a five and a half year high of 7.35% in December 2019, with the shortage of onions driving the surge.

**Background**

The last time retail inflation was this high was the 7.39% recorded in July 2014, just after PM Modi began his first term in office.
What led to this spike in retail inflation?

- According to information released by the National Statistical Office on Monday, retail inflation based on the Consumer Price Index was only 2.11% in December 2018 and 5.54% in November 2019.

- The hike in inflation in the ‘vegetables’ category was at 60.5% last month in comparison to December 2018. Onion prices were above the Rs. 100 per kg mark in many major cities last month, due to a 26% fall in production.

- Overall, food inflation rose to 14.12 per cent in December as against a negative rate of -2.65 per cent in the same month of the previous year. It was also significantly higher than the 10.01% recorded in November 2019. Along with vegetables, high prices of pulses, meat and fish also contributed to last month’s spike.

Inflation targeting by the RBI

- The Centre has mandated the Reserve Bank of India to keep inflation in the range of 2-6%.

- The RBI, which mainly factors in the CPI based inflation, is scheduled to announce its next bi-monthly monetary policy on February 6.

- In its December policy, the central bank, which had been reducing rates, had kept the repo rate unchanged citing inflationary concerns.

Source: The Hindu
Syllabus subtopic: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections

Prelims and Mains focus: about the report of NCSK and its findings; the menace of manual scavenging and the efforts of the govt. to curb it

News: Of the 926 deaths inside sewers in the country, from 1993 till December 31, 2019, families of 172 victims were yet to receive compensation, with Gujarat having the highest number of cases where the amount was not paid or the payment was unconfirmed (48), while Maharashtra was yet to pay or confirm payment of compensation in any of its 32 cases, according to data from the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK).
Status report of the states

- During a meeting of the Central Monitoring Committee (Chaired by Minister
of Social Justice and Empowerment) under the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, which is meant to review the implementation of the law, on January 8, States that were found lagging behind in the rehabilitation of manual scavengers were asked to comply soon.

- Tamil Nadu, which had the highest number of such deaths, had paid compensation in all but seven of the 234 cases. Gujarat was yet to pay or confirm payment in 48 of the 162 sewer deaths recorded in the State, and in 31 of those cases, the legal heir could not be traced, the data showed.

- One-time cash assistance had been disbursed in 35,397 cases, with Uttar Pradesh accounting for 19,385 such people.

- Capital subsidy and skill development training had been provided to 1,007 and 7,383 of the identified manual scavengers, respectively, the data showed.

- According to the NCSK, a total of 53,598 people, of which 29,923 were in Uttar Pradesh alone, had been identified as engaged in manual scavenging after surveys in 2013 and 2018.

- As per the provisions of the Act, District Vigilance Committees had been constituted in 21 States/Union Territories, State Monitoring Committees in 26, and State Commissions for Safai Karamcharis in eight.

Source: The Hindu
Syllabus subtopic: Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the e-commerce market in India and allegations on e-commerce retailers; about CCI and its role

News: The Competition Commission of India (CCI) ordered a probe into Amazon and Flipkart for alleged deep discounting and unfair trade practices. The matter, once a toss between pricing and convenience, now has jobs and international relations at its heart.
What are the online retailers accused of?
Amazon and Flipkart are accused of offering deep discounts on products to buyers through select preferred sellers. Not all sellers on the platforms are handed this. As such, these deep discounts deny them the opportunity of higher sales. The online retailers are also accused of tweaking their search algorithms, which results in their preferred sellers appearing on top of the websites and thus having a better chance of being chosen by buyers. It is alleged that other sellers are relegated to sell only through the brick and mortar set-up, preventing them from having the pan-India reach that online marketplaces offer.

How are e-retailers able to dominate?

- It is alleged that Amazon and Flipkart are able to cross-subsidize due to the huge amount of funding received from their investors. This allows them to price products below cost through their sellers.

- This, in turn, creates high entry barriers for a new entrant. The online retailers allegedly force sellers, which are not among the preferred ones, to sign skewed agreements that they can terminate as per their will. For products such as mobile phones, they enter into exclusive tie-ups with manufacturers, thereby creating a monopoly and in turn denying the consumer the option of buying from elsewhere.

What is the sales model that’s under scanner?

Amazon and Flipkart are platforms for sellers and manufacturers to sell their wares. Both have multiple vendors supplying any given product. Both also have private label brands sourced from preferred manufacturers and sold through preferred sellers. The law doesn’t allow them to hold their own inventory or sell directly to consumers.

What’s the fear around online retailers?

E-retailers act as intermediaries between buyer and seller, allowing them to gather critical data, including price, quantities sold, demand of each product, seller and geography. They can use the information to launch their private labels in
categories where they think it’s profitable for them or use their preferred sellers for this. It enables them to target consumers better with recommendations for products and customized offerings. Another worry is sellers find that transparency is generally missing in online product reviews.

What do e-retailers say in their defence?

CCI’s 38-page “Market Study on E-Commerce in India” says market-place platforms maintain that all sellers listed on their platforms, including those selling private labels, are independent. Thus, it is not incentive-compatible for them to prefer a few at the expense of quality of the platform, given the stiff competition that exists in what is predominantly an offline retail landscape. E-retailers also deny any role in pricing. CCI will take a call on the findings, while ensuring that competition and efficiency are not compromised.

Source: Livemint

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

Prelims and Mains focus: about the discovery and its significance; about Stardust, meteors, meteorite and meteoroids

News: A meteorite that crashed into rural south-eastern Australia in a fire-ball in 1969 contained the oldest material ever found on Earth, stardust that predated the formation of our solar system by billions of years, scientists said on Monday.
About the discovery

- The oldest of 40 tiny dust grains trapped inside the meteorite fragments retrieved around the town of Murchison in Victoria state dated from about 7 billion years ago, about 2.5 billion years before the sun, Earth and rest of our solar system formed, the researchers said.

- In fact, all of the dust specks analysed in the research came from before the solar system’s formation—thus known as “presolar grains”—with 60% of them between 4.6 and 4.9 billion years old and the oldest 10% dating to more than 5.6 billion years ago.

- The stardust represented time capsules dating to before the solar system.
Why is the discovery so significant?

- Though the universe abounds with floating stardust, no presolar grains have ever been found in Earth's rocks. That's because plate tectonics, volcanism and other planetary processes heated and transformed all the presolar dust that may have collected during Earth's formation.
- When large, orphan space rocks form — such as the asteroid that produced Murchison — they, too, can pick up ancient, interstellar dust. But unlike dynamic planets, Murchison's parent asteroid is "an almost-inert piece of rock..."
that formed from the solar nebula and hasn't changed since then," so the presolar grains haven't been cooked down into another type of mineral.

- Most presolar grains measure about 1 micron in length, or are even smaller.
- But the grains the scientists analyzed for the study were much bigger, ranging from 2 to 30 microns in length.
- Scientists call them 'boulders; they can be seen with an optical microscope.

### About Stardust (Cosmic dust)

- Cosmic dust, also called **extraterrestrial dust or space dust**, is dust which exists in outer space, or has fallen on Earth. Most cosmic dust particles are between a few molecules to 0.1 µm (1 micron) in size.

- Cosmic dust can be further distinguished by its astronomical location: intergalactic dust, interstellar dust, interplanetary dust (such as in the zodiacal cloud) and circumplanetary dust (such as in a planetary ring).

- In the Solar System, **interplanetary dust causes the zodiacal light**. Solar System dust includes comet dust, asteroidal dust, dust from the Kuiper belt, and interstellar dust passing through the Solar System.

- Thousands of tons of cosmic dust are estimated to reach the Earth's surface every year, with each grain having a mass between 10^{-16} kg (0.1 pg) and 10^{-4} kg (100 mg). The density of the dust cloud through which the Earth is traveling is approximately 10^{-6} dust grains/m³.

- Cosmic dust contains some complex organic compounds (amorphous organic solids with a mixed aromatic–aliphatic structure) that could be created naturally, and rapidly, by stars. **A smaller fraction of dust in space is "stardust" consisting of larger refractory minerals that condensed as matter left by stars.**

- Interstellar dust particles were collected by the **Stardust spacecraft** and
How are meteoroids, meteors and meteorite related?

Meteoroids and meteors are 2 parts of a whole, meteorites are what they are if they survive the landing to Earth's surface.

Explanation:

- A meteor refers to the flash of light we see in the sky and the meteoroid is the actual debris that makes the light from entering Earth at high velocities. When the meteor hits the ground, if it somehow doesn't burn up in the atmosphere, it is then referred to as a meteorite.

- Meteoroid in common language can refer to the rock in space and meteor can refer to what the rock is when it enters the atmosphere. Meteorite remains consistent.
Syllabus subtopic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the malpractices in passing on GST rate cuts to the customers and the role played by NAA in curbing it; NAA: mission and functions

News: A wave of orders is expected from the National Anti-profiteering Authority (NAA) in the next three months, with the Centre stepping up a goods and services tax (GST) compliance drive.

Background

- This comes amid concern among policy makers that businesses have pocketed part of the Rs.1 trillion worth of GST rate cuts that was to benefit end users and thus help stimulate demand in the economy.

- In the past, about 60% of the cases investigated by the Directorate General of Anti-Profiteering (DGAP) have confirmed profiteering behavior by businesses.

Complaints against firms

- About 40 orders are expected to be issued shortly on complaints against firms in the real estate, consumer goods, and cinema industries.
- The firms facing investigations include some the leading suppliers of ayurvedic products, electronics and television makers, luggage and travel accessories makers, two leading multiplex chains, and hygiene and home products firms.

Role played by NAA

- The NAA has issued orders on more than 100 cases since it came into force.
in November 2017. Its orders have led to businesses depositing about ₹600 crore in profiteered amount to a consumer welfare fund managed by the consumer affairs ministry.

- Authorities intend to take more measures to reach out to consumers and sensitise them about their rights and remedies. Towards this, the government has decided to direct erring companies to deposit the profiteered amounts in a separate fund to be used for GST-related purposes.

About National Anti-profiteering Authority (NAA)

- The National Anti-Profiteering Authority (NAA) was constituted under Section 171 of the Central Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017.

- It is to ensure the reduction in rate of tax or the benefit of input tax credit is passed on to the recipient by way of commensurate reduction in prices.

NAA has taken the following steps for customers get the full benefit of tax cuts:

- Holding regular meetings with the Zonal Screening Committees and the Chief Commissioners of Central Tax to stress upon consumer awareness programs.
- Launching a helpline to resolve the queries of citizens regarding registration of complaints against profiteering.
- Receiving complaints through email and NAA portal.
- Working with consumer welfare organizations to facilitate outreach activities.

Vision and Mission of NAA –

- The National Anti-profiteering Authority (NAA) is the institutional mechanism under GST law to check the unfair profit-making activities by the trading community.

- The Authority’s core function is to ensure that the benefits of the reduction is GST rates on goods and services made by GST Council and proportional
change in the Input tax credit passed on to the ultimate consumers and recipient respectively by way of reduction in the prices by the suppliers.

Institutional Mechanism:

This institutional framework comprises the NAA, a Standing Committee, Screening Committees in every State and the Directorate General of Safeguards in the Central Board of Indirect taxes & Customs (CBIC).

Source: Livemint

Iranâ€™s violation of nuclear deal
GS-II | 15 January,2020

Syllabus subtopic: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the move by European countries to restrict Iran and its likely implications; about JCPOA

News: Britain, France and Germany ratcheted up pressure on Iran on Tuesday to cease its violations of a landmark nuclear deal, stressing that they want to resolve differences through talks while starting the clock on a process that could result in a so-called “snapback” of United Nations sanctions.

Context:

The 2015 nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, seeks to prevent Iran from producing a nuclear weapon — something Iran insists it does not want to do — by putting curbs on its atomic programme in exchange for economic incentives.
About the move and its significance

- The three countries, which signed the international agreement in 2015 along with the U.S., Russia and China, said in a letter to the European Union’s foreign policy chief that they had no choice but to trigger the deal’s “dispute mechanism,” given Iran’s ongoing transgressions.

- The three said they rejected Tehran’s argument that Iran was justified in violating the deal because the U.S. broke the agreement by pulling out unilaterally in 2018.

- The Europeans stressed that they want to “resolve the impasse through constructive diplomatic dialogue” and made no threat of sanctions in their statement.

- They also specifically distanced themselves from sanctions imposed by the U.S., which Washington has said is part of a “maximum pressure” campaign against Tehran.

- The pressure on Iran from Europe does not mean sanctions will automatically be slapped on the Islamic Republic.

Way ahead

Under its dispute resolution mechanism, countries have 30 days to resolve their problem, though that can be extended. If it cannot be solved, the matter could be brought before the UN Security Council and could then result in the snapback of sanctions that had been lifted under the deal.

Source: The Hindu
Syllabus subtopic:

- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources, issues relating to poverty and hunger.
- Development processes and the development industry the role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders

Prelims and Mains focus: about the report; its findings and significance

News: The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2019, was released by NGO Pratham on Tuesday.

How was the survey conducted?

- ASER surveyors visited almost 37,000 children between 4 and 8 years in 26 rural districts across 24 States.

- They asked each child to do a variety of tasks, testing cognitive skills as well as simple literacy and numeracy tests.
Key findings of the report
Only 16% of children in Class 1 in 26 surveyed rural districts can read text at the prescribed level, while almost 40% cannot even recognize letters. Only 41% of these children could recognise two digit numbers.

However, ASER found that the solution is not to spend longer hours teaching children the 3Rs (reading, writing, and arithmetic).

Counterintuitively, the report argues that a focus on cognitive skills rather than subject learning in the early years can make a big difference to basic literacy and numeracy abilities.

The survey shows that among Class 1 children who could correctly do none or only one of the tasks requiring cognitive skills, about 14% could read words, while 19% could do single digit addition.

However, among children who could correctly do all three cognitive tasks, 52% could read words, and 63% could solve the math problem.

The report says that “permitting underage children into primary grades puts them at a learning disadvantage which is difficult to overcome.”

The ASER surveyors found that a primary classroom could include students from a range of age groups, skewing towards younger children in government schools. More than a quarter of Class 1 students in government schools are only 4 or 5 years old, younger than the recommended age. The ASER data shows that these children struggle more than others in all skills.

Global research shows that 90% of brain growth occurs by age 5, meaning that the quality of early childhood education has a crucial impact on the development and schooling of a child.
The ASER report shows that a large number of factors determine the quality of education received at this stage, including the child’s home background, especially the mother’s education level; the type of school, and the child’s age in Class 1.

Based on a series of tests administered to the children, the report says, “ASER data shows that children's performance on tasks requiring cognitive skills is strongly related to their ability to do early language and numeracy tasks.”

Why an 'Early Years' ASER?

The early years, defined globally as age 0-8, is known to be the most important stage of cognitive, motor, social and emotional development in the human life cycle. A large body of worldwide research demonstrates that exposure to enabling environments and access to appropriate imgs during these years is fundamental to ensuring that children have a firm foundation on which to build, both in school and in life.

In India, as in many low and middle income countries, there is little evidence on scale with respect to whether young children have access to pre-primary facilities and whether they are acquiring the foundational skills and abilities that are key to subsequent success in school and beyond. Further, parents, families, community members and others are not always clear about the different kinds of abilities that can help young children cope with the demands both of academic learning and of everyday life. Child development experts know that breadth of skills and experiences is critically important in the early years and that exposing young children to formal academic content too early is often counterproductive; but many other adults responsible for children’s welfare – parents and policy makers alike – do not. Given the rising aspirations for educational success, parents often put their children into school well before they are developmentally “ready”.

Most of the available instruments for assessing young children’s abilities are
Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) rules, 2019
GS-II | 15 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic:

- Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.
- Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Prelims and Mains focus: about the gazette notification and its significance; about Blue flag certification; CRZ rules 2019

News: The Environment Ministry has relaxed Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) rules that restrict construction near beaches to help States construct infrastructure and enable them to receive ‘Blue Flag’ certification.

Background

- Last year, the Ministry selected 13 beaches in India to vie for the certificate. This is an international recognition conferred on beaches that meet certain criteria of cleanliness and environmental propriety.

- The earmarked beaches are — Ghoghala beach (Diu), Shivrajpur beach (Gujarat), Bhogave beach (Maharashtra), Padubidri and Kasarkod beaches.
About the rules eased by the notification

The Blue Flag certification, requires beaches to create certain infrastructure — portable toilet blocks, grey water treatment plants, a solar power plant, seating facilities, CCTV surveillance and the like. However, India’s CRZ laws don’t allow the construction of such infrastructure on beaches and islands.

The above activities and facilities shall be permitted in the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ), including Islands, subject to maintaining a minimum distance of 10 meters from HTL (High Tide Line).

Significance of blue flag certification

• The ‘Blue Flag’ beach is an ‘ecotourism model’ and marks out beaches as providing tourists and beachgoers clean and hygienic bathing water, facilities/amenities, a safe and healthy environment, and sustainable development of the area.

• The Blue Flag Programme started in France in 1985 and has been implemented in Europe since 1987, and in areas outside Europe since 2001, when South Africa joined.

• The certification is accorded by the Denmark-based Foundation for Environment Education, with 33 stringent criteria under four major heads for the beaches, that is,

(i) Environmental Education and Information
Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) rules

- Last year, the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change notified the 2019 Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) norms, replacing the CRZ norms of 2011.
- The new CRZ norms were issued under Section 3 of the Environment Protection Act, 1986 with an aim to promote sustainable development based on scientific principles.

Objectives of CRZ Regulations 2019:

- To promote sustainable development based on scientific principles taking into account the natural hazards such as increasing sea levels due to global warming.
- To conserve and protect the environment of coastal stretches and marine areas, besides livelihood security to the fisher communities and other local communities in the coastal area.

Salient Features:

Two separate categories for CRZ-III (Rural) areas:

CRZ-III A: The A category of CRZ-III areas are densely populated rural areas with a population density of 2161 per square kilometre as per 2011 Census. Such areas have a No Development Zone (NDZ) of 50 meters from the High Tide Line (HTL) as against 200 meters from the High Tide Line stipulated in the CRZ Notification, 2011.
CRZ-III B – The B category of CRZ-III rural areas have population density of below 2161 per square kilometre as per 2011 Census. Such areas have a No Development Zone of 200 meters from the HTL.

Floor Space Index Norms eased: As per CRZ, 2011 Notification, the Floor Space Index (FSI) or the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) had been frozen. As per the latest notification, the government has decided to de-freeze the Floor Space Index and permit FSI for construction projects.

Tourism infrastructure permitted in coastal areas: The new norms permit temporary tourism facilities such as shacks, toilet blocks, change rooms, drinking water facilities, etc. in Beaches.

Streamlining of CRZ Clearances: The procedure for CRZ clearances has been streamlined. Now, the only such projects which are located in the CRZ-I (Ecologically Sensitive Areas) and CRZ IV (area covered between Low Tide Line and 12 Nautical Miles seaward) will be dealt with for CRZ clearance by the Ministry. The powers for clearances with respect to CRZ-II and III have been delegated at the State level.

No Development Zone of 20 meters for all Islands: For islands close to the main land coast and for all Backwater Islands in the main land, No Development Zone of 20 meters has been stipulated in wake of space limitations and unique geography of such regions.

Pollution abatement: To address pollution in Coastal areas, the treatment facilities have been made permissible in CRZ-I B area subject to necessary safeguards.

Critically Vulnerable Coastal Areas (CVCA): Sundarban region of West Bengal and other ecologically sensitive areas identified as under Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 such as Gulf of Khambat and Gulf of Kutchh in Gujarat, Achra-Ratnagiri.
in Maharashtra, Karwar and Coondapur in Karnataka, Vembanad in Kerala, Gulf of Mannar in Tamil Nadu, Bhaitarkanika in Odisha and Krishna in Andhra Pradesh are treated as Critical Vulnerable Coastal Areas. These Critical Vulnerable Coastal Areas will be managed with the involvement of coastal communities including fisher folk.

Source: The Hindu

China coronavirus
GS-II | 15 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Important International institutions, agencies and fora, their structure, mandate.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the virus outbreak and actions taken to address it; about Coronavirus and its impact on humans; about WHO: structure and functions

**News:** There may have been limited human-to-human transmission of a *new coronavirus in China* within families, and *it is possible there could be a wider outbreak*, the *World Health Organization (WHO)* said on Tuesday.

- Coronaviruses are a *large family of viruses* that can *cause infections* ranging from the *common cold to severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)*. A Chinese woman has been quarantined in Thailand with a mystery strain of coronavirus, Thai authorities said on Monday, the first time the virus has been detected outside China.

**Actions taken by WHO**

- The WHO is however preparing for the possibility that there could be a wider
Some types of the virus cause less serious diseases, while others - like the one that causes Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) - are far more severe.

The UN agency has given guidance to hospitals worldwide about infection control in case the new virus spreads. There is no specific treatment for the new virus, but anti-virals are being considered and could be "re-purposed".

About Coronavirus

Coronaviruses are species of virus belonging to the subfamily Coronavirinae in the family Coronaviridae, in the order Nidovirales. Coronaviruses are enveloped viruses with a positive-sense single-stranded RNA genome and with a nucleocapsid of helical symmetry. The genomic size of coronaviruses ranges from approximately 26 to 32 kilobases, the largest for an RNA virus.

The name "coronavirus" is derived from the Latin corona, meaning crown or halo, and refers to the characteristic appearance of virions under electron microscopy (E.M.) with a fringe of large, bulbous surface projections creating an image reminiscent of a royal crown or of the solar corona. This morphology is created by the viral spike (S) peplomers, which are proteins that populate the surface of the virus and determine host tropism.

Diseases caused by Coronavirus

Coronaviruses primarily infect the upper respiratory and gastrointestinal tract of mammals and birds. Seven different currently known strains of coronaviruses infect humans.

Coronaviruses are believed to cause a significant percentage of all common
colds in human adults and children. Coronaviruses cause colds with major symptoms, e.g. fever, throat congestion and adenoids, in humans primarily in the winter and early spring seasons.

- Coronaviruses can cause pneumonia, either direct viral pneumonia or a secondary bacterial pneumonia, and bronchitis, either direct viral bronchitis or a secondary bacterial bronchitis.

- The much publicized human coronavirus discovered in 2003, SARS-CoV which causes severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), has a unique pathogenesis because it causes both upper and lower respiratory tract infections.

- The significance and economic impact of coronaviruses as causative agents of the common cold are hard to assess because, unlike rhinoviruses (another common cold virus), human coronaviruses are difficult to grow in the laboratory.

- Coronaviruses also cause a range of diseases in farm animals and domesticated pets, some of which can be serious and are a threat to the farming industry.

Note: to read about the new coronavirus in detail, click on the link below

https://www.ft.com/content/7a80b8c6-362c-11ea-a6d3-9a26f8c3cba4

About World Health Organization

- established on 7 April 1948
- headquarters — Geneva, Switzerland
- specialized agency of the United Nations
- WHO is a member of the United Nations Development Group
- It is concerned with international public health.
Its Predecessor

- **International Sanitary Conferences** — A series of 14 conferences that lasted from 1851 to 1938. The International Sanitary Conferences worked to combat many diseases, chief among them cholera, yellow fever, and the bubonic plague.
- **Health Organization** — agency of the League of Nations

Reports published by WHO

- World Health Report, the worldwide World Health Survey
- Global Urban Air Pollution database

How it functions:

- World Health Assembly — Geneva
- legislative and supreme body of WHO
- appoints the Director-General every five years
- votes on matters of policy and finance of WHO, including the proposed budget
- reviews reports of the Executive Board

Executive body: 34 members, technically qualified in the field of health elected by the world health assembly for three-year terms

- carry out the decisions and policies of the Assembly, to advise it and to facilitate its work

Source: Indian Express
Prelims and Mains focus: About the TrueNat tool and significance for WHO approval of it, the menace of TB in India

News: The World Health Organization (WHO) has given its approval to TrueNat, an indigenous molecular diagnostic tool to help detect tuberculosis (TB).

About TrueNat

- The TB test, developed by Goa-based Molbio Diagnostics, was found to be comparable in accuracy to similar tests currently in use and has been recommended as a replacement for sputum microscopy tests.

- TrueNat is a polymerase chain reaction (PCR)-based test that by assaying the genes present in the TB bacteria, can not only detect the presence of the bacteria but can also detect drug resistance with the use of chips.

- The DNA of the TB bacteria is extracted from sputum samples collected from the patient and the test can easily and cost-effectively be done in the primary health care setup.

Why is WHO’s approval significant for India

- The approval by WHO is important for India because it has the most number of TB patients in the world.
- According to the National Strategy Plan for TB Elimination 2017-25:

  1. TB kills and estimated 4,80,000 Indians every year and over 1400 everyday.
2. India also has over a million ‘missing cases’ every year that are not notified and most remain either undiagnosed or unaccountably and inadequately diagnosed and treated in the private sector.

Source: Indian Express
Syllabus subtopic: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the move to curb imports from Malaysia and its impact on trade relations between the two countries

News: Trade tensions between India and Malaysia have aggravated with the Narendra Modi government’s latest move to restrict palm oil imports from the latter.

Context:

India has a trade deficit of $4.4 billion with Malaysia in FY19. Malaysia’s palm oil exports to India grew 73% in January-November 2019.
What’s the backdrop for the stand-off?

- India-Malaysia ties turned bitter as the latter gave shelter in 2016 to radical Islamic preacher Zakir Naik, who is wanted by Indian counterterrorism agencies.

- On 4 September, India decided to raise customs duty on import of refined palm oil from Malaysia to 50% from 45% for six months.
On 27 September, speaking at the UN, Malaysian prime minister Mahathir Mohamad alleged that India had “invaded and occupied” Kashmir and asked it to resolve the issue with Pakistan. On 20 December, he said that India’s Citizenship Amendment Act would deprive some Muslims of their citizenship.

What measures has India taken so far?

- In October, India’s top vegetable oil trade body, Solvent Extractors’ Association of India, told members to stop buying Malaysian palm oil at the behest of the government. Indian refiners resumed buying palm oil from Malaysia after a one-month suspension as it began offering a $5 a tonne discount over supplies from Indonesia.

- India’s move on 8 January putting refined palm oil on the restricted list was a tacit signal to Malaysia. It means India will have more control on the source of import of the item as the importer will need a licence for the inbound shipment. Reports say the curbs could extend to import of electronic items from Malaysia.

How do India’s import curbs impact Malaysia?

Palm oil is crucial for the Malaysian economy as it accounts for 2.8% of gross domestic product and 4.5% of total exports. State-owned and private Malaysian refineries will likely have to scramble to find new buyers for their refined product. Malaysia is the world’s second-largest producer of palm oil after Indonesia.

Where does Malaysia stand on trade ties?

- India and Malaysia signed the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) in 2011 building upon the 2009 India-ASEAN free trade pact.
Malaysia is India’s third-largest trading partner in ASEAN. India’s exports and imports with Malaysia stood at $6.4 billion and $10.8 billion, respectively in FY19.

Palm oil imports from Malaysia jumped in recent months as it has a duty advantage over Indonesia under CECA. Malaysia has thus overtaken Indonesia as India’s biggest palm oil supplier in 2019.

How has Malaysia reacted to the curbs?
Mahathir has expressed concern over India’s move to restrict import of palm oil from his country, while insisting that he would continue to speak up. Meanwhile, Malaysian Trades Union Congress, members of which include palm workers, has urged the two countries to resolve the matter through talks.

Source: Livemint

Labour reforms
GS-II | 16 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the bills and heir significance; concerns raised by various stakeholders

News: The government has hinted it will go slow on big-ticket labour reforms and will encourage a larger debate on proposed labour codes after a nationwide strike by workers drew millions last week.
Background

The Industrial Relations Code 2019 and the Code on Social Security 2019, introduced in Parliament last month, have been forwarded to the standing committee on labour by the Lok Sabha Speaker for evaluation and suggestion, the ministry of labour and employment announced on Wednesday.

Why is govt. wary of going ahead with the reforms

- **Resistance from several quarters**: Central trade unions went on a nationwide strike on 8 January and have warned of an intensified agitation at the state level and in industrial belts.

- The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, which is linked to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, stayed out of the strike but had written on 28 November to the labour ministry accusing it of taking a “casual approach” to labour reforms.

- Opposition political parties and trade unions have said that the government should not hurry in pushing its labour reform bills without a wide enough debate and discussion in the standing committee.

What next?

- With Industrial Relations Code and the Code on Social Security now going to the standing committee, three of the proposed four labour codes are up for discussion at the Bhartruhari Mahtab-led parliamentary standing committee.

- The other bill already with the committee is the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code. The government has merged 44 central laws into four labour codes.

- Apart from these three, there is a code on wages that has already got parliamentary approval.
The standing committee is expected to submit the report in three months but is not bound to do so and can thus take more time to complete its consultations and give suggestions on what changes can be made in both the laws, said the official mentioned above.

Source: Livemint

**À OALP Round-V**

GS-II | 16 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:**

- Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.
- Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the details of OALP-V; HELP and OALP: their significance

**News:** India’s Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH) on Wednesday opened the fifth round of bidding for oil and gas blocks, offering 11 areas up for grabs.

**Background**

- The OALP round-four was the first round of bidding conducted under tweaked norms, where blocks in little or unexplored Category-II and III basins are awarded to firms offering to do maximum exploration programme. Earlier, licenses were awarded to companies who offered a maximum share of oil and gas to the Centre.
The last bidding round under which seven blocks were put up on offer saw only eight bids coming in, with state-run oil explorer ONGC bagging all seven on land blocks offered under the Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP). So far, the government has awarded 94 blocks under the Hydrocarbon Exploration & Licensing Policy (HELP) regime in just two-and-a-half years.

About the move

- In continuation of its aggressive acceleration of exploration and production activities and adhering to prescribed timelines, the government has now launched the Bid Round-V for International Competitive Bidding. In this bid, 11 blocks with an area of around 19,800 sq km are on offer for bidding to the investor community.

- The 11 blocks under OALP Round-V are spread across eight Sedimentary Basins and include eight on land blocks (six in Category-I Basin and one each in Category II and III Basins), two Shallow Water blocks (one each in Category-I and II Basins) and one Ultra Deep Water block (Category I Basin).

- OALP-V comes with attractive and liberal terms like no oil cess, reduced royalty rates, marketing and pricing freedom, round the year bidding, freedom to investors for carving out blocks of their interest, a single licence to cover both conventional and unconventional hydrocarbon resources, exploration permission during the entire contract period, and an easy, transparent and swift bidding and awarding process.

About Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP)

- The OALP, a critical part of the Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy, provides uniform licences for exploration and production of all forms of hydrocarbons, enabling contractors to explore conventional as well as unconventional oil and gas resources.
**UPSC "PT" DNA (Daily News Analysis)**

- Fields are offered *under a revenue-sharing model* and throw up marketing and pricing freedom for crude oil and natural gas produced.

- Under the OALP, once an explorer selects areas after evaluating the **National Data Repository (NDR)** and submits the EoI, it is to be put up for competitive bidding and the entity offering the maximum share of oil and gas to the government is awarded the block.

- NDR has been created to provide explorers’ data on the country’s repositories, allowing them to choose fields according to their capabilities. Data received through the National Seismic Programme, an in-depth study of 26 sedimentary basins, are continuously being added to the NDR.

Source: *Indian Express*

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**RBI tightens debit, credit card usage norms**

*GS-III | 16 January, 2020*

**Syllabus subtopic:** Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the RBI’s move and its significance; frauds in transactions from credit/debit card and attempts to address them

**News:** Tightening the rules for credit and debit card issuance and use in the wake of rising frauds related to card transactions, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday asked banks to allow only domestic card transactions at **ATMs and point of sale (PoS) terminals in India** at the time of issuance or reissuance of a card.

**Why?**
Banks are now issuing international debit cards to most of their customers, thereby increasing the risk of frauds.

**Background**

- Over the years, the volume and value of transactions made through cards have risen manifold. The volume of card transactions touched 1,60,462 lakh and value at Rs 45,12,210 crore for the year ended March 2019. Of this, debit card volumes were 1,42,738 lakh and value at Rs 39,04,264 crore.

- In a bid to promote digital payments, the government had recently said no **Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) charges** will be applicable on transactions through homegrown RuPay and UPI platforms beginning January 1, 2020.

- The MDR pricing structure that **National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)** had arrived at, effective October 2019, for RuPay debit card is 0.4 per cent (0.3 per cent when the transaction is QR-code based) for transactions up to Rs 2,000 and 0.6 per cent (0.5 per cent when the transaction is QR-code based) for payments exceeding Rs 2,000, with a ceiling on MDR of Rs 150 for any transaction.

- The government had indicated that the RBI and the concerned banks will absorb these costs from the savings that will accrue to them on account of handling less cash as people move to these digital modes of payment.

**Changes in the usage norms**

- The RBI has also asked banks to offer all cardholders the **facility to switch on or off and set or modify transaction limits** within the overall card limit.

- The RBI has asked banks to **offer three facilities to customers after issuance of card**. Issuers should provide cardholders the facility for enabling ‘card not present’ (domestic and international) transactions, ‘card present’
1. ‘Card not present’ transactions involve furnishing of card number and CVV (card verification value) in transactions executed online.
2. ‘Card present’ transactions need the card for use in PoS or ATM terminals.
3. Contactless transactions are done using RFID technology or near-field communication (NFC).

- The new changes will come into effect from March 16, 2020.
- For existing cards, issuers may take a decision, based on their risk perception, whether to disable the card not present (domestic and international) transactions, card present (international) transactions and contactless transaction rights, the central bank said. Existing cards which have never been used for online (card not present) or international or contactless transactions should be mandatorily disabled for this purpose.
- There should be alerts, information and status through SMS/e-mail, as and when there is any change in status of the card. The provisions of this circular are not mandatory for prepaid gift cards and those used at mass transit systems.

Significance
The new rules will improve user convenience and increase the security of card transactions.

About Merchant Discount Rate (MDR)
- The merchant discount rate is the rate charged to a merchant for payment processing services on debit and credit card transactions.
- The merchant must set up this service and agree to the rate prior to accepting debit and credit cards as payment.
The merchant discount rate is a fee that merchants must consider when managing the overall costs of their business.

Source: Indian Express

China’s move on J&K

Syllabus subtopic: Important International institutions, agencies and fora, their structure, mandate.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the China’s move to raise Kashmir issue in UN and its implications; about UNSC; bifurcation of J&K

News: For the third time since August, Beijing raised the issue of Jammu and Kashmir at a closed-door meeting of the United Nations Security Council late Wednesday night. Vietnam, which is the UNSC President for the month of January, allowed the issue to be brought up by China.

Background

• The move by China is third such attempt since August when the special status granted to Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 of the Constitution was revoked by the government, and the state was bifurcated into two union territories.

• This is the third time, China, Pakistan’s ‘all-weather ally’, has demanded discussion on the Kashmir issue. In August, China had raised it in an informal and closed-door consultations, but the meeting did not lead to any outcomes. In December again, France, US, UK and Russia — the remaining P-5 members — had foiled an attempt by China to discuss Kashmir at a meeting
In August, China had objected to the formation of Ladakh as Union Territory, saying it undermined its territorial sovereignty. It also expressed “serious concern” about the current situation in the region.

About the meeting

The closed-door meeting of the UNSC was called to discuss issues related to Mali, an African country, and China made a request to discuss the Kashmir issue under the agenda of “Any Other Business Points”.

Was China able to move ahead with the issue?

However, members of the UNSC, including France and the US, blocked the attempt by China for a discussion on the Kashmir issue. Sources said the plan was to tell Beijing that this is not the appropriate forum.

Diplomatic sources said that France has noted the request of a UNSC member to raise the Kashmir issue once again in the powerful body and it is going to oppose it like it did on a previous occasion. French sources said that the Kashmir issue must be settled bilaterally (between India and Pakistan). The sources said this has been stated on several occasions, and it will continued to be reiterated to partners in the UN Security Council.

Source: Indian Express

Bru refugee crisis

Syllabus subtopic: Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.
Prelims and Mains focus: about the resettlement agreement to be signed and its significance; about Bru tribe

News: An agreement to end the 22-year-old Bru refugee crisis may be signed on Thursday when Union Home Minister Amit Shah meets Chief Ministers of Mizoram and Tripura and representatives of Bru tribes.

Background

- The Brus inhabit an area spread across parts of Mizoram, Tripura and the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh. In 1997, the Bru National Union passed a resolution demanding an Autonomous District Council, which was opposed by the government and the Young Mizos Association (Mizo Zirlai Pawl or MZP).

- Hardline elements within the autonomy movement then launched an armed struggle. In 1997, Bru National Liberation Front allegedly killed a Mizo forest guard. The killing was followed by ethnic riots, forcing 35,000 to 40,000 Bru villagers to flee Mizoram and seek shelter in Tripura, where they have been staying since.

- According to a relief package announced six months after Bru migrants arrived in Tripura in 1997, 600 gm of rice is provided daily to every adult living in the camps and 300 gm to minors. The package also has provisions for a cash dole of Rs 5 per adult per day and Rs 2.5 for every minor.

- In October 2019, the supply of ration was stopped on instructions of the Home Ministry in a bid to hastily complete the repatriation of refugees to Mizoram. Civil society outfits had alleged that at least six refugees died due to starvation. At least seven repatriation attempts have failed in the past 22 years.
About the agreement

• According to the new agreement, **approximately 35,000 Bru refugees will settle in Tripura** and will be **given aid to help with their rehabilitation**. Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb agreed to the settling of the Bru tribals — called Reangs in Tripura — in November last year.

• According to the 2018 agreement, the Bru tribals would have settled in Mizoram, but they will now settle in Tripura according to this new agreement.

• The stakeholders in the issue expect a package of Rs 600 crore from the Centre.

• On the cards is **individual plots of land with pattas to be given to each Bru family in addition to agricultural land**. According to the draft agreement, each plot will be of 2,500 sq ft and a stipend of Rs 5,000 per month and free ration would be provided to each family for the next two years.

• Also, Bru tribals would be **included in Tripura’s voter list**.

Source: Indian Express

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National Investigation Act, 2008

**Syllabus subtopic:** Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the concerns raised against the NIA act; About
News: A day after Kerala invoked Article 131 of the Constitution to challenge the Citizenship (Amendment) Act in the Supreme Court, the Congress government of Chhattisgarh too cited the same provision to move the top court, challenging the Constitutional validity of the National Investigation Act, 2008.

Background

- Incidentally, the Congress-led UPA was in power at the Centre when the law was enacted by Parliament.
- In January 2019, a month after the Congress came to power in the state after 15 years of BJP rule, it withdrew the general consent granted to the CBI for investigation in the state.

Why is the Chhattisgarh govt. against the NIA Act?

- The decision to file the case was taken by the government after reviewing several cases in the state. There are a list of 59 cases that the NIA could have taken up. They also had Naxal involvement and many people died in them. Yet, there was selective picking of cases.
- The state government has already had its fair share of disagreements with the NIA. The agency had been investigating the Jhiram Ghati massacre in which several senior Congress leaders were killed by Naxals in an ambush. While NIA found no foul play, the state government formed an SIT and asked the NIA to share their investigation, which they haven’t yet.

What does the Chhattisgarh govt.’s petition contend?

- The Chhattisgarh government’s petition, citing Article 131, contends that the NIA Act is ultra vires the Constitution and beyond the legislative competence of Parliament since the Act empowers the Centre to create an agency for “investigation” which, notwithstanding the NIA, is carried out by the State Police, a subject matter of the State under Entry 2, List...
It said the NIA Act, in its present form, **not only takes away the state’s power of conducting investigation through police but also confers unfettered discretionary and arbitrary powers on the Centre**. There are no rules governing the exercise of power which, it said, gives ample discretion to the defendant to exercise its power at any juncture without providing any reason or justification for the same.

It said the provisions of the Act leave no room of coordination and pre-condition of consent, in any form whatsoever, by the Central government from the State government which clearly **repudiates the idea of state sovereignty as envisaged under the Constitution of India**.

It said the scheme of NIA Act is such that once brought in motion, it completely takes away the power of a State to investigate the offences which have been categorised as scheduled offence under the NIA Act and which has been committed within the jurisdiction of the State.

The petition said that its enactment by Parliament and creation of an “investigative” agency, namely the National Investigation Agency, for investigating the scheduled offences committed in any particular State, is clearly an **act of colourable legislation**. Incidentally, the Kerala petition against the validity of the CAA also calls it a colourable legislation.

By way of the Act, Parliament has effectively created a ‘National Police’ which, in cases of investigation of scheduled offences, will have **overriding control over the State Police** and its investigation which is contrary to the scheme and intention of **Distribution of Power as provided in Schedule 7 of the Constitution of India**.

**What does Article 131 of Constitution of India say?**
Article 131 of the Constitution states “subject to the provisions of this Constitution, the Supreme Court shall, to the exclusion of any other court, have original jurisdiction in any dispute

(1) between the Government of India and one or more States; or

(2) between the Government of India and any State or States on one side and one or more other States on the other; or

(3) between two or more States, if and in so far as the dispute involves any question (whether of law or fact) on which the existence or extent of a legal right depends: Provided that the said jurisdiction shall not extend to a dispute arising out of any treaty, agreement, covenant, engagements, and or other similar instrument which, having been entered into or executed before the commencement of this Constitution, continues in operation after such commencement, or which provides that the said jurisdiction shall not extend to such a dispute”.

About National Investigation Agency (NIA)

- The National Investigation Agency (NIA) was set up in 2009 under the NIA Act, 2008.
- It was set up in the wake of the Mumbai terror attack.
- At present, NIA is functioning as the Central Counter Terrorism Law Enforcement Agency in India.

Vision

The National Investigation Agency aims to be a thoroughly professional investigative agency matching the best international standards. The NIA aims to set the standards of excellence in counter terrorism and other national security related investigations at the national level by developing into a highly trained, partnership oriented workforce. NIA aims at creating deterrence for existing and potential terrorist groups/individuals. It aims to develop as a storehouse of all terrorist related information.
Mission

- In-depth professional investigation of scheduled offences using the latest scientific methods of investigation and setting up such standards as to ensure that all cases entrusted to the NIA are detected.
- Ensuring effective and speedy trial.
- Developing into a thoroughly professional, result oriented organization, upholding the constitution of India and Laws of the Land giving prime importance to the protection of Human Rights and dignity of the individual.
- Developing a professional work force through regular training and exposure to the best practices and procedures.
- Displaying scientific temper and progressive spirit while discharging the duties assigned.
- Inducting modern methods and latest technology in every sphere of activities of the agency.
- Maintaining professional and cordial relations with the governments of States and Union Territories and other law enforcement agencies in compliance of the legal provisions of the NIA Act.
- Assist all States and other investigating agencies in investigation of terrorist cases.
- Build a data base on all terrorist related information and share the data base available with the States and other agencies.
- Study and analyse laws relating to terrorism in other countries and regularly evaluate the adequacy of existing laws in India and propose changes as and when necessary.
- To win the confidence of the citizens of India through selfless and fearless endeavours.

Source: Indian Express
Syllabus subtopic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the current account deficit and its significance; reasons for its contraction; about balance of payments; OPEC

News: Data released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) shows India’s current account deficit (CAD) reduced to 0.9% of GDP in the second quarter of 2019-20 from 2% in the first, primarily due to a lower trade deficit.

Is it a reason to cheer?

India’s CAD shrunk in the second quarter as imports contracted, while exports posted a modest growth. Given the current slowdown, lower imports point to weak demand rather than a better trade position.
What makes up current account?

Current account is essentially a record of all trade, net transfers and earning transactions of a country with the rest of the world. Therefore, current account has four essential components.

1. The first is trade, the net value of goods and services.
2. The second is net income, defined as income earned by residents from the rest of the world minus the income paid to foreigners.
3. The third is direct transfers, which record net remittances, and
4. the fourth is asset income.

Current account is said to be in surplus when the value of exports is greater
Why is it bad if the trade deficit is high?

International trade has become an important political economy issue in advanced economies such as the US and the UK. Developed economies have become concerned with the extent of their CADs and have used trade policies to reduce them. This isn’t new as mercantilism was widely practiced in the 16-18th centuries when countries focused on using state regulations to maximize exports to increase the wealth of a nation. Most countries want to export more goods than they import, implying that a country will get more income than it spends. India, maintains a high current account deficit along with a fiscal deficit.

What’s the reason for a contraction in India’s CAD?

India’s CAD contracted from $19 billion in the second quarter of 2018-19 to $6.3 billion during the corresponding period of 2019-20. The data shows that this contraction is primarily because of a lower trade deficit. Also, net services receipts have increased by 0.9%. So, while imports have shrunk, exports have posted a modest growth, leading to a contraction in CAD.

What about concerns regarding oil prices?

A major component of our import bill is crude. The value of our imports is sensitive to movements in global oil prices, which are contingent on geopolitical factors, besides economic considerations of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), an important player in the global oil market. Oil from Canada, Brazil and the US also plays an important role in determining overall supply and, thus, prices. Despite tensions in West Asia, prices have been subdued and are likely to remain comfortable due to the supply glut.

Is a contraction in CAD not a good thing?

A contraction in CAD may be good during a normal growth year, but it is a
cause of concern during a slowdown. The bulk of India’s imports is for self-consumption, so their contraction is a sign of weak demand rather than of a better trade position. Low growth has led to lower imports. Once growth picks up, imports will rise. RBI should look at the value of the rupee and intervene to avoid its appreciation due to a lower CAD and net positive capital flows.

Source: Livemint

**Mental Health Act, 2017**

**Syllabus subtopic:** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the findings of the task force; The mental health act, 2017 and its significance; Mental health scenario in India

**Context:** More than two years after the Mental Health Act, 2017, was passed, life of the mentally ill in India, especially of women, has not improved.

**Background**

The joint task force was formed in 2018 by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, and Hans Foundation, a charitable trust. It reviewed and assessed the condition of those who had recovered from their illness, but were still languishing in mental homes for more than a year.
Findings of the joint task force

- While the provisions of the Act discourage long-term institutionalization of the mentally ill, the government’s task force has found that around 36% of them were still lodged in mental hospitals, as they could not be rehabilitated, or because they were deserted by family members.

- A recent directive of the Supreme Court and guidelines issued by the health ministry mandates that the period of stay in these institutions should not exceed six months.

- On an average, the people were living in mental hospitals for six years, with the minimum duration as one year and the maximum 62 years. At least 48.4% of the participants had been living for between one and five years in
These hospitals, accounting for the majority of users.

- Shockingly, among long-stay users, 11.4% had been there for over a quarter of a century, in effect, a better part of their lives had been spent within the confines of the mental homes, while 40 had spent 50 years or more.

- They can all be discharged immediately, but where will they go? Nobody wants them. Institutions kept them on humanitarian grounds to prevent them from becoming homeless. To change this, we will have to first make the society more benevolent.

- **Gender differences** were also observed in Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand, where men on an average remained longer than women.

- In Maharashtra, significant gender differences were observed with women hospitalized for more years than men, the report added. **Pan-India, more women (54.26%) were confined in state mental hospitals than men (45.74%).**

- The task force report said that surveyed people were **diagnosed predominantly with schizophrenia (50.4%)** followed by psychosis.

**What did the task force recommend?**

- Institutions should not admit patients unless it is absolutely necessary. **Re-integration with the family has higher success** and those who do not have a family, can be placed in long-stay or halfway homes. Nobody should be hospitalised.

- The task force has recommended **constituting a national steering committee for inclusive living.** The officials have found that complex multi-factorial social disadvantage, coupled with challenges in institutional care,
accompanies their (patients) long-term stay at these facilities—a significant proportion has experienced homelessness.

- The recommendations of the task force include entailing placements with the family and in community-based housing with supportive services and simultaneous enhancement of local-level mental health services. The aim of the report was to enable exit pathways and reintegrate such people into community living options.

About the Mental Health Act, 2017
India to host SCO meet
GS-II | 17 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

Prelims and Mains focus: about the SCO meeting to be hosted by India this year; likely impact on Indo-Pak relations on the grouping and role of China

News: Prime Minister Imran Khan of Pakistan will be invited to participate in the Heads of Government Council meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) that will be hosted in India this year, the Ministry of External Affairs said on Thursday. The invite move came hours after the UN Security Council discussed the situation in Kashmir.

Background

- Prime Minister Khan who assumed office in 2018 has been a tough critic of India’s continued lockdown of Kashmir. He has also taken up the Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 and the National Register of Citizens both domestically and on global platforms.

- Though his predecessor Nawaz Sharif had visited India in May 2014 for the “mini-SAARC summit”, Mr. Khan has not been invited to India till now. On Thursday, the Pakistani leader welcomed the discussion on Kashmir held at the UN Security Council in New York, saying that the meeting “reflects a recognition of the seriousness of the prevailing situation (in Kashmir).”

- Wednesday’s meeting on Kashmir was the second such China-backed
meeting on “The India-Pakistan Question” at the UNSC since India ended the special status of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir on August 5, 2019.

India-Pakistan at SCO

Since becoming full-time member of the SCO in 2017, both India and Pakistan have participated in multiple meetings of SCO and the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) despite hostilities and tension in Kashmir. The Heads of Government Council meeting is attended by the Prime Minister-level leaders of the member states that deliberate on the regional body’s economic and other pressing issues. The meeting also firms up SCO’s annual budget.

Source: The Hindu

Tipu Sultan

GS-I | 17 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present- significant events, personalities, issues

Prelims and Mains focus: about the controversy around Tipu Sultan of Mysore; his administration and religious policies

News: Even though the Karnataka State government is yet to officially announce its decision on whether lessons pertaining to Mysuru king Tipu Sultan should be dropped or retained, it is clear that the lessons will be retained for the 2020-2021 academic year.

Background
The controversy regarding the lessons on Tipu Sultan was raised by Madikeri MLA Appachu Ranjan who had written to the department seeking removal of the lessons terming Tipu a “fanatic”. Subject experts had argued that only “facts” pertaining to him were presented in the class six, seven and 10 textbooks and that he was “not glorified”.

Concerns:

The “removal” of Tipu from textbooks will fundamentally alter the history of early modern India, and make invisible one of the key individuals in the society and politics of South India in the second half of the 18th century, when the East India Company was rapidly expanding Britain’s colonial footprint over the country.

About Tipu Sultan (1750-1799)

Tipu Sultan, the Tiger of Mysore, was the Indian ruler who resisted the East India Company’s conquest of southern India. He had inherited the throne from his father Haidar Ali, who had driven out the previous Hindu dynasty.

He tried to build up an alliance to drive the British – ‘those oppressors of the human race’ – out of India and intrigued with the French in Paris and Mauritius. Tippu was instructed in military tactics by French officers in the employ of his father, Hyder Ali. In 1767 Tippu commanded a corps of cavalry against the Marathas in the Carnatic (Karnataka) region of western India, and he fought against the Marathas on several occasions between 1775 and 1779.

He succeeded his father in December 1782 and in 1784 concluded peace with the British and assumed the title of sultan of Mysore. In 1789, however, he provoked British invasion by attacking their ally, the Raja of Travancore. By the Treaty of Seringapatam (March 1792) he had to cede half his dominions.

He remained restless and allowed his negotiations with Revolutionary France to become known to the British. On that pretext the governor-general, Lord Mornington (later the marquess of Wellesley), launched the fourth Anglo- Mysore War. Seringapatam (now Srirangapatna), Tippu’s capital, was stormed by British-
Conflicts with the British (Anglo-Mysore wars):

The Anglo–Mysore Wars were a series of four wars fought in India over the three decades of the 18th century between the British East India Company and the Kingdom of Mysore

First Anglo-Mysore War (1767-1769)

In 1767, Mysore was a powerful state under Hyder Ali. In 1769, the first Anglo-Mysore war was fought in which Haider Ali defeated the British and Treaty of Madras was signed between them. Haider Ali occupied almost the whole of Carnatic

Second Anglo-Mysore War (1780-1784)

Warren Hastings attacked French port Mahe, which was in Haider Ali’s territory. Haider Ali led a common front with Nizam and Marathas and captured Arcot (Capital of Carnatic State).

In July 1781, Haider Ali was defeated at Porto Novo by Eyre Coote and saved Madras. In December 1782, after the death of Haider Ali, the war was carried on by his son Tipu Sultan.

Tipu Sultan signed Treaty of Mangalore in March 1784 which ended the second Anglo-Mysore war.
Third Anglo-Mysore War (1789-1792)

The third war was fought between Tipu Sultan, and British East Indian Company began in 1789 and ended in Tipu's defeated in 1792. In this war, Marathas and Nizam aided the British and Cornwallis captured Bangalore. The war ended by signing of Treaty of Seringapatna, between Tipu Sultan and Lord Cornwallis. In this treaty, Tipu ceded half of his territories and two of his son's as a hostage of war.
Fourth Anglo-Mysore War (1799)

In Fourth War 1799, the British army led by Lord Wellesley attacked and defeated Tipu Sultan in a fierce war. He met a heroic death on 4th May 1799 while defending his capital Seringapatnam.

Tipu’s reform measures and administration:

Tipu was less worried about form and more about the substance of governance. He considered agriculture as the life blood of the nation and took steps for taking over derelict land and protection of the cultivator and his descendants. He had encouraged the farmers to cultivate commercial crops to overcome poverty and unemployment problems. He had several commercial depots in foreign countries such as Pegu, Muscat, Turkey and Istanbul for selling sandalwood.

He introduced sericulture in Mysore on a large scale and maintained records about the cultivation of sericulture. He was primarily responsible for the construction of well laid out roads and communication facilities. He had given loans and subsidies to the farmers and provided the benefit of land revenue exemption. Tipu also promoted animal husbandry, horticulture, sericulture, social forestry and other branches of agriculture.

Tipu wanted to develop the economy of Mysore State in a different way and make his citizens economically self-reliant and politically sovereign republics. He gave importance for the development of economic bonds between South India and the Persian Gulf. In a letter addressed to Chief of the factory at Muscat, Tipu had requested the Imam to send Dingies, a small vessel employed in the trade between Malabar Coast and Persian Gulf in return of rice produced in India.

He wrote letters to Muscat to dispatch expert shipbuilders to the Mysore territory. Maldive Islands continued to be an important naval dockyard during his time. Mangalore, Bhatkal, Coondapur and Tadadi became important naval centres of his times. Tipu also invited experts from Turkey, China, France and Iran and set up industries in Channapatna, Bidnur, Chitradurga, Bangalore and Srirangapatna. He had invited Chinese experts for improving sugar manufacturing in his territory. Pearl fisheries were encouraged by him in the Malabar coast. He sent a mission
to France to import skilled workers and arsenals in 1785.

He took measures to bring social reforms like ban on the use of liquor and all intoxicants, the ban on prostitution and the employment of female slaves in domestic service, the abolition of the Nayar practice of polyandry in Malabar and Coorg, the repeal of the custom of human sacrifice in the temple of Kali near Mysore town and restrictions on lavish extravagance for marriages, festivals and charities.

His administration saw a strong and well-organized central government, a well-knit district and provincial administration directly under the control of the centre, well-trained and disciplined civil, military and diplomatic services, uniform set of laws and the direct contact between the subjects and the state by the removal of intermediaries.

Tipu’s international diplomacy:

Tipu was greatly disappointed when he realized that local powers in India lacked national consciousness. Tipu tried his best to enlist the cooperation of both the Marathas and the Nizam, but none of them recognized the political sagacity and foresightedness of Tipu.

It was this factor which compelled him to develop friendly relations with foreign powers. He appointed trade agents and diplomatic missions to accomplish this goal of diplomacy. He tried to enlist the support of France, Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan, hoping to form a formidable front against the English by appealing to their religious sentiments.

He had appealed to the French General to send a strong army of 10000 to be under the his authority within India. He was a member of Jacobin club of France. Tipu Sultan had strongly persuaded the French to assist him in the Third Mysore War against the British but they remained neutral because Tipu had initiated a war against the English at the wrong moment.

Tipu made an attempt to cultivate diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Sultan and French King and assured them that they could share the British possessions in South India with him. Turkey did not have either the wish or the capacity to respond to Tipu’s diplomatic initiatives and France incurred severe loss in the war.
Tipu’s religious idealism:

Tippu is being considered by many historians as a great secular ruler and a splendid supporter of Hindu temples. He consulted with astrologers of Ranganatha temple, Sreerangapattana before his every administrative or war attempts. He gifted the astrologers with lots of money.

Believing, according to the predictions of astrologers, that he could become the undisputed ruler of the whole of South India, after defeating the British, he performed all the suggested rituals in the Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple. It is only for the satisfaction of the Brahmin astrologers who used to study his horoscope that Tipu Sultan had patronised two temples. The wealth of many Hindu temple was confiscated before 1790 itself mainly to make up for the revenue loss in the country.

By his six to eight years of presence in Malabar, the entire costal belt of the region converted to Islam. Some of the largest and wealthiest groups of families of Calicut were converted in mass to Islam. He renamed several places with Islamic tenor. His role in Malabar and Coorg region shows some elements of religious extremism and intolerance.

But after being defeated in the first Anglo-Mysore war he started dealing cordially with the Hindus in his kingdom so as to avoid insurrection and get support in the face of the British power. The credit of re-consecration of Sharada idol made of sandalwood, the main deity at Sharada Peeta, Sringeri of Chikmagalur goes to him and his contributions to the Peeta are well documented.

When the Peeta came under attack from Maratha army when Sachidananda Bharathi was the pontiff, Tipu Sultan was waging a battle at Kannur in Kerala. On learning about the raid from the Marathas, he sent an army to Sringeri to drive away Marathas. The army was stationed at Sringeri to offer protection from further attacks. According to documentations Tipu brought back Sachidananda Bharathi again to Sringeri and offered donations in huge quantities and got consecrated a sandalwood idol of Sharada.

Tipu Sultan was a ruler of the past and we cannot expect him to be Secular and...
tolerant in the modern sense. His history shows evidence of both statemenship and tolerance to Hindus along with persecution and forced conversions of Hindus. In his defence of Mysore against the British he showed the character of the highest order of Patriots. In his reformative and innovative measures he showed the character of a great administrative genius. There is enough evidence in history to celebrate or condemn Tipu Sultan.

But today there is an active project of communalizing history and there is focus on Politicising historical figures. In this project Tipu Sultan is a controversial figure as he can be interpreted both ways. In the interest of Indian National unity and to foster the genuine feeling of tolerance and brotherhood among communities it is better to look at the Tipu’s tolerant aspect rather than dividing the communities by bringing forth his intolerant measures. There is a need for constructive use of history

Source: The Hindu

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China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC)

GS-II | 17 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about China's outreach to Myanmar and its significance; its impact on India; about CPEC; BRI

**News:** President Xi Jinping’s visit to Myanmar starting Friday promises to turn a region that was once known as the “back door” to China into a “highway” to the Bay of Bengal by launching multiple projects under the so-called China-Myanmar Economic Corridor. The CMEC, in turn, is being presented as a critical element of Beijing’s ambitious Belt and Road Initiative.
China’s outreach to Myanmar is being viewed against the deterioration of Naypyidaw’s relations with the US and the West that have been critical of the country’s handling of the Rohingya problem. China, in contrast, has signalled some empathy and has also sought to mediate, if unsuccessfully, between Myanmar and Bangladesh.

Historical background

- It was modern India that saw Burma, as Myanmar was known until recently, as the backdoor to China. The East India Company and the British Raj that developed the trade routes to China’s eastern seaboard through the Indo-Pacific, were eager to develop connectivity into Yunnan through Burma to promote trade between India and western China.

- In the late 19th century, the Indian Railways surveyed the route for a railway line from the Arakan coast to Yunnan, but could never get going. China is now poised to realise that vision. Delhi, then, must find ways to take advantage of the new economic possibilities that CMEC opens up and cope with China’s new strategic salience in the Bay of Bengal.

About CMEC

- It aims at greater connectivity between China’s southwestern province of Yunnan and the eastern Indian Ocean.

- Like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that connects Beijing’s far western province of Xinjiang to Karachi and Gwadar on the Arabian Sea, the CMEC to the Bay of Bengal has begun to define the changing economic geography on India’s eastern flank.

- And between the two is the China-Nepal Economic Corridor (CNEC). Unveiled by Xi during his visit to Nepal last year, it links Tibet to Nepal and...
knocks at the doors of the Gangetic plain.

• Together the three corridors underline the economic rise of China and its impact on the subcontinent and its immediate periphery.
Other infrastructure projects to be discussed

- In Myanmar to **celebrate the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries**, Xi is expected to nudge his hosts to implement **stalled Chinese infrastructure projects**, consolidate Beijing’s status as the most important economic partner of Naypyidaw, and rejuvenate the historic special relationship between the two countries.

- Among the major infrastructure projects under consideration are the **development of a special economic zone** and a **deep-sea port at Kyaukpyu**, the construction of a **railway line** from the China border to Mandalay in central Myanmar.

- The railway will eventually branch out (like the economic corridor) to Kyaukpyu on the western seaboard of Myanmar and Yangon in the south where the **Irrawaddy river** flows into the Bay of Bengal. The **railway line to Kyaukpyu** will align with the twin pipeline system that has been carrying oil and natural gas to Kunming, the capital city of Yunnan, for some years.

- Xi would also like to revive the **hydel dam at Myitsone** and the **copper mining project** that had to be suspended amidst the political backlash at the ground level against Chinese projects nearly a decade ago. He has managed to fend off similar opposition in Sri Lanka and will hope to do the same in Naypyidaw.

Significance of China’s partnership for Myanmar

- For Naypyidaw, a stronger partnership with Beijing is certainly attractive amidst the current chill in the relationship with the West. Yet, as it prepares for elections later this year, Myanmar’s leadership is conscious of the likely criticism of Chinese projects within the country. In the last few years, Naypyidaw too has sought to negotiate hard on the terms of economic
China is making the case that some of its BRI projects can help alleviate the Rohingya conflict by accelerating the development of the Arakan region. It is also offering projects to promote economic development in the conflict-prone northern frontiers of Myanmar that have long challenged the writ of the central government in the south.

Although there is much wrangling between the two countries over the terms of economic engagement — many projects have stalled in recent years because of political reservations in Myanmar.

How does China-Myanmar partnership impact India?

While there will be many twists and turns in China’s economic partnership with Myanmar, Delhi should be in no doubt about its evolution — towards greater interdependence. And as China’s economic stakes in the Bay of Bengal rise, so will Beijing’s political imperative to secure them through a larger maritime presence and naval engagement.

As the tranquil backwaters of the Bay of Bengal turn into a potential contested zone, the littorals of the bay have a stake in constructing a regional order that limits conflict and promotes cooperation across the Bay of Bengal. Delhi has every incentive to take the lead.

Instead of seeing itself in irreconcilable competition with Beijing in Myanmar, Delhi should focus on making more effective contribution to Myanmar’s development and security. India needs to focus on quickly completing its own infrastructure projects in Myanmar and develop a new strategy for commercial partnership with Naypyidaw that is in tune with India’s own capabilities and strengths.

Given the constraints on its own resources, Delhi would want to strengthen engagement with Beijing and Xi’s visit may reveal the extent of its success.
its collaboration with like-minded partners like Japan which has a growing economic presence in Myanmar.

- Delhi also needs to bring fresh energy to the dormant dialogue with Beijing on the so-called BCIM corridor involving Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar. Although India has rejected China’s BRI, it has left the door open for cooperation with China on the BCIM corridor. After all, there are no sovereignty issues involved in the development of regional collaboration.

- While India must vigorously negotiate the terms of that collaboration, it needs to recognise that Beijing is merely building on the logic of geographic proximity between south western China, the eastern subcontinent and Myanmar. It was a logic that expressed itself in the form of the Southern Silk Road a few centuries ago.

Source: Indian Express

Debt Linked Savings Scheme (DLSS)

GS-III | 17 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.

Prelims and Mains focus: about DLSS and its advantages; AMFI; SEBI

News: The Mutual funds sector has asked the government to allow ‘Debt Linked Savings Scheme’ (DLSS) on the lines of Equity Linked Savings Scheme (ELSS) in order to channelize long-term savings of retail investors and deepen the corporate bond market.
Advantages of DLSS proposed by AMFI

- DLSS will help small investors participate in bond markets at low costs and at a lower risk as compared to equity markets.

- This will also bring debt oriented mutual funds on par with tax saving bank fixed deposits, where deduction is available under Section 80C of the Income Tax Act, 1961

Conditions on DLSS

- AMFI said at least 80 per cent of the funds collected under DLSS should be invested in debentures and bonds of companies as permitted under SEBI Mutual Fund Regulations.

- Pending investment of the funds in the required manner, the funds may be invested in short-term money market instruments or other liquid instruments or both, as may be permitted by SEBI.

About Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI)

- It is the apex body of mutual funds, dedicated to developing the Indian Mutual Fund Industry on professional, healthy and ethical lines and to enhance and maintain standards in all areas with a view to protecting and promoting the interests of mutual funds and their unit holders.

- AMFI, the association of SEBI registered mutual funds in India, was incorporated on August 22, 1995, as a non-profit organisation. It is dedicated to developing the Indian Mutual Fund Industry on professional, healthy and ethical lines and to enhance and maintain standards in all areas with a view to protecting and promoting the interests of mutual funds and their unit holders.

Asset Management Company (AMC): An asset management company (AMC) is
a firm that invests pooled funds from clients, putting the capital to work through different investments including stocks, bonds, real estate, master limited partnerships, and more. Those that offer public mutual funds or exchange-traded funds (ETFs) are also known as investment companies or mutual fund companies.

Note: to read about the difference between the bond market and the equity market click on the link below.


Source: Indian Express

Capital Punishment
GS-II | 17 January, 2020

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 abolishment

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.
Source: Indian Express
GSAT-30
GS-III | 18 January, 2020

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

Prelims and Mains focus: about the satellite and its applications; about geostationary orbit

News: The nation’s latest communication satellite, GSAT-30, was sent to space from the Guiana Space Centre in Kourou at 2:35 a.m. IST on Friday.

About the launch

- In a flight lasting over 38 minutes, European Ariane-5 space vehicle VA-251 released GSAT-30 in an initial elliptical geosynchronous orbit. The ISRO Master Control Facility picked up its signals immediately and found its systems healthy.

- Over the coming weeks MCF engineers will gradually adjust it into a final circular orbit 36,000 km from earth and apparently fixed at 83° East longitude over the country.

- ISRO hired a foreign launcher as GSAT-30 is much heavier than the 2,000-kg lifting capacity of its geostationary launch vehicle GSLV-MkII.

- As for the newer and more powerful GSLV-MkIII that can lift up to 4,000 kg, the space agency plans to save the two or three upcoming MkIIIs mainly for its first human space flight Gaganyaan of 2022 and two preceding crew-less trials. The first Indian crew-less test flight is planned later this year.
A European communication satellite called EUTELSAT KONNECT was the **co-passenger** of GSAT-30.
About GSAT-30 satellite

- The 3,357-kg satellite will replace INSAT-4A which was launched in 2005 and marks the first mission of the year for Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

- The high-power satellite is equipped with 12 normal C band and 12 Ku band transponders.

Applications

- GSAT-30 will provide DTH (direct to home) television services, connectivity to VSATs (that support working of banks') ATMs, stock exchange, television uplinking and teleport services, digital satellite news gathering and e-governance applications.

- The satellite will also be used for bulk data transfer for a host of emerging telecommunication applications.

- Its unique configuration provides flexible frequency segments and flexible coverage. The satellite will provide communication services to Indian mainland and islands through the Ku band and wide coverage over Gulf countries, a large number of Asian countries and Australia through the C band.

About Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)

- The Indian Space Research Organisation is the space agency of the Government of India and has its headquarters in the city of Bengaluru.

- Its vision is to "harness space technology for national development while pursuing space science research & planetary exploration".
The Indian National Committee for Space Research (INCOSPAR) was established in the tenure of Jawaharlal Nehru under the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) in 1962, with the urging of scientist Vikram Sarabhai recognizing the need in space research.

INCOSPAR grew and became ISRO in 1969, also under the DAE.

In 1972, Government of India had setup a Space Commission and the Department of Space (DOS), bringing ISRO under the DOS. The establishment of ISRO thus institutionalized space research activities in India.

It is managed by the DOS, which reports to the Prime Minister of India.

Source: The Hindu

Waste treatment
GS-III | 18 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Prelims and Mains focus: about the judgement of the NGT Bench and concerns raised on waste treatment

News: The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has warned that local bodies will be liable to pay a compensation for failure in waste treatment.
Concerns raised by NGT

- While observing that there was a huge gap in the amount of waste generated and treated, the Bench said that the current processing of waste generated and collected is also not taking place on a regular basis. For any person travelling by train, hot spots of scattered garbage and overflowing sewage are common sights.

- Satisfactory sewage management also remains a far cry. This unsatisfactory state of affairs must be remedied at the earliest and in a time-bound manner by initiative at the highest level. Accountability needs to be fixed and consequences for failure clearly provided and enforced.

About the NGT judgement

- The local bodies will be liable to pay a compensation of Rs. 10 lakh per month for a population of above 10 lakh if there was continued failure to treat generated waste.

- The Bench also directed that an ‘environment monitoring cell’ has to be set in the offices of Chief Secretaries of all States and Union Territories.

- The financial burden may be shared with the State governments in case the local bodies are unable to bear cost for remedial action.

- Apart from compensation, adverse entries must be made in annual confidential reports of CEO of the said local bodies and other senior functionaries in department of urban development, etc. who are responsible for compliance of orders of the Tribunal.

- The Chief Secretaries of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Chandigarh were also directed to be present before the Tribunal on August 24.
Illegal Extraction of Groundwater
GS-III | 18 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the NGT order regarding groundwater extraction; about the groundwater situation in India; about CGWA

**News:** The National Green Tribunal (NGT) on Friday pulled up the State governments of Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh over inaction towards large-scale illegal extraction of groundwater in “critical” and “semi-critical” areas.

**What did the NGT Bench direct them to do?**

- The NGT Bench directed both the States to **take remedial action** and ensure that **prior approval is sought from the Central Ground Water Authority (CGWA).**

- Before any such permission is granted, the CGWA may ensure actual compliance of conditions of replenishment of groundwater with regard to the water table in areas so that there is no further deterioration of **critical, semi-critical and over-exploited areas** in terms of groundwater availability.
The Tribunal also specified that approvals should be granted based on a study of the availability of groundwater and periodical report that the replenishment had resulted in improvement in ground situation.

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), along with the two State governments, were also directed to ensure recovery of compensation from violators by taking appropriate coercive measures.

India's groundwater situation
UPSC "PT" DNA (Daily News Analysis)
Central Ground Water Authority has been constituted under Section 3 (3) of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 to regulate and control development and management of ground water resources in the country.

Powers & Functions:

The Authority has been conferred with the following powers:

1. Exercise of powers under section 5 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 for issuing directions and taking such measures in respect of all the matters referred to in sub-section(2) of section 3 of the said Act.

2. To resort to penal provisions contained in sections 15 to 21 of the said Act.

3. To regulate and control, management and development of ground water in the country and to issue necessary regulatory directions for the purpose.


Regulatory measures:

- The Central Ground Water Authority is regulating withdrawal of ground water by industries/ projects in 802 Over-exploited and 169 Critical Assessment Units. List of these critical areas has been circulated to the State Pollution Control Boards and Ministry of Environment & Forests which refer the new industries/ projects to CGWA for obtaining permission.

- CGWA has notified 162 critical/ overexploited areas in parts of NCT Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, MP, Gujarat, West Bengal,
Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, UT of Puducherry and UT of Diu for control and regulation of development of ground water resources. For enforcement of the regulatory measures in these areas, concerned Deputy Commissioners/ District Magistrates have been directed under Section 5 of Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 to regulate ground water development in these notified areas.

- Construction of new ground water structures is prohibited in the notified areas. Permission of drilling tubewells is being granted only to the Govt. agencies responsible for drinking water supply.

Source: The Hindu

Surge in Solar imports
GS-III | 18 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic:
- Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.
- Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the rise in imports of solar equipments and the reasons for govt. failure to curb it; about solar power scenario in India; about PV cell

News: Five years of a concerted solar power push, a key policy thrust area for the NDA government, has come at a cost — the value of solar photovoltaic (PV) cells and modules imported since FY’14 adds up to $12.93 billion, or Rs 90,000 crore.
Import cost too high?

- An estimated **85 per cent** of this equipment has been imported from three countries — primarily China, alongside Vietnam and Malaysia — with a surge coinciding with the rollout of the Centre’s ‘Make-in-India’ programme.

- The amount spent on imports of PV cells and modules in the last five years works out to nearly three times the cumulative Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) of $4.83 billion that flowed into the entire renewable energy sector. It is also **well over six times** the budgetary allocation made by the Centre to the renewable energy sector in the five years since FY’14.

- The high import levels came **despite safeguard duties being slapped by the government** in the last 24 months, alongside multiple red flags being raised on the quality of solar equipment and material reaching the country.
Reasons for lack of domestic production of PV panels & modules

- India has an installed manufacturing capacity of around 3 GW (giga watts, or
3000 mega watts) for fabricating solar PV cells and around 10 GW for modules. But it does not have any commercial production for upstream stages of solar PV manufacturing, such as wafers, ingots and polysilicon. The official reason is the energy and capital intensive nature of the process.

- The lack of an integrated set-up and the economies of scale — despite the government having allowed 100 per cent FDI in the renewable energy sector through the automatic route — translates into higher cost of domestic production.

- This is despite the government extending a raft of sops for the production of solar PV cells and modules. This includes support through the Modified Special Incentive Package Scheme (M-SIPS) of Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology that offers a 20-25 per cent subsidy for investments in capital expenditure for setting up a manufacturing facility.

- Riding on equipment imports, the solar generation sector cornered the bulk of FDI inflows in the power sector in the last five years, also accounting for the bulk of capacity addition during this period. At the same time, thermal capacity addition recorded a progressive downward trend.

- The problem pertaining to the quality of material used in solar projects is another fallout of the excessive import dependency by project developers.

- There is a trend wherein developers taking up solar projects import use sub-standard equipment to set it up, with the result that capacity starts to report a decline in output after about a year.

- Most of these developers then end up selling the project to a buyer, generally after around a year. It generally takes about three years to ascertain the actual solar efficiencies of a project.
Measures taken by the govt.

- Following a number of such cases coming to light, the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy changed rules to ensure that developers will not be allowed to dispose of a project before three years, as against a one-year stipulation earlier.

- This condition has now been put to ensure quality standard, alongside the stipulation of a minimum efficiency of 21 per cent.

- There have been some trade interventions to stymie equipment imports, but they have largely been ineffectual and had resulted in protests from developers.

- Based on the findings of Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR), following investigations concerning safeguard duty on imports of solar cells and modules, the government had slapped duties on imports of solar cells (on assembled modules or panels) of between 15 per cent and 25 per cent since July 2018.

- Industry players, however, maintain that the duties have failed to stem the tide, with the Indian Solar Manufacturers Association contending that Chinese manufacturers have, in turn, reduced their prices.

India’s solar power ambition

The government has a target of 175 GW of installed clean energy capacity by March 2022, of which 100 GW is expected to be solar. Over the last five years, solar power has seen its installed capacity grow around 12 times to over 31 GW, according to Central Electricity Authority data.
About Photovoltaic (PV) cell
A photovoltaic (PV) cell, commonly called a solar cell, is a non-mechanical device that converts sunlight directly into electricity. Some PV cells can convert artificial light into electricity.

Solar photovoltaic cells are grouped in panels (modules), and panels can be grouped into arrays of different sizes to produce small to large amounts of electricity, such as for powering water pumps for livestock water, for providing electricity for homes, or for utility-scale electricity generation.

**Applications of photovoltaic systems**

The smallest photovoltaic systems power calculators and wristwatches. Larger systems can provide electricity to pump water, to power communications equipment, to supply electricity for a single home or business, or to form large arrays that supply electricity to thousands of electricity consumers.

**Some advantages of PV systems are:**

- PV systems can supply electricity in locations where electricity distribution systems (power lines) do not exist, and they can also supply electricity to an electric power grid.
- PV arrays can be installed quickly and can be any size.
- The environmental effects of PV systems located on buildings is minimal.
**World Economic Situation and Prospects 2020 report**

**GS-II | 18 January, 2020**

**Syllabus subtopic:** Important International institutions, agencies and fora, their structure, mandate.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the key highlights of the report and its significance

**News:** The UN projects India's economy to grow by 5.7 per cent in the current fiscal year and expects it to rise to 6.6 per cent in the next.

**Background**

UN's Chief Economist Elliott Harris presented a dire picture of the global economy last year when the world's gross product growth rate dropped to 2.3 per cent, the lowest in a decade.

He said that rising tariffs and rapid shift in trade policies were responsible for the lower growth rate with the United States-China trade disputes playing a significant part.

**Key highlights of the report**

- The projection in the UN's World Economic Situation and Prospects report released on Thursday are **higher than the 5 per cent made by the World Bank earlier this month.**
The UN growth estimate for the current fiscal is drastically lower than the forecast of 7.6 per cent made in last year's report in January and 7 per cent in the May update.

According to the report, only China has a higher growth rate than India among the world’s large economies with a 6 per cent forecast for the current calendar year.

In South Asia, Bangladesh’s forecast grow by 8.1 per cent this fiscal year and 7.8 in the next, while Pakistan's growth rate estimated at 3.3 per cent for 2019-20 is projected to slip to 2.1 per cent next year.

Reasons for slowdown highlighted in the report

• Huge decline in investment and in private consumption were the major reasons for the economic slowdown in India.

• External factors have also contributed to the lower growth.

• Globally we have seen a large impact of trade tensions, particularly between the US and China, but also other major economies, that have affected growth rates across the globe and also, of course, India which is a very open economy, that has a lot to gain from international trade.

• The labour markets are not performing optimally with high levels of informality and gender barriers that effectively limit the participation of women. In addition, a high number of youth are neither working nor undergoing training.

Green signals in the report

• Although there has been a steep decline in growth, India was still one of the high performers globally.
Tt was expected to improve its growth rate in the coming year because of the steps being taken.

In India, the government has responded to those issues by announcing some stimulus steps. However, fiscal stimulus in itself will not be enough.

It mentioned two areas where India could do better: Labour and green energy.

What next?

Another barometer of economic growth in India and the world will be coming out on Monday when the International Monetary Fund releases its World Economic Outlook report.

Source: Indian Express

India-EU summit 2020
GS-II | 18 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India’s interests

Prelims and Mains focus: about the India-EU summit and its significance; about Raisina Dialogue and its importance

News: PM Modi is likely to visit Brussels in March for the next India-European Union summit. While the dates have not been officially announced, the proposed date is likely to be March 13.
Background

- The March summit will take place against the backdrop of the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the government’s move to revoke the special status of Jammu and Kashmir. In October, a group of Members of European Parliament (MEPs) — many of them from far-right parties in Europe — were taken to Kashmir.

- The EU had said that it was not an official delegation, and these MEPs were visiting in their private capacity.

- Earlier this month, when a group of 15 ambassadors went to Kashmir at the government’s invitation. The European Union envoys could not join them, as envoys from 27 EU countries wanted to go together. The envoys who were invited could not make it since it was too short a notice for them to get approvals from their Foreign ministries.

India-EU Summit 2017

- The last India-EU summit took place in October 2017 in Delhi and both sides have had ambitious plans. But the Indian assessment that the relationship has not achieved its potential was articulated by External Affairs minister S Jaishankar during his remarks at the Raisina Dialogue earlier this week.

- During the 2017 India-EU summit, PM Modi had led the Indian delegation and European Council President Donald Tusk and European Commission President Jean Claude Juncker led the EU side.

- The leaders had held wide-ranging discussions on foreign and security policy, migration, trade, climate, research and innovation. A Joint Statement was adopted by the leaders which reflected common understanding on these areas and reaffirmed commitment to strengthen the India-EU Strategic Partnership.
The two sides are likely to prepare for the summit and pick up the threads from where they left.

About the Raisina Dialogue:

- This is an annual geo-political event, organised by the Ministry of External Affairs and Observer Research Foundation (ORF).

- It is designed to explore prospects and opportunities for Asian integration as well as Asia’s integration with the larger world.

- It is predicated on India’s vital role in the Indian Ocean Region and how India along with its partners can build a stable regional and world order.

Participants:

The conference is a multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral meeting involving policy and decision-makers, including but not limited to Foreign, Defence and Finance Ministers of different countries, high-level government officials and policy practitioners, leading personalities from business and industry, and members of the strategic community, media and academia.

Significance of the event:

The Raisina Dialogue was born in 2016, in the belief that the Asian century that the world was talking about was not about any exclusive geographical region. It was rather about the engagement of global actors with Asia and of Asia with the world. So this dialogue took birth as a platform, where the old and the new could work together, to discover their connections, their inter-dependence.

About European Union (EU)
The European Union (EU) is a political and economic union of 28 member states that are located primarily in Europe.

The EU and European citizenship were established when the Maastricht Treaty came into force in 1993.

The EU traces its origins to the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and the European Economic Community (EEC), established, respectively, by the 1951 Treaty of Paris and 1957 Treaty of Rome.

The EU has developed an internal single market through a standardised system of laws that apply in all member states in those matters, and only those matters, where members have agreed to act as one. EU policies aim to ensure the free movement of people, goods, services and capital within the internal market, enact legislation in justice and home affairs and maintain common policies on trade, agriculture, fisheries and regional development.

For travel within the Schengen Area, passport controls have been abolished.

A monetary union was established in 1999 and came into full force in 2002 and is composed of 19 EU member states which use the euro currency.
Source: Indian Express
Sexual Harassment at Workplace

Syllabus subtopic:

- Social empowerment.
- Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the GoM for strengthening legal framework to prevent sexual harassment at workplace; about the 2013 Act and its shortcomings; about NCRB

News: The Group of Ministers (GoM) headed by the Home Minister, which was constituted to strengthen the legal framework to prevent sexual harassment at the workplace, has finalised its recommendations.

Members of the GoM

The members of the GoM (including Home Minister) are Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Human Resource and Development Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal and Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani.

Background

The GoM was constituted first in October 2018 in the aftermath of the #MeToo movement after many women shared their ordeal on social media. It was reconstituted in July 2019 under the Home Minister.

Mandate of GoM

- The recommendations of GoM, which include addition of new provisions to the Indian Penal Code, will be put up for comments from the public.
The GoM also examined the report of the Justice J.S. Verma Committee that was constituted in the wake of the Nirbhaya gang-rape and murder in 2012. The Verma committee had recommended an employment tribunal, instead of an ICC, as dealing with such complaints in-house could discourage women from coming out.

Changes likely to be made in Indian Penal Code (IPC)

- Changes to the existing laws on sexual harassment at the workplace would be incorporated when the overhaul of the IPC was complete. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is working on another project to reboot the IPC, introduced by the British in 1860.

- Several retired judges, legal luminaries and State governments are being consulted by the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D) to amend various sections of the IPC and the Code of Criminal Procedure (Cr. PC).

- When changes are made to the IPC, the sections on crime against women will also be amended. The laws need to change with time, and sexual harassment of women at the workplace will be addressed through the IPC amendments also.

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013

- The Women and Child Development Ministry had steered the Sexual Harassment of Women and Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act in 2013, which was applicable to government offices, the private sector, NGOs and the unorganised sector.

- The proposed amendments (by GoM) would be largely based on the Vishaka Guidelines (Vishaka and others v State of Rajasthan case in 1997) laid down by the Supreme Court in 1997, on which the 2013 Act was based.
Shortcomings in the 2013 Act

- The 2013 Act had shortcomings like giving the powers of a civil court to the internal complaints committee (ICC) without specifying if the members need to have a legal background.
- It only imposed a fine of Rs.50,000 on employers for non-compliance. The Act said the employer shall provide assistance to the woman if she chooses to file a complaint under the IPC “against the perpetrator after the conclusion of the enquiry”.

The MHA in December 2018 had written to all States to ensure that the ICC under the 2013 Act was constituted and notified to the police departments.
NCRB report on sexual harassment incidents at work place

As per National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) the number of sexual harassment incidents at “work or office premises” registered under Section 509 IPC (words, gesture or act to insult the modesty of a woman) were 479 and 401 in the years 2017 and 2018 respectively. Among the cities, the highest number of such cases were registered in Delhi (28), Bengaluru (20), Pune (12) and Mumbai (12) in 2018.

The total number of sexual harassment incidents in 2018 including that in public places, shelter homes and others was 20,962.

Source: The Hindu

Libya summit

Syllabus subtopic: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India’s interests, Indian diaspora.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the Libya summit and its goal; about the Libya crisis and its consequences on regional stability

News: World leaders made a fresh push for peace in Libya at a summit in Berlin on Sunday, in a desperate bid to stop the conflict-wracked nation from turning into a “second Syria”.

About the summit and its goal

• The Presidents of Russia, Turkey and France joined other global chiefs at the talks hosted by Chancellor Angela Merkel and held under the auspices of the United Nations.
The summit’s main goal is to get foreign powers wielding influence in the region to stop interfering in the war — be it through weapons, troops or financing.

About the warring factions in Libya

- Haftar in Leaders of both warring factions — strongman Khalifa Haftar and the head of Tripoli’s UN-recognised government Fayez al-Sarraj — were also in Berlin for the first such gathering since 2018.

- But pro-Haftar forces upped the ante ahead of the talks by blocking oil exports at Libya’s key ports, crippling the country’s main income source in protest at Turkey’s decision to send troops to shore up Mr. Sarraj’s Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA).

- Ahead of the talks, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan lashed out at Mr. Haftar, saying he needed to drop his “hostile attitude” if Libya is to have any chance at winning peace.

- The flaring oil crisis underlined the devastating impact of foreign influence in the conflict, in which Mr. Sarraj’s GNA is backed by Turkey and Qatar while Mr. Haftar has the support of Russia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates.

Has Libya become the second Syria?

- Libya has been torn by fighting between rival armed factions since a 2011 NATO-backed uprising killed dictator Moamer Kadhafi.

- Most recently, Mr. Sarraj’s troops in Tripoli have been under attack since April from Haftar’s forces.
Clashes killed more than 280 civilians and 2,000 fighters and displaced tens of thousands, until a fragile ceasefire backed by both Ankara and Moscow was put in place on January 12.

At follow-up talks in Moscow, Sarraj agreed to a permanent truce but Haftar walked away without signing the deal.

Although Mr. Sarraj’s government is recognised by the UN, powerful players have broken away to stand behind Haftar -- turning a domestic conflict into what some have described as a proxy war in which international powers jostle to secure their own interests.

Alarm grew after Erdogan ordered troops to Libya early January to bolster Mr. Sarraj, while Russia has been accused of sending in mercenaries to help Haftar as Moscow seeks to extend its influence in the region.

Why is Turkey so concerned?

- Mr. Erdogan has repeatedly urged Europe to stand united behind Sarraj’s government, warning that Tripoli’s fall could allow jihadist groups like the Islamic State or Al-Qaeda to regroup.

- He has also cautioned that further unrest could prompt a new wave of migrants to head for Europe.

- For Turkey, a fall of Sarraj’s GNA could jeopardise a maritime boundary agreement the parties signed. It gives Ankara extensive rights over the eastern Mediterranean where the recent discovery of undersea gas reserves has triggered a scramble by littoral states.
Submarine-launched Ballistic Missile K-4
GS-III | 20 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the K-4 missiles and their significance, about INS Arihant

**News:** India on Sunday successfully test-fired the 3,500-km range submarine-launched ballistic missile, K-4. The test was carried out by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) from a submerged pontoon off the Visakhapatnam coast around noon.

**About the test**

- The test was conducted from a submerged pontoon and has met the desired parameters. A pontoon simulates the situation of a launch from a submarine.

- The missile has been tested several times earlier as part of developmental trials to validate different parameters. The missile ejecting from a submerged platform to the surface (sea) is the toughest part.

**Why is it an achievement for India?**

- There are very few countries which have managed to achieve this technological breakthrough.

lower the CEP, the more accurate the missile is.

Background

- The Advanced Technology Project (ATV) began in the 1980s and the first of them, Arihant, was launched in 2009 by then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Since then it underwent extensive sea trials and the reactor on board went critical in 2013.

- In 1998, India conducted nuclear tests under Phokran-II and in 2003, declared its nuclear doctrine based on credible minimum deterrence and an No First Use policy while reserving the right of massive retaliation if struck with nuclear weapons first.

Significance of K-4 missiles

- Once inducted, these missiles will be the mainstay of the Arihant class of indigenous ballistic missile nuclear submarines (SSBN) and will give India the stand-off capability to launch nuclear weapons submerged in Indian waters. INS Arihant, the first and only operational SSBN, is armed with K-15 Sagarika missiles with a range of 750 km.

- This means the submarine has to venture far way from the Indian waters and move closer to the adversary’s coast to launch the missile. The K-4 will do away with that need.

- Given India’s position of ‘No-First-Use’ (NFU) in launching nuclear weapons, the SSBN is the most dependable platform for a second-strike. Because they are powered by nuclear reactors, these submarines can stay underwater indefinitely without the adversary detecting it. The other two platforms — land based and air launched are far easier to detect.
About INS Arihant

- In November 2019, India formally declared its nuclear triad stated in its nuclear doctrine operational after INS Arihant completed its first deterrence patrol which means Arihant has begun prowling the deep seas carrying ballistic missiles equipped with nuclear warheads. It was quietly commissioned into service in August 2016 and its induction was not officially acknowledged.
- It has a displacement of 6,000 tonnes and is powered by an 83 MW pressurised light-water reactor with enriched uranium.
Drone census
GS-II | 20 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Government policies and interventions for development in
Prelims and Mains focus: about the Drone census and its significance; India’s drone policy; Digital Sky Platform

News: India’s first drone census has seen over 2,500 Ownership Acknowledgment Numbers (OANs) being issued by the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) in the last five days.

Aim of the census
The exercise will give the government a picture of who owns what kind of drone in which part of the country and will help in making policy decisions that should ideally become the base for understanding the scale of operations.

Rules for disclosure
- The Ministry issued a notice providing a one-time opportunity for voluntary disclosure of all drones and operators starting from January 14.

- While the DGCA issued the Civil Aviation Requirements (CAR), Section 3 - Air Transport Series X, Part I, Issue I, dated August 27, 2018 which regulates use of drones and provides the process for obtaining Unique Identification Number, Unmanned Aircraft Operator Permit (UAOP) and other operational requirements, there are drones that do not comply with the CAR.

- Along with registrations, officials said a larger number of queries and suggestions had landed at the drone cell. “While no proof of purchase is being sought, all registrations after February 1 will have to be accompanied by an invoice.”
Deadline issued

- As the census led to confusion and myths making the rounds, the Drone Federation of India — a non-government, not-for-profit, industry-led body working in the unmanned aviation space — issued a fresh set of FAQs on Sunday.

- There was a myth that enlisting of a drone would lead to its confiscation. In reality, if a drone is not enlisted by 5 p.m. on January 31, then it will most definitely be confiscated. Plus there would be other consequences as per law.

- After January 31, only authorised retailers will be allowed to sell them after uploading buyers’ Know your Customer (KYC) and sale invoice, similar to sale of mobile phones and cars.

Source: The Hindu

Irrawaddy dolphin

GS-III | 20 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the census and its findings; about Irrawaddy dolphins and why they are important; about Chilika lake

**News:** Odisha Forest Department officials, wildlife experts and researchers on Sunday sighted 146 endangered Irrawaddy dolphins in Chilika Lake, which boasts of the highest single lagoon population of the aquatic mammal in the world.
About the dolphin census and its findings

- The dolphin census was simultaneously taken up in Chilika and off Odisha coast. The Chilika Development Authority (CDA) is elated that the direct sighting of 146 dolphins meant that its population in the lake would stabilise well above 150. According to last year’s census, the Irrawaddy dolphin population in Chilika was 151.

- The CDA does counting of dolphins round the year using hydrophones. According to hydrophone monitoring carried out round the year in Chilika, the highest number of Irrawaddy dolphins (20-25) was moving around Rajhans, followed by the Magarmukh and Malatikuda areas, where dolphins numbering between 17-20 were expected.

- The dolphins were colonising new areas, which had been freed from encroachments by prawn farming gherries.

- The officials expressed hopes that that the population is likely to increase in the next couple of years as there are enough signs of dolphins migrating from the Satpada (town in Puri district, Odisha) side to other areas.
The SOFAR channel (short for Sound Fixing and Ranging channel), or deep sound channel (DSC), is a horizontal layer of water in the ocean at which depth the speed of sound is at its minimum.

The SOFAR channel acts as a waveguide for sound, and low frequency sound
waves within the channel may travel thousands of miles before dissipating.

This phenomenon is an important factor in submarine warfare. The deep sound channel was discovered and described independently by Maurice Ewing, Stanley Wong and Leonid Brekhovskikh in the 1940s.

About Irrawaddy dolphins

- About Irrawaddy Dolphin is not a true river dolphin, but an oceanic dolphin that lives in brackish water near coasts, river mouths and in estuaries in South and Southeast Asia.

- It is slaty blue to slaty gray throughout, with the underparts slightly paler. It is identified by a bulging forehead, a short beak.

- It has established subpopulations in freshwater rivers, including the Ganges and the Mekong, as well as the Irrawaddy River from which it takes its name.

- Its habitat range extends from the Bay of Bengal to New Guinea and the Philippines. They do not appear to venture off shore.

- **Protection Status:** The status has been raised from “Vulnerable” to “Endangered” according to the latest Red List of threatened species produced by the International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

- **Threats:** fishing nets, developmental projects like construction of dams, tourism and diseases.

- The total population of these aquatic mammals in the world is estimated to be less than 7,500. Of these, more than 6,000 Irrawaddy dolphins have been reported from Bangladesh, while the dolphin distribution in Chilika is considered to be the highest single lagoon population.
Why are they important?

- If you see a lot of dolphins in an area, then it generally means that the local ecosystem is healthy enough to support them. They are **apex predators that make sure that the populations of their prey remain healthy** and **do not grow too big**, which can disrupt the food chain. They help maintain their ecosystem by having a diet of fish, mollusks, and aquatic crustaceans such as crab and shrimp.

- Irrawaddy dolphins **provide income for coastal communities** through ecotourism. They are well **recognized for their “smiling” faces** and are known for their **ability to spit water** which is thought to be used as a way to herd fish.

About Chilika Lake

- Chilika Lake is a **brackish water lagoon**, spread over the Puri, Khurda and Ganjam districts of Odisha state on the east coast of India, at the **mouth of the Daya River**, flowing into the Bay of Bengal, covering an area of over 1,100 km.

- It is the **largest coastal lagoon in India** and the **second largest brackish water lagoon in the world** after The New Caledonian barrier reef. It has been listed as a tentative UNESCO World Heritage site.

- It is the **largest wintering ground for migratory birds on the Indian sub-continent**. The lake is home to a number of threatened species of plants and animals. The lagoon hosts over 160 species of birds in the peak migratory season. Birds from as far as the Caspian Sea, Lake Baikal, Aral Sea and other remote parts of Russia, Kirghiz steppes of Kazakhstan, Central and southeast Asia, Ladakh and Himalayas come here. These birds travel great distances; migratory birds probably follow much longer routes than the straight lines, possibly up to 12,000 km, to reach Chilika Lake.
The lake is an ecosystem with large fishery resources. It sustains more than 150,000 fisher–folk living in 132 villages on the shore and islands.

In 1981, Chilika Lake was designated the first Indian wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.

According to a survey, 45 percent of the birds are terrestrial in nature, 32 percent are waterfowl, and 23 percent are waders. The lagoon is also home to 14 types of raptors. Around 152 rare and endangered Irrawaddy dolphins have also been reported. Plus, the lagoon supports about 37 species of reptiles and amphibians.

The highly productive Chilika Lagoon ecosystem with its rich fishery resources sustains the livelihood for many fishermen who live in and near the lagoon. The water spread area of the lagoon ranges between 1165 and 906 km² during the monsoon and summer respectively. A 32 km long, narrow, outer channel connects the lagoon to the Bay of Bengal, near the village Motto. More recently a new mouth has been opened by CDA which has brought a new lease of life to the lagoon.

Microalgae, marine seaweeds, sea grasses, fish and crab also flourish in the brackish water of the Chilika Lagoon. Especially the recovery of seagrass beds in recent years is a welcoming trend which may eventually result in re-colonization of endangered dugongs.
Supreme Court on PF benefits
GS-II | 20 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic:
- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources, issues relating to poverty and hunger.
- Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the SC judgement and its significance; about EPF Act, EPFO

News: The benefits of the provident fund **should be extended to contractual employees**, the Supreme Court has held in a recent judgment.

What was the case about?
- The judgment came on the basis of a petition filed by M/s Pawan Hans Limited, a government company which provides helicopter support services to the oil sector for its offshore exploration operations, services in remote and hilly areas, and charter services for the promotion of tourism.

- The company had filed the petition against its employees’ union, the Aviation Karmachari Sanghatana, which sought uniformity in service conditions among employees.

- Of a total workforce of 840 employees, the company had engaged 570
employees on regular basis, while 270 employees were engaged on “contractual” basis.

- The company implemented the PF Trust Regulations only with respect to the regular employees, even though the term “employee” had been defined to include “any person” employed “directly or indirectly” under the PF Trust Regulations or the EPF Act.

- The contractual employees have been seeking parity with the regular employees, who are covered under the Pawan Hans Employees Provident Fund Trust Regulations.

**What did the SC judges say?**

A Bench of Justices U.U. Lalit and Indu Malhotra held that employees who draw wages or salaries directly or indirectly from a company are entitled to provident fund benefits under the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) Act.

**What is EPF scheme?**

- EPF is the main scheme under the Employees’ Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952. The scheme is managed under the aegis of Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO).

- It covers every establishment in which 20 or more persons are employed and certain organisations are covered, subject to certain conditions and exemptions even if they employ less than 20 persons each.

- Under EPF scheme, an employee has to pay a certain contribution towards the scheme and an equal contribution is paid by the employer. The employee gets a lump sum amount including self and
As per the rules, in EPF, employee whose ‘pay’ is more than Rs. 15,000 per month at the time of joining, is not eligible and is called non-eligible employee. Employees drawing less than Rs 15000 per month have to mandatorily become members of the EPF. However, an employee who is drawing ‘pay’ above prescribed limit (at present Rs 15,000) can become a member with permission of Assistant PF Commissioner, if he and his employer agree.

Employees Provident Funds Organisation (EPFO):

- EPFO is one of the World’s largest Social Security Organisations in terms of clientele and the volume of financial transactions undertaken. At present it maintains 17.14 crore accounts (Annual Report 2015-16) pertaining to its members.

- The Employees’ Provident Fund came into existence with the promulgation of the Employees’ Provident Funds Ordinance on the 15th November, 1951. It was replaced by the Employees’ Provident Funds Act, 1952. The Employees’ Provident Funds Bill was introduced in the Parliament 1952 as a Bill to provide for the institution of provident funds for employees in factories and other establishments. The Act is now referred as the Employees’ Provident Funds & Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952 which extends to the whole of India except Jammu and Kashmir. The Act and Schemes framed there under are administered by a tri-partite Board known as the Central Board of Trustees, Employees’ Provident Fund, consisting of representatives of Government (Both Central and State), Employers, and Employees.

- The Central Board of Trustees administers a contributory provident fund, pension scheme and an insurance scheme for the workforce engaged in the organized sector in India. The Board is assisted by the Employees’ PF Organization (EPFO), consisting of offices at 135 locations across the country. The Organization has a well equipped training set up where officers

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UPSC "PT" DNA (Daily News Analysis)
and employees of the Organization as well as Representatives of the
Employers and Employees attend sessions for trainings and seminars. The
EPFO is under the administrative control of Ministry of Labour and
Employment, Government of India.

- The Board operates three schemes – EPF Scheme 1952, Pension Scheme
  1995 (EPS) and Insurance Scheme 1976 (EDLI).

Source: The Hindu

50th Meeting of World Economic Forum
GS-II | 20 January,2020

Syllabus subtopic: Important International institutions, agencies and fora, their
structure, mandate.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the WEF annual summit: its aim and initiatives
likely to be taken

News: As the rich and powerful from across the globe assemble this week in the
Swiss ski resort town of Davos to discuss a 'cohesive and sustainable world', over
100 CEOs as also some union ministers and chief ministers from India would also
be present.

Aim of the meeting

The WEF has said the 2020 meeting aims to give a concrete meaning to
"stakeholder capitalism", assist governments and international institutions in
tracking progress towards the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable
Development Goals, and facilitate discussions on technology and trade
governance.
About the meeting

- The World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2020, taking place on January 20-24, will focus on establishing stakeholder capitalism as a way of addressing the world’s greatest challenges, from societal divisions created by income inequality and political polarization to the climate crisis we face today.

- Underpinning the meeting will be the Davos Manifesto 2020, a document that builds on the original Davos Manifesto of 1973, which set out for the first time the stakeholder concept that businesses should serve the interests of all society rather than simply their shareholders'.

- The Davos Manifesto 2020 provides a vision for stakeholder capitalism that touches on a range of important issues of our time, including fair taxation, zero tolerance for corruption, executive pay and respect for human rights.

- Business has now to fully embrace stakeholder capitalism, which means not only maximizing profits, but use their capabilities and resources in cooperation with governments and civil society to address the key issues of this decade. They have to actively contribute to a more cohesive and sustainable world.

- Adding a new dimension this year is the Arts and Culture Festival. Running alongside the Annual Meeting, the Festival will feature a number of sessions and immersive art installations, including those featuring the participation of the winners of the 26th Annual Crystal Awards and Cultural Leaders.

Initiatives to be taken up

- This year’s programme focuses on achieving maximum impact on the

- Among the initiatives to be launched at the Annual Meeting is one that aims to plant 1 trillion trees over the next decade and to equip 1 billion people with the necessary skills in the age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Other attendees

- US President Donald Trump, Britain's Prince Charles, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Afghanistan's Ashraf Ghani and Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan would be among the world leaders attending the five-day 50th annual meeting of WEF beginning Monday.

- This year over 120 of civic-minded young leaders will also join as members of the WEF Global Shapers, Young Global Leaders, and Social Entrepreneur communities.

- The WEF said it will also welcome 10 leaders under the age of 20 representing the viewpoints of younger generations.

Source: Indian Express

BharatNEt phase-2
GS-II | 20 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Prelims and Mains focus: About the delays in implementation of phase-2 and its reasons; about BharatNet project

17/10, Beside Aggarwal Sweets, Old Rajinder Nagar, New Delhi 110060 | www.aspireias.com | Follow us on: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram | AspireIAS Official
News: After the inordinate delay in the implementation of phase one of BharatNet, the second phase of the flagship project is also lagging way behind schedule.

Background

The government had aimed to connect all GPs and villages in the country via BharatNet by March 2019. Though the government had initially planned to connect only one lakh GPs under phase one, it later increased its target to nearly 1.3 lakh GPs, which also delayed the completion of phase one, the documents showed.

Targets missed

- Under BharatNet phase two, against the target of providing last mile connectivity to 1.5 lakh gram panchayats (GPs), only about 7.45 per cent of these have been made service ready so far.

- As against a target of laying down 3.11 lakh km of optical fibre cable, only about 92,283 km of cable has been laid down as of December end.

- Compounding the problem further, an estimated 19,952 km of optical fibre out of the 27,534 km laid by Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) under phase one is now being pulled out and replaced by new optical fibre, the documents showed.

State-wise progress

- The progress in states such as Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, and Odisha under BharatNet phase two is among the worst. The number of service ready GPs in these states has not even touched 1 per cent of the total 28,623 villages planned to be connected by March 2019. The four states have so far spent about Rs 950 crore, nearly 17 per cent of approved project cost, according to the documents.
While Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra have already missed their revised work completion deadline of October and November 2019, respectively, Jharkhand and Odisha have 45 to 60 days to achieve their targets. In total, these states managed to lay about 25 per cent of the 1.32 lakh km of optical fibre needed to connect the villages and GPs under the second phase.

The project in these states is being implemented by private agencies in these states, instead of debt-laden Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL). That, however, has made little difference. In states where the project is being implemented by state-run BSNL, the project timelines are further off. The state-run telecom company is in-charge of the project in Madhya Pradesh, Sikkim, and Uttar Pradesh.

In Madhya Pradesh, barely 10 per cent of the total 5,832 GPs have been made service ready, while not even a single village or GP has been made service ready in Sikkim and Uttar Pradesh West region. In the Uttar Pradesh East region, only 702 GPs of the total 17,032 that are to be connected are service ready so far.

All these regions have long overshot their target completion dates of March 31, 2019.

In all these regions, there had been little or no work between April and December last year due to the lack of funds with BSNL. On December 27, Bharat Broadband Network Limited cleared BSNL’s dues worth Rs 770 crore, after which the work has resumed, albeit slowly, the documents showed. The revised date of completion of the project in these areas has now been set to March 31, 2020, “subject to availability of fund” to the project implementation agencies.

In Assam, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, the Centre has proposed to finish pending work from BharatNet phase one
and start work on phase two under a public-private-partnership (PPP) model. The work, however, has still not started in nearly 1.25 lakh GPs in these areas due to lack of final approval to the proposed work structure and the viability gap funding.

- The work for BharatNet phase two has not even started in Tamil Nadu and Telangana, owing to lack of agreements with project implementation agencies, the internal documents showed.

- Overall, as of January 10, 2020, only about 1,33,300 GPs had been made service ready on both fibre and satellite against the target of connecting 2.5 lakh GPs under BharatNet, according to another set of documents.

**Reason for delays**

The lack of approved detailed project report, non-existent project implementing agencies, and non-availability of funds has been attributed as the reason for the delay for most of these projects, according to internal documents of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.

Source: Indian Express
Syllabus subtopic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the import substitution policy and its benefits and how it impacts domestic industries and overall growth of an economy

Context: The recent wave of protectionism and the US-China trade war point to a need to re-evaluate India’s trade policy. The argument in favour of higher tariffs or import substitution is that ‘infant’ domestic industries need to be protected.

Benefit of a low-tariff regime

India’s GDP growth rate has largely gone up over the years with a reduction in tariffs from 1999 onwards.
What is an import substitution policy?

- Under an import substitution policy, a government uses trade tariffs as a policy instrument to encourage domestic industry, the idea being to substitute imports with domestic goods. This policy has been practised by many countries, including India.

- The argument in favour of high tariffs is that in developing countries, industries are yet to develop and, therefore, need to be protected from international trade to ensure their development. This is generally termed the “infant industry” argument and was often cited to justify the policy of tariffs, licences and quotas that predated the 1991 reforms.

Is the ‘infant industry’ argument valid?
To some extent, the argument is valid as “infant” domestic industries would be hampered by imports of cheaper goods and commodities. But there is adequate empirical evidence, including from India’s experience, that suggests protectionism and tariff barriers act as a disincentive for domestic industries to become competitive.

Another issue is imgs: a higher tariff on imgs would result in higher img costs for manufacturers, which could otherwise be competitive if they could import cheaper imgs. A comprehensive view of the supply chain must be taken while making any changes to tariff policies.

What has been India’s recent trade experience?

Since 1991, the tariff policy has led to a systemic reduction in India’s weighted effective average tariff, coinciding with a sharp rise in GDP and higher growth rate, even though recent trade experience has been mixed. Several factors are behind the slow pace of export growth. The slowdown has led to a drop in the value of imports, thus shrinking the current account deficit.

Has the reduction in tariffs benefited India?

Many are against imports, but they ignore India’s experience of the last few decades when there was a systematic overhaul of the economy. Lower tariffs have come with higher growth, rise in exports and reduction in poverty at the fastest pace in India’s history. The nation has emerged as a leader in exports of IT services, and is now a key player in pharmaceuticals. As production takes place through supply chains, India has to integrate with global markets to ensure adequate labour-intensive manufacturing jobs.

What about tariffs imposed on exports?

The ongoing trade-war and recent escalation of protectionist steps between the US and China have raised the question about India’s policy response to any rise in tariffs imposed by other countries on Indian goods and services. The high-level advisory group said it would be beneficial for India not to retaliate with tariffs. Any
move to raise tariffs must consider the integrated supply chains and the fact that Indian imports are largely for domestic consumption.

Source: Livemint

Oxfam India report: “Time to Care”

GS-III | 21 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic:

- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.
- Role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders

Prelims and Mains focus: about the key highlights of the report regarding income disparity in India and recommendations

News: Oxfam India’s report, “Time to care”, released in Davos, Switzerland, highlights the need for Asia’s third-largest economy to plug a growing rich-poor gap.

Background

- The findings come at a time when the government is preparing to present the Union budget for FY21 seeking to address an economic downturn, distress in the rural economy, and improve incomes and add new jobs.

- The Narendra Modi administration has been following a progressive taxation policy and higher welfare spending to try and tackle income inequality.

Key findings of the report

- India’s richest 10% control more than 74% of the national wealth, while
poor women and girls—the bottom of the economic heap—put in Rs.19 trillion of unpaid care work every year.

- The gap becomes even wider when considering the richest 1% of Indians: they hold 42.5% of the national wealth, while the bottom 50%, the majority of the population, has a mere 2.8% share of the national wealth.

- The top 1% holds more than four times the wealth held by 953 million Indians, who make up the poorest 70% of the population.

What does the report recommend?

- The report said its findings call for a dialogue on the rising income disparity in the world’s largest democracy.

- The Oxfam report makes a strong case for raising taxes on corporations and rich individuals to tackle poverty and lift the responsibility of care from women.

- It said successive governments are “massively under-taxing the wealthiest individuals and corporations” and “underfunding vital public services and infrastructure” that could help reduce the workload of women and girls.

- The gap between the rich and the poor cannot be resolved without deliberate inequality-busting policies, and too few governments are committed to these.

- Women’s unpaid care work, it said, is taken for granted or ignoring the physical, mental and emotional effort it requires. Investments in water and sanitation, electricity, childcare and healthcare could free up women’s time and improve their quality of life.
Governments must ensure corporations and wealthy individuals pay their fair share of tax and increase investment in public services and infrastructure. It also argued that people who care for parents, children and the most vulnerable, an important social function, should be paid a living wage.

About Oxfam India

- Oxfam India is leading NGO of people and organisations working hand on hand to fight inequality in India. Supporting civil society organisations in India over the past 60 years, In 2008 Oxfam registered as an Independent organisation. Oxfam is celebrating its 67th year of humanitarian service in India.

- In 1951, Oxfam Great Britain launched its first full scale humanitarian response to the Bihar famine. In the past six decades Oxfam has supported civil society organisations across the country. In 2008, various Oxfams in India joined forces to form Oxfam India. Registered as an independent organisation, Oxfam India has indigenous staff and board members. It is a member of the global confederation of 19 Oxfams.

It focuses on four poverty eliminating goals

1. Livelihood: More women and men will realise their right to secure and sustainable livelihoods.
2. Fight for women: More women will lead a violence-free life. This can be achieved through changes in attitudes and beliefs about gender relations and through encouraging women's engagement and assuming leadership in institutions and decision-making roles.
3. Education and Health: People living in poverty, especially women and, girls will realise their right to accessible and affordable healthcare, education, clean water and sanitation.
4. Human Rights: Those facing a humanitarian crisis will be assured the protection and the assistance they need, regardless of who they are, where they live or how they are affected.
**IMF lowers India’s growth forecast**

**GS-II | 21 January, 2020**

**Syllabus subtopic:** Important International institutions, agencies and fora, their structure, mandate.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the IMF report and its significance; about IMF and terms associated to it

**News:** The International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Monday slashed India’s growth forecast by 1.3 percentage points to 4.8% for 2019-20, prompting the agency to also trim its global growth estimates as a result.

**Why?**

Growth in India slowed sharply owing to stress in the non-bank financial sector and weak rural income growth.

**Background**

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman, scheduled to present her second budget on 1 February, is expected to increase infrastructure spending and boost rural expenditure to revive growth, which slowed to a six-and-a-half-year low of 4.5% in the quarter ended 30 September.

**Contrasting figures**

While the Indian government’s statistics department and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) have estimated growth in 2019-20 at 5%, rating agency Moody’s Investors Service has projected growth at 4.9% for the fiscal.
What did the IMF recommend earlier?

- IMF in its Article IV consultation report on India released last month said the Indian government should avoid a fiscal stimulus to boost the economy and, instead, opt for an easier monetary policy.

- However, retail inflation has picked up since and RBI has paused its monetary easing cycle. Retail inflation touched a five-and-a-half-year high of 7.35% in December, breaching the central bank's tolerance limit of 6%. This may constrain RBI from not only further monetary easing in its policy review on 6 February, but may also force it to rethink its accommodative policy stance. The IMF growth projection for India shows economic downturn is quite entrenched.
IMF’s ‘World Economic Outlook’ report highlights

- It projected global growth to increase modestly from 2.9% in 2019 to 3.3% in 2020 and 3.4% in 2021. The slight downward revision of 0.1 percentage point for 2019 and 2020, and 0.2 percentage point for 2021, is owed largely to downward revisions for India.
The IMF report, however, projected India’s growth to revive in 2020-21 to 5.8%, 30 basis points below its October estimate, supported by monetary and fiscal stimulus as well as subdued oil prices.

IMF raised China’s growth estimate by 20 basis points to 6% for 2020, reflecting the signing of the phase 1 trade deal with the US.

Despite several headwinds, IMF said some indications have emerged towards the year-end that global growth may be bottoming out. The report, however, warned that downside risks remain prominent, including rising geopolitical tensions, notably between the US and Iran, intensifying social unrest, further worsening of relations between the US and its trading partners and deepening economic friction between other countries.

The pickup in global growth for 2020 remains highly uncertain as it relies on improved growth outcomes for stressed economies like Argentina, Iran, and Turkey and for underperforming emerging and developing economies such as Brazil, India, and Mexico. A materialization of these risks could lead to rapidly deteriorating sentiment, causing global growth to fall below the projected baseline.

Way ahead

The economic slowdown seems to be sharper than estimated. This is a wake-up call for the government ahead of its 1 February budget, which is likely to address the economy’s structural weaknesses and recalibrate spending within the available fiscal space. With inflation crossing the central bank’s tolerance limit, the ball is now in the government’s court to revive growth.

Monetary policy having run its course, the government should spend wisely to support economic recovery.
Bretton Woods

- Bretton Woods is a place in New Hampshire State of USA.
- In 1944, US President Roosevelt hosted a conference here, to rebuild the world economy, after Second World War.
- Delegates of 44 allied nations came to participate (India was represented by Sir D. Deshmukh, the first Indian Governor of RBI)
- Officially known as United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference, commonly known as Bretton Woods because of the place where it was held.

This conference resulted into creation of four important organizations viz.

1. IMF (International monetary fund)
2. World Bank
3. GATT (General Agreement on Trade and Tariff) – later becomes WTO in 1995
4. Fixed Exchange Rate system (Discarded in 1970s)

IMF

- HQ – Washington
- **Official language** – Chinese, English, French, Russian, Spanish, Arabic
- Formally created in 1945 by 29 member countries
- **Stated goal was to assist in the reconstruction of world’s international payment system post World War II**
- Countries contribute funds to a pool through a **quota system** from which countries with payment imbalances temporarily can borrow money and other resources.

**IMF Quota & Voting Rights**

- Quotas was assigned to member countries reflecting their relative economic power & credit deposit to IMF.
- Subscription was to be paid 25% in gold or currency convertible into gold (effectively the dollar, which was the only currency then, still directly gold convertible for central banks) and 75% in the member's own currency
- Members were provided voting rights in proportion to their quota, hence
Special Drawing Rights

- Special drawing rights (SDRs) are supplementary foreign exchange reserve assets defined and maintained by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).
- SDR is not a currency, instead represents a claim to currency held by IMF member countries for which they may be exchanged.
- The value of an SDR is defined by a weighted currency basket of five major currencies: the US dollar, the euro, the British pound, the Chinese...
Yuan and the Japanese yen.

- Central bank of member countries held SDR with IMF which can be used by them to access funds from IMF in case of financial crises in their domestic market.

Reserve Tranche

- A certain proportion of a member country’s quota is specified as its reserve tranche.
- The member country can access its reserve tranche funds at its discretion, and is not under an immediate obligation to repay those funds to the IMF.
- Member nation reserve tranches are typically 25% of the member’s quota.

Given its unequal voting power mechanism, IMF doesn’t always serve the interests of poor & developing countries, hence requires two set of reforms.

1. IMF reform in quota

- IMF Executive board decides the Quota of each member based on various parameters including GDP & tariff barriers.
- Higher quota gives higher voting rights and borrowing permissions, But formula is designed in such way US has ~18% quota, G7 collectively own >40% while India and Russia have barely ~2.5% each.
- BRICS, G20 and emerging market economies are against this scheme especially after Subprime crisis and declined economic strength of USA & G7
- 2010: Board decided to increases quota of developing countries albeit mainly by decreasing the quota of poor countries.

Problem: 70% votes required to implement this reform, not 70 nations, & the nations who collectively own 70% quota- USA, Germany, Japan etc. Hence quota reform is pending.

2. IMF reform in governance

- Currently in Executive board, 5 out 24 directors are permanently decided by five largest quota holders.
2010: new reforms proposed: Board composition will be reviewed every 8 years + all directors to be elected, no permanent chairs.

Problem: Requires 85% votes in favour, hence governance reform is pending as well.

Source: Livemint

SC won’t stay Electoral Bond Scheme

Syllabus subtopic: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the SC judgement; arguments for and against Electoral Bonds Scheme

News: Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde on Monday orally made it clear that if the Supreme Court had found it unnecessary to stay the electoral bonds scheme (EBS), it may not stay the scheme even now.

Background

On April 12 last, to ensure that the balance was not tilted in anybody’s favour before the May last general elections, the Supreme Court passed an interim order directing political parties to provide complete information to the Election Commission of India in sealed covers on every single donor and contribution received by them till date through electoral bonds. However, it did not stay the operation of the scheme.
Case against the electoral bond scheme by the NGO Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR)

- New facts have come up indicating that the scheme was being frequently opened to allow funds to fill the coffers of the ruling party.

- The scheme would be opened again now with the Delhi elections scheduled on February 8. Instead of opening the scheme exclusively for the Lok Sabha elections, as envisaged, it had become a mechanism to funnel benami funds to fuel political parties. Over Rs.6,000 crore had been drawn in through the scheme recently.

- Both the Election Commission of India (ECI) and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had strongly objected to the scheme and raised the red flag against it.

- The court should consider the scheme with a new eye as many novel and disturbing facts had come to the fore since April 12.

- 95% of the payments through electoral bonds till date had been routed to the BJP. The ECI submitted that a lion’s share of the contributions via electoral bonds had gone to the ruling party.
What is the govt.'s stand vis-a-vis Election Commission?

- The government has justified the scheme as an experiment to eradicate black money.
It claimed that the impact of the EBS would be known only after the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. It should meanwhile be allowed a free hand to execute its policy and the apex court should not pass any orders in the matter for the present.

The government’s position is in stark contrast to the ECI’s stand. The ECI has expressed reservations about the transparency in political funding. It submitted to the apex court that electoral bonds legalised anonymity of political donors and the parties receiving contributions. It maintained that the right to vote also meant the right to make an informed choice. It said that knowing the candidate was only “half the exercise”. The voters should also know the source of funding of political parties who prop up these candidates.

Source: The Hindu

Iran says it may pull out of NPT

GS-II | 21 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India’s interests, Indian diaspora.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the NPT and its significance; about JCPOA

News: Iran said on Monday it will consider withdrawing from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) if a dispute over its atomic programme goes before the UN Security Council.

Background

• Britain, France and Germany launched a process last week charging Iran with failing to observe the terms of the 2015 nuclear deal, a move that could eventually see the Security Council reimpose international sanctions on
Iran has accused the three EU member states of inaction over sanctions the United States reimposed on it after unilaterally withdrawing from the landmark accord in 2018.

**What was the 2015 deal about?**

- The landmark 2015 deal (JCPOA) reached with Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States **gave Iran relief from sanctions in return for curbs on its nuclear programme.**

- Since the U.S. pullout, Iran has progressively rolled back its commitments to the accord in retaliation.

- It has hit out at the three European nations that remain party to the tattered deal for failing to live up to their promises to ease the impact of U.S. sanctions on its oil-based economy.

**About the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)**

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, commonly known as the **Non-Proliferation Treaty or NPT,** is an international treaty whose **objective** is:

1. to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology,
2. to promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and
3. to further the goal of achieving nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament.

- As of August 2016, 191 states have adhered to the treaty, though North Korea, which acceded in 1985 but never came into compliance, announced its withdrawal from the NPT in 2003, following detonation of nuclear devices in violation of core obligations.
Four UN member states have never accepted the NPT, three of which possess nuclear weapons: India, Israel, and Pakistan. In addition, South Sudan, founded in 2011, has not joined.

The treaty defines nuclear-weapon states as those that have built and tested a nuclear explosive device before 1 January 1967; these are the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and China (P5).

Four other states are known or believed to possess nuclear weapons: India, Pakistan, and North Korea have openly tested and declared that they possess nuclear weapons, while Israel is deliberately ambiguous regarding its nuclear weapons status.

Critics argue that the NPT cannot stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons or the motivation to acquire them. They express disappointment with the limited progress on nuclear disarmament, where the five authorized nuclear weapons states still have 22,000 warheads in their combined stockpile and have shown a reluctance to disarm further. Several high-ranking officials within the United Nations have said that they can do little to stop states using nuclear reactors to produce nuclear weapons.

Source: The Hindu

Naga-Kuki conflict in Manipur
GS-III | 21 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Security challenges and their management in border areas

Prelims and Mains focus: about the Naga-Kuki conflict and its impact on India’s internal security; about strategic importance of Northeast region
News: Umbrella organisations of two tribes have called a truce in Manipur after almost four decades of violence and uneasy existence.

About the two groups in conflict

- The conflict between the Nagas and the Kukis in 1993 had claimed more than 230 lives and displaced 1,00,000, mostly Kukis.

- The NNPGs, which has been in talks with New Delhi since 2017, comprises the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Unification), the NSCN (Reformation), the NSCN (Khango), the Naga National Council and two of its factions, and the Federal Government of Nagaland.

- The KNO, which is seeking a territorial council in Manipur, is the umbrella body of 17 militant outfits now engaged in peace talks with the Centre.

Manipur’s demography

- Manipur has a population of 2,855,794 as per 2011 census. Of this total, 57.2% live in the valley districts and the remaining 42.8% in the hill districts.

- The hills are inhabited mainly by the Nagas, and Kukis, and smaller tribal communities and the valley (plains) mainly by the Meiteis, Manipuri Brahmins (Bamons) and Pangal (Manipuri Muslims). Bishnupriya Manipuri, Naga and Kuki settlements are also found in the valley region, though less in numbers.
UPSC "PT" DNA (Daily News Analysis)
About the Naga-Kuki conflict

• On September 13, 1993, Naga militants allegedly belonging to the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak Muivah) massacred around 115 Kuki civilians in the hills of Manipur. The Kukis refer to the killings as the Joupi massacre after the village which saw the highest number of casualties.

• However, The National Socialist Council of Nagalim Isaac-Muivah (NSCN-IM) faction has accused Kukis of being responsible for the start of Naga-Kuki conflict in 1992.

• Hostility between the Nagas and the Kukis dates back to colonial times, but the conflict of the 1990s was primarily over land: large swathes of what the Kuki claim to be their “homeland” in the Manipur hills overlapped with Greater Nagaland or Nagalim, envisioned by the NSCN (IM) as a sovereign Naga homeland. The proposed map of Nagalim consists of Nagaland and “all contiguous Naga-inhabited areas” of Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and, across the international border, Myanmar.
UPSC "PT" DNA (Daily News Analysis)
• The Kukis, one of the bigger hill tribes of the region, are spread across the North East, and even parts of Myanmar and the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh.

Way forward

• The working committee of the Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs) and the Kuki National Organisation (KNO) have signed a declaration to settle contentious issues and inter-community differences peacefully.

• According to the declaration, the two sides will “work together closely to resolve differences through a democratic political process, and by respecting each other’s history and identity”.

Strategic Importance of Northeast:

Strategic Importance of North East: Northeast India has an extraordinarily important international strategic dimension and is a vital part of the nation’s defence architecture. Its importance is enumerated below:

International Border:

These states share their borders with other countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar and China. It makes up close to 40% of India’s land borders with its neighbours.

1. Bridge to South East Asia: The region is at the crossroads of India and Southeast Asia. It is a bridgehead between India and the vibrant economies of Southeast Asia, including southern China.

2. Economic Significance: North East is endowed with huge natural resource (oil, gas, coal, hydro, fertile land, etc) which can be harnessed for nation development.
Environment Impact Assessment (EIA)

Syllabus subtopic: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Prelims and Mains focus: about the EIA sought for water aerodromes and delay in it; about EIA; UDAN scheme

News: A year after 10 water aerodromes were awarded to airlines for seaplane operations, the government is yet to seek environmental clearance for them.

Background

- In January 2019, the government announced winners of the third round of UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik) — the government’s low-cost flying scheme.
- Among the routes awarded to airlines were those that provided air connectivity to 10 waterdromes — the Statue of Unity, the Sabarmati riverfront and the Shatrunjay dam in Gujarat; the Nagarjuna Sagar dam and the Prakasam barrage in Andhra Pradesh and Havelock Island, Neil Island and Long island in Andaman and Nicobar. Eight of these waterdromes in Gujarat, Assam and Andaman and Nicobar were awarded to the SpiceJet.

About the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) for aerodromes

- The Ministry of Civil Aviation appointed a consultant, M/s Feedback Infra, to prepare a detailed project report in August last year. Subsequently, a proposal was sent to the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF) seeking the “terms of reference” for conducting an environment impact assessment (EIA) for three waterdromes in Andaman and Nicobar, which was granted on November 25.

- Once the EIA is finalised, the apex body under the MoEF, Environment
Approval Committee, will take it up for clearance. This process is yet to be undertaken for the remaining seven waterdromes.

- The process of seeking environmental clearance requires a lot of data such as **bathymetric test**. (Bathymetry is the study of underwater depth of lake or ocean floors.)

- As per the EAC’s “terms of reference” for the waterdromes in Andaman and Nicobar, the Ministry of Civil Aviation will have to provide information about toilet waste from flights, disposal of trash collected during flights and waste from eateries and shops at the aerodromes. Details have also been sought about **the impact of noise on the sensitive environment and presence of corals**.

**What is Environment Impact Assessment (EIA)?**

- **UNEP** defines Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) as “a tool used to identify the environmental, social and economic impacts of a project prior to decision-making.”

- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is the process of examining the anticipated environmental effects of a proposed project – from consideration of environmental aspects at design stage, through consultation and preparation of an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR), evaluation of the EIAR by a competent authority, the subsequent decision as to whether the project should be permitted to proceed, encompassing public response to that decision.

- The aim is to predict environmental impacts at an early stage in project planning and design, find ways and means to reduce adverse impacts, shape projects to suit the local environment and present the predictions and options to decision-makers. Although legislation and practice vary around the world, the fundamental components of an EIA would necessarily involve the following stages:
1. Screening
2. Scoping
3. Assessment and evaluation of impacts and development of alternatives
4. Reporting the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or EIA report
5. Review of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
6. Decision-making
7. Monitoring, compliance, enforcement and environmental auditing

Source: The Hindu
Global Investment Trend Monitor report: UNCTAD
GS-II | 21 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Important International institutions, agencies and fora, their structure, mandate.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the report and its key findings; about UNCTAD

News: India was among the top 10 recipients of Foreign Direct Investment in 2019, attracting USD 49 billion in inflows, a 16 per cent increase from the previous year, driving the FDI growth in South Asia, according to a UN report released on Monday.

About the report and its highlights

- The Global Investment Trend Monitor report compiled by United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) states that the global foreign direct investment remained flat in 2019 at USD 1.39 trillion, a 1 per cent decline from a revised USD 1.41 trillion in 2018. This is against the backdrop of weaker macroeconomic performance and policy uncertainty for investors, including trade tensions.

- Developing economies continue to absorb more than half of global FDI flows. South Asia recorded a 10 per cent increase in FDI to USD 60 billion and this growth was driven by India, with a 16 per cent increase in inflows to an estimated USD 49 billion. The majority went into services industries, including information technology.

- The FDI flows to developed countries remained at a historically low level, decreasing by a further 6 per cent to an estimated USD 643 billion.

- The FDI to the European Union (EU) fell by 15 per cent to USD 305 billion,
while there was zero-growth of flows to United States, which received USD 251 billion FDI in 2019, as compared to USD 254 billion in 2018, the report said.

- **Despite this, the United States remained the largest recipient of FDI, followed by China** with flows of USD 140 billion and **Singapore** with USD 110 billion.

- **China also saw zero-growth in FDI inflows.** Its FDI inflows in 2018 were USD 139 billion and stood at USD 140 billion in 2019. The FDI in the UK was down 6 per cent as Brexit unfolded.

**Way forward**

- Looking ahead, UNCTAD **expects the FDI flows to rise moderately in 2020**, as current projections show the global economy to improve somewhat from its **weakest performance since the global financial crisis in 2009**.

- Corporate profits are expected to remain high and signs of waning trade tensions emerge. However, the **decrease of announced greenfield projects** by 22 per cent – an indicator of future trends, high geopolitical risks and concerns about a further shift towards protectionist policies temper expectations.

- The report said that GDP growth, gross fixed capital formation and trade are projected to rise, both at the global level and, especially, in several large emerging markets.

- Such an improvement in macroeconomic conditions could prompt MNEs to resume investments in productive assets, given also their easy access to cheap money, the fact that corporate profits are expected to remain solid in 2020, and hopes for waning trade tensions between the United States and
China.

- However, significant risks persist, including high debt accumulation among emerging and developing economies, geopolitical risks and concerns about a further shift towards protectionist policies, it added.

**About United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)**

- UNCTAD is a permanent intergovernmental body established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1964.
- Its headquarters are located in Geneva, Switzerland, and it has offices in New York and Addis Ababa.
- UNCTAD is part of the UN Secretariat. It reports to the UN General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council but have its own membership, leadership, and budget.
- It is also a part of the United Nations Development Group.

Source: Indian Express

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Sukhoi-30 MKI equipped with BrahMos missile

**Syllabus subtopic:** Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the deployment and its significance for India’s presence in IOR; about the geopolitical importance of IOR

**News:** Adding teeth to India’s air and maritime dominance in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), a squadron of fourth-generation fighter jets Sukhoi-30 MKI equipped with the BrahMos missile was inducted on Monday at the airforce station in Thanjavur in the Southern Air Command.
Sukhoi-BrahMos Combo

With a **combat radius of nearly 1500-km without requiring a refuel**, Sukhoi 30 jets have been **modified to carry BrahMos air-to-surface missiles** with a range of nearly 300 km, giving them the **capacity to conduct long-range precision strikes**.

**About the squadron**

- The squadron is a resurrection of the **Tigersharks 222 squadron**, which was raised at Ambala in 1969 with Sukhoi Su-7 aircraft. In July 1971, the squadron was moved to Halwara and was engaged in combat with Pakistan Air Force in the **1971 war**.

- The squadron was formally inducted by **Chief of Defence Staff** General Bipin Rawat.

- The resurrection of the 222 Squadron highlights the integration and jointness that is the future for our armed forces and integration of this weapon system would not have been possible but for the support of the Indian Air Force, the HAL, the DRDO and BrahMos.

**Advantage for India’s presence in IOR**

- Sukhoi-30 MKI equipped with BrahMos will indeed become a game-changer for our armed forces.

- Not only will it **extensively enhance the security of our maritime domain**, but the squadron can also **perform tasks in support of the land forces**, protecting the vulnerable areas and points and any other tasks that may be assigned to them.

**Importance of IOR**
The region comprises the ocean itself and the countries that border it. These include Australia, India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Madagascar, Somalia, Tanzania, South Africa, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

There is an obvious sense in which the region is the future. The average age of people in the region's countries is under 30, compared to 38 in the US and 46 in Japan. The countries bordering the Indian Ocean are home to 2.5 billion people, which is one-third of the world’s population.

Some 80% of the world’s maritime oil trade flows through three narrow passages of water, known as choke points, in the Indian Ocean. This includes the Strait of Hormuz – located between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman – which provides the only sea passage from the Persian Gulf to the open ocean.

The economies of many Indian Ocean countries are expanding rapidly as investors seek new opportunities. Bangladesh, India, Malaysia and Tanzania witnessed economic growth in excess of 5% in 2017 – well above the global average of 3.2%.

India is the fastest growing major economy in the world. With a population expected to become the world’s largest in the coming decades, it is also the one with the most potential.

Politically, the Indian Ocean is becoming a pivotal zone of strategic competition. China is investing hundreds of billions of dollars in infrastructure projects across the region as part of its One Belt One Road initiative.

In security terms, piracy, unregulated migration, and the continued presence of extremist groups in Somalia, Bangladesh and parts of Indonesia pose significant threats to Indian ocean countries.
Regulating Artificial Intelligence (AI)

GS-III | 22 January, 2020

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

Prelims and Mains focus: about the need for regulating AI; about AI and its applications

News: One of the most powerful men in tech, Sundar Pichai, has backed regulations for artificial intelligence (AI). While Pichai isn’t the first big tech executive to say so publicly, his voice matters, given that Google is arguably the world’s largest AI company.

2019 AI Readiness Index

India ranks 17 on the 2019 AI Readiness Index that tracks how “well-placed” governments are to take advantage of the benefits of AI in delivering public services. Singapore is the most well-prepared, while China rounds out the top 20.
Why is there a need to regulate the use of AI?

**AI depends on the gathering of data**, automatically making it an issue that needs regulation. Any organization will require large amounts of data to train an AI software, so how it acquires the data must be regulated.

When AI is put to use practically, it becomes an even more direct threat to privacy. **For example, facial recognition can be used for mass surveillance.** AI algorithms are usually built for specific tasks, but if left unchecked they can deviate from their desirable behaviour. **For example**, two Facebook chatbots...
created their own language when they were allowed to interface with each other in any way they wanted.

Who else has called for regulation of AI?

Pichai is not the first big name in tech to have sought regulations on AI. Tesla and SpaceX chief Elon Musk has been vocal about the need for regulating AI several times in the past. Musk even said that “by the time we are reactive in AI regulation, it’s too late”.

Microsoft president Brad Smith is another prominent person in tech who has called for regulation of AI. Pichai, in his editorial, advocated for AI to be regulated keeping in mind both the harm and societal benefits that the technology can be used for. He also said that governments must be aligned on regulations around AI for “making global standards work”.

Which fields are using the technology at present?

AI is a buzzword in almost every field. Smartphone makers are marketing AI-driven cameras, while governments have been looking to reap the benefits of AI in various areas. Regulation has to take into account all the use cases. The use of AI in governance, healthcare, law enforcement, etc. is more intrusive than, say, enhancing a phone camera’s imaging capabilities.

What is the status on regulation of AI?

Pichai’s editorial came soon after reports that the European Union was planning to ban the use of facial recognition in public areas for up to five years. This would give regulators time to figure out ways to avoid the abuse of such AI technologies. The US proposed certain principles for AI regulation earlier this month, which were more lenient than the EU's proposed policy. In May, 42 countries had adopted the inter-governmental policy guidelines on AI by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Where does India stand on regulations?
While India has been vocal about the use of AI in various sectors, it is far from regulating it. A 2018 NITI Aayog paper proposed five areas where AI can be useful. In that paper, the think tank also noted the lack of regulation around AI as a major weakness for India. While presenting the 2019 Union budget, then interim finance minister Piyush Goyal had said the Centre was planning to launch a national programme on AI. While India’s startup ecosystem has built several products using AI, we do not yet have principles for regulating it.

What is AI?

- Artificial intelligence (AI) is a wide-ranging branch of computer science concerned with building **smart machines capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence**.

- AI is an interdisciplinary science with multiple approaches, but advancements in machine learning and deep learning are creating a paradigm shift in virtually every sector of the tech industry.

AI examples

- Smart assistants (like Siri and Alexa)
- Disease mapping and prediction tools
- Manufacturing and drone robots
- Optimized, personalized healthcare treatment recommendations
- Conversational bots for marketing and customer service
- Robo-advisors for stock trading
- Spam filters on email
- Social media monitoring tools for dangerous content or false news
- Song or TV show recommendations from Spotify and Netflix
Recession and Stagflation
GS-III | 22 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the two terms and their significance in determining the status of the economy

**News:** The Indian economy is going through tough times with the advance estimates for the rate of growth for real **gross domestic product (GDP)** for 2019-20 being pegged at 5% compared to 6.9% in 2018-19.

**What have been the trend so far?**

- The GDP growth for the second quarter of 2019-20 came in at 4.5% as against 7.1% in the second quarter in 2018-19 and 5% in the first quarter of 2019-20.

- Inflation, on the other hand, showed an upward trend with the **Consumer Price Index (CPI)** rising 7.35% in December 2019 with November and October numbers coming in at 5.54% and 4.62%, respectively.

**Does the combination of slowdown in the rate of growth of the economy and higher inflation mean that the economy is in recession or going through a period of stagflation?**
1. Recession

- There is no standard definition for recession but a rule of thumb used by most economists and analysts is that an economy that is seeing negative growth rate or shrinking GDP for two consecutive quarters may be considered to be in a recessionary phase.

- Sometimes a period of contraction is followed by periods of growth before it turns negative again. The data on the fall in GDP is seen in conjunction with other indicators such as increasing unemployment, falling real income and fall in economic activity such as manufacturing and sales to confirm a recession in the economy.

- A recession may be the outcome of tight monetary and fiscal policies aimed at controlling inflation or a result of over-leveraging by companies and individuals and the cutback in consumption and investment as they try to meet their obligations.

- A recession may be V-shaped where the economy sees a sharp decline followed by a strong recovery, or it may be W-shaped where there is a marginal recovery in the middle followed by a decline before the economy eventually recovers. Sometimes recessions are L-shaped where the economy goes down and then stagnates there.

- When recession is severe in terms of the contraction in GDP and extends over a longer period of time, it turns into a depression.

2. Stagflation

- Stagflation is another fear that comes up when inflation is high in a period of slow economic growth. The combination is unnatural because inflation is not a condition that is generally seen when the economy is slowing or stagnant and unemployment is high.
Typically, costs push inflation, caused by supply side issues, or excessive liquidity in the system cause inflationary conditions in such a situation. The high prices are likely to lead to a slowing demand that can further aggravate the economic slowdown. High prices even in one segment, say, food, can affect demand in other segments because the disposable income in the hands of the consumer comes down. High prices in a commodity like oil will have a cascading effect on the prices of other products, too, since transportation costs go up.

Policy prescriptions in a situation of stagflation can be tricky since increasing interest rates to control inflation will make it difficult for the economy facing slowing growth to recover. At the same time, keeping rates low to support recovery may exacerbate the inflationary situation.

The data is considered over a period of time and not just at one point or a few months for a contraction to be called an economy in recession or stagflation.

Source: Livemint

Code of conduct for Ministers
GS-II | 22 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic:

- Structure, Organization and Functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary—Ministries and Departments of the Government; Pressure Groups and Formal/Informal Associations and their Role in the Polity.

- Probity in Governance: Concept of Public Service; Philosophical Basis of Governance and Probity; Information Sharing and Transparency in Government, Right to Information, Codes of Ethics, Codes of Conduct, Citizen’s Charters, Work Culture, Quality of Service Delivery, Utilization of
Prelims and Mains focus: about the new code of conduct for Ministers at both national and state level: its need and significance

News: A five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court on Tuesday said the possibility of enforceability ought to be explored if a new code of conduct is framed for Ministers at the Centre and in the States.

What is the SC examining?

- The Bench, led by Justice Arun Mishra, is examining whether “greater restrictions” should be imposed on Ministers’ right to free speech.
- The issue, which was referred to a Constitution Bench in April 2017, was based on a petition filed by the family members of the Bulandshahr rape case victim, who were enraged by then Uttar Pradesh Minister Azam Khan’s statement that the case was part of a conspiracy against the Akhilesh Yadav government.

Way ahead

The government and the legislature should be asked by the court to formulate a voluntary code of conduct with respect to the personal and public lives of Ministers and to publish it after finalising the same based on due deliberations.

Arguments in favour of new code of conduct for ministers at both Centre and State level

- Union Ministry of Home Affairs has already a code of conduct for Ministers, which essentially is concerned about financial discipline. Nothing is emanating from the code which addresses the private and public activities of the Ministers in general. This is too narrow and inadequate.
The code of conduct should reflect constitutional morality and values of good governance. The acts of the persons holding public offices can be thus subjected to better and meaningful public scrutiny, which in turn would ensure democratic accountability.

**Note:** to read more about the code of conduct for ministers at Union and State level, click on the link below


Source: The Hindu

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**Project 75I**

GS-III | 22 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Achievements of Indians in Science & Technology; Indigenization of Technology and Developing New Technology.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the decisions taken in the DAC meeting; about project 75I and its significance; about iDEX scheme

**News:** The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday cleared Mazgaon Docks Limited (MDL) and Larsen & Toubro (L&T) as the Indian partners in the Navy’s tender for six advanced submarines under Project-75I worth over Rs 45,000 crore.

- This was the first DAC meeting after the constitution of the Chief of Defence Staff and was attended by Gen. Bipin Rawat.

**Decisions taken in the meeting**

- The DAC approved deals worth Rs 5,100 crore, which includes electronic
warfare systems for the Army to be developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and manufactured locally by the Indian industry.

- The DAC approved shortlisting of Indian Strategic Partners (SP) and the potential Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) that would collaborate with SPs to construct six conventional submarines in India.

- The DAC also approved prototype testing of trawl assemblies designed by DRDO for T-72 and T-90 tanks providing an important indigenous de-mining capability to the Army.

- In addition, DAC accorded approval for inclusion of Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) scheme in the Defence Procurement Procedure which would provide opportunities in capital procurement to start ups and innovators working for iDEX.

About Project 75I (called “Project-75 India (P-75I)”)

- The Project 75I-class submarine is a follow-on of the Project 75 Kalvari-class submarines for the Indian Navy.

- Under this project, the Indian Navy intends to acquire six diesel-electric submarines, which will also feature advanced air-independent propulsion systems to enable them to stay submerged for longer duration and substantially increase their operational range.

- All six submarines are expected to be constructed in Indian shipyards.

- This project, under the Strategic Partnership (SP) model, aims to promote the role of the Indian industry in defence manufacturing and build a defence industrial ecosystem. With this there are now two Indian SPs and five OEMs
in the shortlisted pool for the project. The Request For Proposal (RFP) would be issued to the Indian partners who would tie up with an OEM and submit a bid. The five OEMs are Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Engineering (DSME) (South Korea), Naval Group (France), Navantia (Spain), Rosoboronexport (Russia) and TKMS (Germany).

- The P75I project is part of a 30-year submarine building plan that ends in 2030. As part of this plan, India was to build 24 submarines — 18 conventional submarines and six nuclear-powered submarines (SSNs) — as an effective deterrent against China and Pakistan.

- Of the 14 conventional submarines India currently possesses, including the Scorpene, only half are operational at any given point of time. India also has two nuclear-powered submarines — INS Arihant (SSBN, a ballistic missile submarine) and INS Chakra (SSN, a nuclear-powered one) leased from Russia.
About Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) Scheme:

- It was launched by the Government in April 2018; primarily aims at creation of an ecosystem to foster innovation and technology development in Defence and Aerospace.
• It aims at engaging Industries including MSMEs, start-ups, individual innovators, R&D institutes & academia for defence technology to be made and fostered in India.

• It will provide them grants/funding and other support to carry out R&D which has good potential for future adoption for Indian defence and aerospace needs.

• iDEX is funded and managed by a ‘Defence Innovation Organization (DIO)’ which has been formed as a ‘not for profit’ company as per Section 8 of the Companies Act 2013 for this purpose.

• DIO has been created by the two founder members i.e. Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) - HAL & BEL.

• iDEX functions as the executive arm of DIO, carrying out all the required activities while DIO will provide high level policy guidance to iDEX.

Key Functions of iDex:

• Co-Innovation/co-creation
• Piloting of candidate technologies in important platforms
• Indigenization of various defence and aerospace related platforms being manufactured in the country based on ToT.

Defence India Start Up Challenge:

• Taking the iDEX initiative further, Defence India Startup Challenge "has been launched by Defence Ministry in partnership with Atal Innovation Mission."

• It aims at supporting Startups/MSMEs/Innovators to create prototypes and/or commercialize products/solutions in the area of National Defence and
The vision of the Challenge is two-fold:

- Help create functional prototypes of products/technologies relevant for national security (prototyping), and spur fast-moving innovation in the India defence sector
- Help new tech products/technologies find a market and early customer (commercialization) in the form of the Indian Defence Establishment.

Source: The Hindu

India, Brazil to sign Strategic Action Plan
GS-II | 22 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India’s interests

Prelims and Mains focus: about the agreements to be signed during Brazilian President’s visit; about India-Brazil relations

News: India and Brazil will upgrade their strategic partnership with an “action plan” and sign a Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) when Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro visits as the Chief Guest of the Republic Day celebrations from 24-27.

About the agreements to be signed during the visit

1. Strategic Action Plan: The Strategic Partnership Action Plan will serve as an “umbrella agreement”, for plans between the two countries to increase defence cooperation, technology sharing and a logistics agreement.

2. The Bilateral Investment treaty will be one of the first that the Modi
government will sign since 2015, when it decided to scrap all existing treaties with 83 countries, and brought in a new “Model BIT”.

- Since then India has been able to sign BITs with Belarus and Kyrgyzstan, has concluded an agreement with Cambodia, and is negotiating treaties with about a dozen other countries.

3. Of particular interest will be any discussion held on climate change cooperation between the leaders, given Mr. Modi’s stated commitment on combating global warming, and the Brazilian President’s stand rejecting scientific studies on climate change.

- Last year, Mr. Bolsonaro decided not to host the COP-25 UN climate talks, and although Brazil joined the India-led International Solar Alliance (ISA), it was done under his predecessor President Michel Temer.

4. On January 27, he will also address the “India-Brazil Business Forum” and is expected to travel to Agra to see the Taj Mahal.

5. Among about 20 agreements set to be exchanged, are the Strategic Partnership Action Plan, along with the BIT, a Mutual Legal Assistance Agreement (MLAT) on crime, agreements on double taxation avoidance, bio-energy or ethanol production, cybersecurity, health, mining, oil and gas exploration and investment, and animal husbandry.

India-Brazil relations

- The bilateral relations are based on a common global vision, shared democratic values, and a commitment to foster economic growth of both countries.

- Bilateral relations were elevated to a Strategic Partnership in 2006, heralding a new phase in India-Brazil relations.
The two countries hope to take their partnership to “the next level” and build on the relationship between PM Modi and President Bolsonaro, who met twice in 2019.

Brazil and India will also exchange a Social Security Agreement (SSA), first signed in March 2017, to allow investments in each other’s pension funds, to help business processes and encourage the flow of investment.

In 2018 Indian investments in Brazil were around U.S.$ 6 billion and Brazilian investments in India are estimated at U.S.$ 1 billion and the bilateral trade stands at about $8 billion.

Brazil is the largest producer and exporter of sugar, and claims Indian subsidies are inconsistent with global trade rules.

While Mr. Bolsonaro is known internationally for other controversial “far-right” beliefs on gender and orientation, and rights for indigenous tribes, he could face protests in India over Brazil’s complaint at the World Trade Organisation against New Delhi’s subsidies to sugarcane farmers.

Source: The Hindu

Tenth Schedule
GS-II | 22 January, 2020


Prelims and Mains focus: about the SC judgement and concerns raised by it for timely disqualification of defecting MPs and MLAs; about the Tenth Schedule
The Supreme Court on Tuesday asked Parliament to amend the Constitution to strip Legislative Assembly Speakers of their exclusive power to decide whether legislators should be disqualified or not under the anti-defection law.

Context: On Tuesday, in a 31-page judgment, a three-judge Bench led by Justice Rohinton F. Nariman questioned why a Speaker, who is a member of a particular political party and an insider in the House, should be the “sole and final arbiter” in the disqualification of a political defector.

Background

- This is the second time in as many months the court has highlighted the issue of taking away the disqualification power under the Tenth Schedule from Speakers.

- In a 109-page judgment by a three-judge Bench led by Justice N.V. Ramana in the Karnataka MLAs’ disqualification case, the court had held that a Speaker who cannot stay aloof from the pressures and wishes of his political party does not deserve to occupy his chair.

- This judgment of November last, also urged Parliament to “reconsider strengthening certain aspects of the Tenth Schedule, so that such undemocratic practices are discouraged”.

- The Tuesday judgment came on an appeal filed by Congress legislator Keisham Meghchandra Singh against the Manipur Assembly Speaker for the disqualification of Minister T. Shyamkumar, who after contesting in the Congress ticket, switched sides to favour the BJP.

- The court asked the State Assembly Speaker to decide the disqualification petition in four weeks. The petitioners were given liberty to approach
Concerns highlighted by the SC

- It is time Parliament had a rethink on whether disqualification petitions ought to be entrusted to a Speaker as a quasi-judicial authority when such Speaker continues to belong to a particular political party either de jure or de facto.

- For that matter, it asked why disqualification proceedings under the Tenth Schedule (anti-defection law) should be kept in-house and not be given to an “outside” authority. Even the final authority for removal of a judge is outside the judiciary and in Parliament, it reasoned.

- Only swift and impartial disqualification of defectors would give “real teeth” to the Tenth Schedule. The anti-defection law was enacted in 1985 to weed out corruption and money power from politics. A person who had incurred disqualification for defection does not deserve to be an MP or an MLA even for a single day.

What did the court recommend?

- Disqualification petitions under the Tenth Schedule should be adjudicated by a mechanism outside Parliament or the Legislative Assemblies. The court suggested a permanent tribunal headed by a retired Supreme Court judge or a former High Court Chief Justice.

- The court said the Speakers should decide Tenth Schedule disqualifications within a “reasonable period”. What was ‘reasonable’ would depend on the facts of each case. Unless there were “exceptional circumstances”, disqualification petitions under the Tenth Schedule should be decided by Speakers within three months. The court noted that this period was ‘reasonable’, as the ordinary life of the Lok Sabha or the Legislative Assemblies was merely five years.
About the Tenth Schedule

- The Tenth Schedule was inserted in the Constitution in 1985 by the 52nd Amendment Act.

- It lays down the process by which legislators may be disqualified on grounds of defection by the Presiding Officer of a legislature based on a petition by any other member of the House.

- The decision on question as to disqualification on ground of defection is referred to the Chairman or the Speaker of such House, and his decision is final.

- The law applies to both Parliament and state assemblies.

Disqualification:

If a member of a house belonging to a political party:

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

Exceptions under the law:

Legislators may change their party without the risk of disqualification in certain circumstances. The law allows a party to merge with or into another party provided that at least two-thirds of its legislators are in favour of the merger. In such a scenario, neither the members who decide to merge, nor the ones who
Decision of the Presiding Officer is subject to judicial review:

The law initially stated that the decision of the Presiding Officer is not subject to judicial review. This condition was struck down by the Supreme Court in 1992, thereby allowing appeals against the Presiding Officer’s decision in the High Court and Supreme Court. However, it held that there may not be any judicial intervention until the Presiding Officer gives his order.

Merits of anti-defection law:

- Provides stability to the government by preventing shifts of party allegiance.
- Ensures that candidates remain loyal to the party as well the citizens voting for him.
- Promotes party discipline.
- Facilitates merger of political parties without attracting the provisions of Anti-defection
- Expected to reduce corruption at the political level.
- Provides for punitive measures against a member who defects from one party to another.

Various Recommendations to overcome the challenges posed by the law:

1. Dinesh Goswami Committee on electoral reforms: Disqualification should be limited to following cases:
   - A member voluntarily gives up the membership of his political party
   - A member abstains from voting, or votes contrary to the party whip in a motion of vote of confidence or motion of no-confidence. Political parties could issue whips only when the government was in danger.

2. Law Commission (170th Report)
   - Provisions which exempt splits and mergers from disqualification to be deleted.
   - Pre-poll electoral fronts should be treated as political parties under anti-
defection
• Political parties should limit issuance of whips to instances only when the
government is in danger.

3. Election Commission:
• Decisions under the Tenth Schedule should be made by the President/
Governor on the binding advice of the Election Commission.

Source: The Hindu

Thirty Metre Telescope (TMT)
GS-III | 22 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Science and Technology- Developments and their
Applications and Effects in Everyday Life.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the telescope and its applications; roadblocks in
its construction

News: India, a partner in the construction of one of the largest telescopes in
the world, has said it wants the project to be moved out of the proposed site at
Mauna Kea, a dormant volcano in Hawaii.

About the Telescope and its applications
• The Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) is a new class of extremely large
   telescopes that will allow us to see deeper into space and observe cosmic
   objects with unprecedented sensitivity.
• With its 30 m prime mirror diameter, TMT will be three times as wide, with
   nine times more area, than the largest currently existing visible-light
   telescope in the world. This will provide unparalleled resolution with TMT
images more than 12 times sharper than those from the Hubble Space Telescope.

- When operational, TMT will provide new observational opportunities in essentially every field of astronomy and astrophysics.
- The TMT will enable scientists to study fainter objects far away from us in the universe, which gives information about early stages of evolution of the universe. Also, it will give us finer details of not-so-far-away objects like undiscovered planets and other objects in the Solar System and planets around other stars.
Countries involved in its construction:

The $2 billion project is a joint venture (JV) involving five countries:

1. **USA** (California Institute of Technology)
2. **Japan** (National Institutes of Natural Sciences of Japan)
3. **China** (National Astronomical Observatories of the Chinese Academy of Sciences)
4. **India** (the Department of Science and Technology)
5. **Canada** (National Research Council)

Why does India want the project side to be shifted to an alternate site?

- The project has been marred by protests for over a decade. The proposed site is considered sacred to indigenous Hawaiians, and also has too many observatories for one more such massive establishment to come up.

- The difficulty is that even if construction in Mauna Kea were to go ahead, there could be future agitations.

- Protests at the site last year saw scientists unable to access other telescope facilities in Mauna Kea. The project has been delayed by nearly five years and should have begun operations by 2025.

- **India has committed $200 million, which is about a tenth of the proposed cost.** The telescope needs 492 precisely polished mirrors and India is to contribute 83 of them. The project delay has meant that these manufacturing contracts have also been delayed.

- The level of contribution determines the amount of viewing time, or slots, that the member-countries' scientists get on the machine. Thus India, in a given year, stands to get 10% of the available slots; any downtime could potentially eat into those.
Where is the proposed alternate site?

- The next best site to locate the telescope is the Observatorio del Roque de los Muchachos (ORM) on La Palma in the **Canary Islands, Spain**.

- Hanle, in Ladakh, was also in the running to host the TMT, but lost out to **Mauna Kea**, which is considered a superior site due to the imaging possibilities it offers, its **stable weather**, and also because it has the necessary infrastructure to manage telescopes, already being host to several telescopes.

**Roadblocks in its construction**

- The TMT has been a litigious site since 2014. In 2018, the Supreme Court of Hawaii gave permission for construction to proceed but the project’s proponents have not made progress because they were obstructed twice, in 2015 and 2019, respectively, from construction.

- Representatives from member countries are expected to convene in Los Angeles in February to decide on project modalities.

- India too has its problems with hosting ambitious science projects. The **Indian Neutrino Observatory, proposed to come up in Theni, Tamil Nadu**, has also been stalled due to protests against the project in the State.

Source: The Hindu
News: An inter-ministerial panel has approved a Ministry of Shipping proposal for deepening and optimisation of inner harbour facilities of the Paradip Port Trust.

Details of the project

- A panel chaired by Department of Economic Affairs Secretary, after consultations with the Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Shipping and NITI Aayog, recently gave in-principle approval to this project. The project will be taken up on a common user basis after clearing of financial and technical bids.

- The total project cost is estimated at Rs 3,025 crore and the project will be executed in the public-private-partnership (PPP) mode.

- Prospective bidders will need to have minimum net worth of 50 per cent of the project cost to qualify for bidding.

- The Paradip Port Trust will invite bids from private players for execution of the project, which will enable construction of Western dock captive berths to handle capesize vessels.
- The project will also facilitate import of coking coal for steel sector and other industries.

About the Paradip Port

- Located in Odisha, the deepwater Paradip Port handles various cargo like crude oil, iron ore, thermal coal, coking coal, limestone, manganese and fertilisers among others.

- The port handled total traffic of 109.27 million metric tonnes (MMT) in
The proposed deepening and optimisation of the inner harbour facilities will add annual handling capacity of another 25 MMT to the port’s overall capacity. Post completion of the inner harbour facilities, Paradip Port Trust plans to take up construction of outer harbour project at an estimated cost of Rs 10,000 crore.

**Initiatives taken by the govt. in Infrastructure sector**

- As part of the National Infrastructure Pipeline prepared by the Finance Ministry for next five years, the Centre is working to approve all projects where financing can be tied up quickly and which are ready to be executed.

- Apart from infrastructure projects in the PPP mode, the Finance Ministry is also working on clearing infra projects that will be implemented by the Central government as well as states.

- The Finance Ministry, last month, unveiled Rs 102 lakh crore of infrastructure projects that will be implemented during fiscal year 2020 and 2025, with the Centre contributing nearly 39 per cent towards these projects, states accounting for another 39 per cent and the private sector 22 per cent.

- Of the total project capital expenditure during fiscals 2020 to 2025, sectors such as energy (24 per cent), urban (16 per cent), railways (13 per cent) and roads (19 per cent) are estimated to account for over 70 per cent of the projected infrastructure investments in India.

- Port sector is estimated to attract investments of Rs 1.01 lakh crore during this period, including an estimated investment of Rs 16,128 crore in the next fiscal year, as per the Finance Ministry.
About National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP)

It is estimated that India would need to spend $4.5 trillion on infrastructure by 2030 to sustain its growth rate. The endeavour of the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP), is to make this happen in an efficient manner.

Funding: The central government and state governments would have an equal share of 39% each in the NIP. The private sector, on the other hand, would have 22% share which the government expects to increase to 30% by 2025.

- National Infrastructure Pipeline will ensure that infrastructure projects are adequately prepared and launched.
- Each Ministry/ Department would be responsible for the monitoring of projects so as to ensure their timely and within-cost implementation.
- It will help in stepping-up annual infrastructure investment to achieve the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of $5 trillion by 2024-25.

Need for infrastructure funding:

- Availability of quality infrastructure is a pre-requisite to achieve broad-based and inclusive growth on a sustainable basis.
- Investment in infrastructure is also necessary for sustaining the high growth rate of India.

Seaports in India
UPSC "PT" DNA (Daily News Analysis)
New Industrial Policy
GS-III | 22 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Effects of Liberalization on the Economy, Changes in Industrial Policy and their Effects on Industrial Growth.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the new industrial policy and its key objectives

**News:** With the government aiming to finalise the new industrial policy within the current financial year, the **Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)** is seeking specific inputs from ministries and states on focus areas to boost manufacturing and private investment.

**Background**

Last week, the government organised an **inter-ministerial workshop** on 14 priority sectors that would need a fillip to boost manufacturing to $1 trillion, including capital goods, electronics, food processing, metals and mining, tourism and renewable energy.

**About the new policy**

- The new industrial policy, which will **come over two decades after the last policy was implemented in 1991**, has a “wider” focus, especially since manufacturing is expected to account for 20 per cent of India’s $5-trillion economy target.

- The broad goal is to give a **boost to manufacturing**, which has many complexities. It is now embedded in the services sector and manufacturing is also getting more automated. Therefore the govt. also need to keep
employment in mind.

- This industrial policy is still in the making. It is still in an infancy stage. A lot of material has been collected and a lot of consultations have been held, but there is still more to be done.

- The government is looking to resolve issues related to ease of doing business, including developing clusters for backward and forward linkages in the supply chain.

**Way ahead**

- Work is on to understand how to bring in more policy incentives to attract investment, how to make the process easier for these sectors and how to make credit available to them at an affordable rate.

- The idea is to bring more private sector investment in all these priority sectors.

Source: Indian Express

**World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2020 report**

**Syllabus subtopic:** Important International Institutions, agencies and fora - their Structure, Mandate

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the report and its key highlights; About ILO and its other reports

**News:** UN's International Labour Organization released its report, The World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2020 (WESO) on Monday,
About the report

The annual WESO Trends report analyses key labour market issues, including unemployment, labour underutilisation, working poverty, income inequality, labour income share and factors that exclude people from decent work.

Key highlights of the report

- **Global unemployment** is projected to increase by around 2.5 million in 2020 and almost half a billion people are working fewer paid hours than they would like or lack adequate access to paid work.

- Global unemployment has been roughly stable for the last nine years but slowing global economic growth means that, as the global labour force increases, not enough new jobs are being generated to absorb new entrants to the labour market.

- In addition, 165 million people do not have enough paid work, and 120 million have either given up actively searching for work or otherwise lack access to the labour market. In total, more than 470 million people worldwide are affected.

- Many African countries are experiencing a drop in real incomes and a rise in poverty.

- Moderate or extreme working poverty is expected to edge up in 2020-21 in developing countries, increasing the obstacles to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 1 on eradicating poverty everywhere by 2030. Currently working poverty (defined as earning less than USD 3.20 per day in purchasing power parity terms) affects more than 630 million workers, or one in five of the global working population.
Inequalities related to gender, age and geographical location continue to plague the job market, with the report showing that these factors limit both individual opportunity and economic growth.

Some 267 million young people aged 15-24 are not in employment, education or training, and many more endure substandard working condition.

The rise in trade restrictions and protectionism, which could have a significant impact on employment, is seen as a potentially worrying trend, as is the significant drop in the share of national income in the form of wages, compared to other forms of production. Labour underutilisation and poor-quality jobs mean our economies and societies are missing out on the potential benefits of a huge pool of human talent.

What does the report recommend?

- Countries must ensure that economic growth and development occurs in a way that leads to the reduction of poverty and better working conditions in low-income countries, through structural transformation, technological upgrading and diversification.

- We will only find a sustainable, inclusive path of development if we tackle labour market inequalities and gaps in access to decent work.

About International Labour Organisation (ILO)

- The ILO is a UN agency whose mandate is to advance social justice and promote decent work by setting international labour standards.
- Established in 1919
- HQ: Geneva, Switzerland
- India is a founder member of ILO
- The ILO registers complaints against entities that are violating international rules; however, it does not impose sanctions on governments.
The ILO has **187 member states**: 186 of the 193 UN member states plus the Cook Islands are members of the ILO.

In 1969, the organisation received the **Nobel Peace Prize** for improving peace among classes, pursuing decent work and justice for workers, and providing technical assistance to other developing nations.

**Reports published by ILO**

1. World Employment and Social Outlook report
2. Global Wage Report
3. World Social Protection Report

Source: Indian Express
**Syllabus subtopic:** Important International Institutions, agencies and fora - their Structure, Mandate.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** About the Index and its findings on India and the world: about EIT and its various reports

**News:** The latest edition of the Democracy Index spells gloom for India. The world’s biggest democracy **slipped 10 places in the 2019 global ranking to 51st place.**

**About the study**

- The report, “*A year of democratic setbacks and popular protest*”, published on Wednesday by The Economist Intelligence Unit — the research and analysis division of The Economist Group, which is the sister company to The Economist newspaper — **records how global democracy fared**, analysing 165 independent states and two territories.

**India’s performance on the Index**

- India’s overall score **fell from 7.23 to 6.9, on a scale of 0-10, within a year (2018-2019) — the country’s lowest since 2006.**
- India was graded in electoral process and pluralism (8.67), government functioning (6.79), political participation (6.67), political culture (5.63) and civil liberties (6.76).
- In the Asia and Australasia region, India ranks eighth, behind Taiwan and Timor-Leste.
Reasons given for India’s low score

- The survey attributes the primary cause of “the democratic regression” to “an erosion of civil liberties in the country”.

- The report talks about the repeal of both Article 370 and Article 35A and how ahead of the move, “the government deployed a large number of troops in J&K, imposed various other security measures and placed local leaders under house arrest, including those with pro-India credentials."

- “The government also restricted Internet access in the State,” it notes. It says the NRC exercise in Assam excluded 1.9 million people from the final list, and that “the vast majority of people excluded from the NRC are Muslims.”

- On the CAA, the report says, “The new citizenship law has enraged the large Muslim population, stoked communal tensions and generated large protests in major cities.”

- The Index also categorises India under “flawed democracies”, countries that hold free and fair elections and where basic civil liberties are respected, but have significant weaknesses in aspects of democracy, such as problems in governance, an underdeveloped political culture and low levels of political participation.

- According to the report, there are only 22 “full democracies” as compared to 54 “authoritarian regimes” and as many “flawed democracies,” that include the U.S.

Global score

- The average global score also recorded its worst value ever, down from
5.48 in 2018 to 5.44, driven by a sharp regression in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, a lesser one in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, and by stagnation in the remaining regions that were covered.

- Almost one-half (48.4%) of the world’s population live in a democracy of some sort, although only 5.7% reside in a “full democracy”, down from 8.9% in 2015 as a result of the US being demoted from a “full democracy” to a “flawed democracy” in 2016.

- The total score of some 68 countries declined from 2018, but almost as many (65) recorded an improvement. Thailand registered the biggest improvement in score owing to an election in March 2019, which was the first since the military coup d’état in May 2014, while China registered the greatest decline as discrimination against minorities, especially in Xinjiang, intensified, and digital surveillance of the population continued apace.

- The report describes the year in Asia as one filled with “drama and tumult,” with Hong Kong being the epicentre of protest in the continent. Globally, “the sheer number of protests spanning different time zones” caught the attention of commentators everywhere, says the report, topped by Norway (9.87) and followed by Iceland, Sweden and New Zealand. North Korea (1.08) figures at the bottom.

About Economist Intelligence Unit

- The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) is a British business within the Economist Group providing forecasting and advisory services through research and analysis, such as monthly country reports, five-year country economic forecasts, country risk service reports, and industry reports.

- The EIU provides country, industry, and management analysis worldwide and
incorporates the former Business International Corporation, a UK company acquired by its parent company in 1986. The EIU has several offices across the globe including two offices in China and one in Hong Kong.

Publications:

1. E-readiness rankings
2. Global Liveability Ranking
3. Quality-of-Life Index
4. Democracy Index
5. CHAMPS (China)

Source: The Hindu

Coronavirus
GS-II | 23 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic:

- Important International Institutions, agencies and fora - their Structure, Mandate.

Prelims and Mains focus: About the Coronavirus: its origins; symptoms and measures taken to contain it

News: Deaths from China’s new flu-like virus rose to 17 on January 22, heightening global fears of contagion from an infection suspected to have come from animals.

Background

- The previously unknown and contagious coronavirus strain emerged from the central city of Wuhan, with cases now detected as far away as the
United States. Officials believe the origin to be a market where wildlife is traded illegally.

- With more than 11 million people, Wuhan is central China's main industrial and commercial centre and an important transport hub, home to the country's largest inland port and gateway to its giant Three Gorges hydroelectric dam.

- The rise in the mobility of the public has objectively increased the risk of the epidemic spreading.

Global health emergency?

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) began an emergency meeting to rule if the outbreak was a global health emergency.

- The virus has spread from Wuhan around China to population centres including Beijing, Shanghai, Macau and Hong Kong. Abroad, Thailand has confirmed four cases, while the United States, Taiwan, South Korea and Japan have each reported one.

- The Chinese-ruled gambling hub of Macau confirmed its first case of pneumonia linked to the coronavirus and tightened body-temperature screening measures.

- A first case of the virus emerged in Hong Kong on January 22, media reported. The patient arrived via high-speed railway from the mainland and had been quarantined.

- New cases may appear as China has stepped up monitoring. But there was no evidence of "super-spreaders" capable of disseminating the virus more widely, as happened during the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) outbreak. SARS was thought to have crossed to humans from the United States.
civet cats sold for food.
Precautions taken worldwide

- Airports round the world have stepped up screening of people from China.
- **Russia’s** consumer safety watchdog said it had strengthened its **sanitary and quarantine control**, **Britain** said it would start enhanced monitoring of passengers arriving from Wuhan and Singapore started screening all passengers arriving from China.
- **Mexico** said it was investigating a potential case of the virus.
- **North Korea** banned foreign tourists from January 22 due to the virus, several foreign tour operators said, losing one of its main sources of foreign currency.
- **India**: Passengers are being screened at airports and no cases have been detected. A travel advisory had been issued and posted on the Health Ministry’s website.

About the Coronavirus

- The coronavirus is a family of viruses that can **cause a lot of mild to life-threatening diseases**.

- It is the cousin of the more popular **Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) virus** and the **Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) virus**. Mostly these viruses affect animals and do not spread to human beings. However, there are seven strains of this virus that can affect humans.

- The symptoms include cough, fever, shortness of breath, and difficulty in breathing. In severe cases, the condition can progress to pneumonia, kidney failure and even death. **For now, there is no vaccine for the new virus.**

- All the six coronaviruses known to humans, including the one that caused severe acute respiratory disease, originated from wild mammals.

- The virus is **constantly adapting and mutating** which makes controlling the outbreak a challenge for the authorities.
• The virus can **spread via human-to-human contact** and can also spread via respiratory transmission.

Source: The Hindu

UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP)

**Syllabus subtopic:**
- India and its Neighborhood- Relations.
- Important International Institutions, agencies and fora - their Structure, Mandate.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** About the issues raised at the meeting by Pakistan; about UNMOGIP and India’s position on it; about WEF

**News:** Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday urged the international powers, including the UN and the U.S., to **help deescalate tensions with India**, saying they “must act” to **prevent the two nuclear- armed countries from reaching a point of no return**.

- He also claimed that India might attempt to raise tensions at the border in order to divert attention from domestic protests against the new citizenship law and the Kashmir issue.
- Mr. Khan also demanded that **UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP)** be allowed along the Line of Control.

**Background**

Mr. Khan, is in Davos, Switzerland to attend the World Economic Forum annual meeting.
About UNMOGIP

- **Established:** January 1949
- **Location:** India and Pakistan
- **Headquarters:** Islamabad (November to April) and Srinagar (May to October)
- **Method of financing:** UNMOGIP is funded through the UN regular budget

The first group of United Nations military observers arrived in the mission area on 24 January of 1949 to supervise the ceasefire between India and Pakistan in the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

These observers, under the command of the Military Adviser appointed by the UN Secretary-General, formed the nucleus of the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP).

Following renewed hostilities of 1971, UNMOGIP has remained in the area to observe developments pertaining to the strict observance of the ceasefire of 17 December 1971 and report thereon to the Secretary-General.

India maintains that the UNMOGIP, has outlived its utility and is irrelevant after the Shimla Agreement and the consequent establishment of the LoC.

Source: The Hindu

Commission for subÂcategorisation of Other Backward Classes

GS-II | 23 January, 2020
Syllabus subtopic: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the commission: its mandate and significance; Article 340

News: The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved a six-month extension in the tenure of the commission to examine subcategorisation of Other Backward Classes (OBC).

- The Cabinet also approved an addition to the commission's terms of reference.

Background:

- The Commission was constituted under Article 340 of the Constitution with the approval of President on 2nd October, 2017 with an initial time frame of 12 weeks.

Why did the commission sought an extension?

- The commission has come to the view that it would require some more time to submit its report since the repetitions, ambiguities, inconsistencies and errors of spelling or transcription, etc., appearing in the existing Central list of OBCs need to be cleared.
- Hence the commission has sought extension of its term by six months, that is up to July 31, 2020 and also addition in its existing terms of reference.

Mandate of the Commission

- The commission has been appointed to look into the existing list of OBCs and categorise the castes that have not benefitted from reservation in government jobs and education.
• It is also expected to give its recommendations to ensure that these marginalised communities get the benefits of various schemes.

• The commission will now also study the various entries in the Central list of OBCs and recommend correction of any repetitions, ambiguities, inconsistencies and errors of spelling or transcription.

• The expenditure involved are related to the establishment and administration costs of the Commission, which would continue to be borne by the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment.

• The commission is headed by the G. Rohini, former Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court.

Significance

The Communities in the existing list of OBCs which have not been able to get any major benefit of the scheme of reservation for OBCs for appointment in Central Government posts & for admission in Central Government Educational Institutions are expected to be benefitted upon implementation of the recommendations of the Commission. The Commission is likely to make recommendations for benefit of such marginalized communities in the Central List of OBCs.

Article 340 in the Indian Constitution

Appointment of a Commission to investigate the conditions of backward classes

1. The President may by order appoint a Commission consisting of such persons as he thinks fit to investigate the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes within the territory of India and the difficulties under which they labour and to make recommendations as to the steps that should be taken by the Union or any State to remove such difficulties and to
improve their condition and as to the grants that should be made for the purpose by the Union or any State the conditions subject to which such grants should be made, and the order appointing such Commission shall define the procedure to be followed by the Commission.

2. A Commission so appointed shall investigate the matters referred to them and present to the President a report setting out the facts as found by them and making such recommendations as they think proper.

3. The President shall cause a copy of the report so presented together with a memorandum explaining the action taken thereon to be laid before each House of Parliament.

Source: The Hindu

India-Brazil agreement on legal and criminal cooperation

Syllabus subtopic: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India’s interests.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the Brazilian President’s visit: agreements to be signed and their significance; about India-Brazil relations

News: The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved an agreement on bilateral legal and criminal cooperation to be sealed during the coming visit of President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil.

Context: Brazilian President Bolsonaro is scheduled to arrive on Friday to be the
Chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations.

**Aim of the agreement**

- To **enhance effectiveness** of both the countries in **investigation and prosecution of crime** through cooperation and **mutual legal assistance** in criminal matters.

- It is expected to **bolster counterterror cooperation** between the two countries.

**Other agreements to be signed**

**Three pacts** covering:

1. research in minerals and mining,
2. child behaviour and
3. energy cooperation.

**MoU for cooperation in the oil and natural gas sector**

- The MoU in the energy sector will allow for **joint exploration in the petroleum and natural gas segment**.

- Under the MoU, both sides will work towards establishing cooperation in the E&P (exploration & production) initiatives in Brazil and India, research & development in this sector, exploring collaboration in liquefied natural gas projects in Brazil, India and third countries.

- It will also encourage collaboration in oil energy and environmental issues, including energy policies such as energy efficiency, energy research development and expansion of the regional energy infrastructure networks.
Vyommitra: ISRO’s half-humanoid


Prelims and Mains focus: About Vyommitra and the functions it can perform; its significance; about Gaganyaan

News: The ISRO unveiled its first ‘woman’ astronaut, named Vyommitra, to an international gathering in Bengaluru on Wednesday.

About Vyommitra

- Vyommitra (vyoma-space, mitra-friend) the prototype of the half-humanoid, made for the first unmanned Gaganyaan mission.

- The artificial intelligence-based robotic system is being developed at a robotics lab at the VSSC in Thiruvananthapuram for an unmanned flight of ISRO’s GSLV III rocket in December 2020, which, along with a second unmanned flight in July 2021, will serve as the test of ISRO’s preparedness for its maiden manned space mission, Gaganyaan, being targeted for 2022 to mark 75 years of India’s independence.

- Vyommitra, equipped with a head, two arms and a torso, is built to mimic crew activity inside the crew module of Gaganyaan. It will have a human-like face, with lips synchronised for movement to mimic speech.

- Once it is fully developed, Vyommitra will be able to use equipment on board.
the spacecraft’s crew module, like safety mechanisms and switches, as well as receive and act on commands sent from ground stations.
Functions it can perform

- It can monitor through module parameters, alert crew members and perform life support operations.

- It can perform activities like switch panel operations. It can also be a companion and converse with the astronauts, recognise them and respond to their queries.

- Attaining launch and orbital postures, responding to the environment, generating warnings, replacing carbon dioxide canisters, operating switches, monitoring of the crew module, receiving voice commands, responding via speech (bilingual),” are among its functions listed.

Significance

- The unmanned test flight with a humanoid will be the first human rated flight of the GSLV Mk III.

- With ISRO set to be the first to attempt to send a manned mission to space without carrying out tests with animals, the flight with Vyommitra will serve as a test of the capabilities of the rocket system to take a human to space and back. Among the key parameters that will be tested is the efficacy of the crew module where astronauts will fly, whether its environment is conducive for human flight, and the safety factor.

Is this the first time ISRO is deploying a robotic system?

No. ISRO has used robotic and autonomous system for many of its missions, including the recent Chandrayaan-2 mission where the Vikram lander was functioning in autonomous mode — using data stored in its systems — while attempting to make a soft landing on the moon’s surface.
Pathalgadi Movement
GS-III | 23 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Linkages between Development and Spread of Extremism.

Prelims and Mains focus: About the Pathalgadi movement and its impact on the internal security of India; About Birsa Munda and his contribution

News: Seven persons were taken hostage and later killed, allegedly by armed supporters of the Pathalgadi self-rule movement, in a village in West Singhbhum district of Jharkhand, on Wednesday.

- The killings were said to be a fallout of an old rivalry between supporters of the Pathalgadi movement and those against it.

Background

- In its first cabinet decision on December 29, the Hemant Soren government dropped all cases registered against people during the Pathalgadi movement of 2017-2018.

- The previous BJP government in the state headed by Raghubard Das had reportedly booked more than 10,000 people for sedition under Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code for participating in the movement.

What is Pathalgadi?

- ‘Pathalgadi’ literally means carving a stone — it is an ancient tradition in the tribal communities of Jharkhand. Adivasis usually erected engraved stones to mark the birth or death of a person.
The practice took on a new meaning after tribal activists, former IAS officer B.D. Sharma (now deceased) and IPS officer Bandi Oraon, initiated the practice of erecting stones outside villages after the Panchayat (Extension of Scheduled Area) Act came into existence in 1996. That Act empowered the gram sabhas or panchayats to safeguard and preserve their traditions, community spaces and culture, and gave them the right to mandatory consultation in land acquisition.

The two civil servants got stones engraved with the provisions of the PESA Act to spread awareness among the tribals about their rights.

These green-painted stones are usually 15-feet long and 4-feet wide, and are found in four districts of Jharkhand, including Khunti, the birthplace of Adivasi icon Birsa Munda. The stones include excerpts from the PESA Act and the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India, which deals with the administration and control of ‘scheduled areas’ as well as of Scheduled Tribes residing in that area.

The stones signify self-rule by the local gram panchayat, declaring the village as sovereign territory and prohibiting the entry of outsiders into the village. The supporters of the movement also declare the gram sabha as the highest authority, and refuse to obey the state and central governments.

CNT and SPT acts

The (Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act) CNT Act was enacted in 1908, eight years after the death of Birsa Munda. This Act extends to the north and south Chotanagpur and Palamau divisions.

The (Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act) SNT Act was passed in 1949, extending to Dumka, Sahibganj, Godda, Deoghar and Pakur in the Santhal Pargana region in eastern Jharkhand.
Together, these Acts **granted special protection and land rights to the tribals** and **prohibited the transfer of tribal land to non-tribals** or the commercial use of the land **without the permission of the concerned gram sabha**.

**BJP govt’s ordinances**

- In May 2016, the BJP government introduced two ordinances — the **Chotanagpur Tenancy Act 1908** (Amendment) Ordinance and **Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act 1949** (Amendment) Ordinance, which **enabled commercial use of tribal land and made it easily transferable**. The Act empowered the government to procure agricultural land from tribals for non-agricultural purposes.

- The **Pathalgadi practice regained prominence after the ordinances were brought in**, with tribal people erecting new stones as a mark of protest. They named it a **battle for “jal-jangal-zameen” (water, jungles and land)**.

- The ordinances were passed by the Jharkhand assembly in June 2017, but after objections from political parties like the JMM, Congress, the Left as well as residents of the state, Jharkhand Governor Draupadi Murmu asked the government to reconsider its decision. The government later withdrew the ordinances.

**Violence over Pathalgadi**

- However, clashes between the establishment and the local population continued and turned violent, leading to allegations of the movement becoming more radicalised and fuelled by separatism.

- In June 2018, five women of an NGO, who were in Khunti district to raise awareness against human trafficking, were allegedly abducted and raped. The police blamed leaders of the Pathalgadi movement for the crime.
According to a report, more than 10,000 people were booked for sedition between June 2017 and July 2018, when the movement was at its peak, which is “possibly the highest number of people booked at one time in one district anywhere in India”. These people were booked for “exciting, or attempting to excite feelings of disaffection against the government”.

Thereafter, the local residents decided to boycott the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

About Birsa Munda

Bisra Munda was a folk hero and a tribal freedom fighter hailing from the Munda tribe. He was a spearhead behind the Millenarian movement that arose in the Bihar and Jharkhand belt in the 19th century under the British colonisation. He is also known as ‘Dharti Abba’ or the Earth Father.

Bisra wanted to reform the tribal society and so, he urged them to let go of beliefs in witchcraft and instead, stressed on the importance of prayer, staying away from alcohol, having faith in God and observing a code of conduct. Based on these, he started the faith of ‘Birsait’.

Bisra started a movement called ‘Ulgulan’, or ‘The Great Tumult’. His struggle against the exploitation and discrimination against tribals led to a big hit against the British government in the form of the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act being passed in 1908. The act restricted the passing on of land from the tribal people to non-tribals.

Source: Indian Express

Amnesty International study
GS-II | 23 January, 2020
Syllabus subtopic:

- Important International Institutions, agencies and fora - their Structure, Mandate.
- Role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders

Prelims and Mains focus: about the report and its findings; about Amnesty and its objectives

News: Amnesty International India study of thousands of tweets found that women politicians are trolled more on social media.

How was the study conducted?

- The data set involved 1,14,716 random samples of 7 million total tweets mentioning 95 Indian women politicians between March and May 2019. Based on nomination papers, the sample of women were MPs in the two most recent Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha elections, MLAs as of February 2019, party office-bearers and spokeswomen, current and former chief ministers, and members from reserved constituencies.

- The categories of online abuse include threats of physical or sexual violence, caste or religious slurs, and sexist discrimination. The Decoders read tweets in English, Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Tamil and Telugu.

- Between July and November 2019, the organisation crowd sourced 1,907 digital volunteers, who were given a random set of tweets. The decoder marked tweets as “abusive” or “problematic” as well as the nature of abuse. Each tweet was marked by multiple people, amounting to 4,74,383 total answers.
The data was then submitted to a team of data scientists “to validate and analyse”. Amnesty said it conducted this analysis in the US and the UK in 2018 to build the world’s “largest crowd-sourced dataset of online abuse against women”.

Key findings of the study

- Over the Lok Sabha election period last summer, one in every seven tweets mentioning women politicians in India were “problematic” or “abusive”, amounting to over 100 such tweets to each woman politician every day.

- Non-BJP women politicians faced 56.7 per cent more online abuse than women politicians from the BJP, according to the study.

- As part of a global quantitative analysis on women contesting elections, the study also found that Indian women politicians faced far more online abuse (13.8 per cent of tweets) than their counterparts in the UK or the US on Twitter (7.1 per cent).

- Muslim women received almost 55.5 per cent more problematic or abusive content than women from other religions.

- Examples of sexist abuses from India included Hindi slurs for ‘witch’ and ‘prostitute’ as well as threats to send the politician concerned to Pakistan.
What did the report recommend?

Given the significance of Twitter among the political elite, the report suggests, “Twitter is failing in its responsibility to respect women's rights online.” It recommends more focus on regional languages in India, continuously evaluating its efforts against online violence against women, and more transparency about its content moderation process.

About Amnesty International (commonly known as Amnesty or AI)
• It is a non-governmental organization (NGO) with its headquarters in the United Kingdom focused on human rights.

• The stated mission of the organization is to campaign for “a world in which every person enjoys all of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments.”

• It works to mobilize public opinion to generate pressure on governments that let abuse take place. Amnesty considers capital punishment to be “the ultimate, irreversible denial of human rights.

• The organization was awarded the 1977 Nobel Peace Prize for its “defence of human dignity against torture,” and the United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights in 1978.

• In the field of international human rights organizations, Amnesty has the third longest history, after the International Federation for Human Rights and broadest name recognition, and is believed by many to set standards for the movement as a whole.

Source: Indian Express
One nation, one road tax

Syllabus subtopic: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the govt.’s move and its implications; need for reform in road tax structure

News: The Union government is making a renewed push to get states on board to levy a uniform road tax for personal vehicles across the country.

Why?
The move is expected to bring relief to automobile buyers, while also helping protect revenue of states as some consumers tend to purchase vehicles in states with lower taxes, resulting in a loss of revenue for those with higher taxes.

Background

- A group of ministers on transport set up by the roads ministry in 2018 had recommended a uniform road tax structure for vehicles across states and that the tax be charged based on the invoice price of a vehicle. For all personal vehicles, the tax should be 8% for a vehicle costing under Rs.10 lakh, 10% for a vehicle costing between Rs.10 lakh and Rs.20 lakh and 12% for a vehicle costing more over Rs.20 lakh.

- A recent meeting between the Centre and state transport ministers to discuss the uniform road tax structure saw most of the ministers agreeing to the proposal.

About Road Tax
Road tax is paid during the registration of a vehicle in a particular state. It is levied along with the goods and services tax (GST) and directly impacts the price of a new vehicle.

Implications

- A rejig in tax rates will have fiscal implications.
- Tinkering with revenue has been a contentious issue. States have been averse to uniform tax rates as some of them would have to take a hit on revenue collection.
- It will depend on the states as road tax features on the state list.

Current scenario

- Currently, each state has a different formula for calculating the tax rate, which leads to anomaly in the final amount.
- For instance, in Delhi, the road tax is calculated based on the make, model, engine and seating capacity of a vehicle. For four-wheelers less than 1,000kg, the tax is more than Rs.3,800.
- However, in Arunachal Pradesh, it is calculated on the basis of the sale price of a four-wheeler, which is 2.5% or Rs.6,250 for a vehicle costing Rs.2.5 lakh, and 6.5% or Rs.1.3 lakh for a car costing over Rs.20 lakh.

Way forward

- On its part, the automobile industry has been pushing for a uniform road tax structure along the lines of the unified tax regime under GST as any arbitrary increase in road taxes by certain state governments results in higher vehicle prices, adversely impacting sales.

- This is a significant development for the auto industry since it was their long-standing demand. Apart from the poor state of the economy, increase in road taxes by states had impacted sales of vehicles in the past one year.
India’s gas-based economy
GS-II | 24 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the draft policy and its significance; initiatives taken to boost gas-based economy, about PESO

News: In a bid to boost India’s gas economy, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural gas on Thursday released a draft city gas distribution policy.

About the draft policy

- The policy could be adopted by states to facilitate speedy implementation of city gas distribution (CGD) networks and value-added services.

- With a view to promote clean and green fuel, the draft policy is looking to make CNG/LNG as the preferred fuel in public transportation. State transport corporations will accord priority to CNG/LNG buses, while purchasing new buses and retrofitting in present alternate fuel fleet (which is viable), in order to actively promote the usage of CNG/LNG in the public transport.

- Reduced road taxes and value-added tax (VAT) may also be in the offing for gas-driven vehicles. In order to provide user-friendly clean and green fuel CNG and PNG to the general public at affordable and reasonable rates, VAT rates may be reviewed and rationalized with a ceiling of 5%.
Further, to promote the safe usage of CNG/LNG in the transport sector, state policy thrust may be given by rationalizing road tax for factory-fitted CNG/LNG vehicles and making them at par with electric vehicles.

Process of implementation

- The draft policy suggests setting up of a committee, under the chairmanship of the chief secretary, which will help formulate policies and streamline the processes for various permissions to develop the CGD infrastructure.

- It will cause setting up of a suitable single-window clearance mechanism for the same in the state for the promotion development of CGD infrastructure and ease of doing business.

- The committee will also make a suitable mechanism for permissions from state divisions of the Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO), NHAI, the railways, etc.

Initiatives taken by the govt. to boost gas-based economy

- Pricing and LNG marketing freedoms have been given to gas producers. LNG terminal capacity is being augmented and the national gas grid is being developed.
- The government will also provide Rs.10,500 crore as viability gap funding for laying pipeline in eastern and north-eastern India. Gas pipeline network will be ready from Kutch to Kohima and Kashmir to Kochi. Around Rs. 4 trillion worth of investment is likely to be made in such projects, which is a challenge as well as an opportunity.

About Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO)
PESO is a department formed by Government of India under Department for the Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) under Ministry of Commerce and Industry, to administer Explosives Act 1884, Explosive Substance Act, Petroleum Act 1934, Inflammable substance Act 1952 and Environment Protection Act 1986 to control import, export, transport, storage and usage of explosive materials, flammable materials, pressure vessels, cryogenic vessels, design and installation of all necessary and relevant infrastructure etc.

PESO is a regulatory authority, with autonomous status. The Department is headed by Chief Controller of Explosives and is headquartered at Nagpur in the State of Maharashtra in India.


It was established during the British India in 1890s as Department of Explosives and later expanded to various other activities.

PESO is known for one of the most efficient departments in India. The officers are selected by the UPSC into Indian Petroleum and Explosives Safety Service (IPESS), a central civil services cadre.

It is a statutory authority.

Source: Livemint

Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI-2019)
Syllabus subtopic: Role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders.

Prelims and Mains focus: About the key highlights of the index; India’s performance; About Transparency International

News: Transparency International released the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI2019) on Thursday.

About the Index

The 2019 CPI draws on 13 surveys and expert assessments to measure public sector corruption in 180 countries and territories, giving each a score from zero (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean).

Key highlights

- The top ranked countries are **New Zealand and Denmark**, with scores of 87 each, followed by Finland (86), Singapore (85), Sweden (85) and Switzerland (85).

- India’s ranking has slipped from 78 to 80 compared to the previous year. Its score of 41 out of 100 remains the same.

- In democracies such as India and Australia, unfair and opaque political financing, undue influence in decision-making and lobbying by powerful corporate interest groups have resulted in stagnation or a decline in the control of corruption.

- The report has revealed that a majority of countries are showing little to no
improvement in tackling corruption.

- It also shows corruption is more pervasive in countries where big money can flow freely into electoral campaigns and where governments listen only to the voices of wealthy or well-connected individuals.
In the Asia Pacific region, the average score is 45, after many consecutive years of an average score of 44, which “illustrates general stagnation” in the region.

China has improved its position from 87 to 80 with a score of 41 out of 100, a two-point jump.

Despite the presence of high performers like New Zealand (87), Singapore (85), Australia (77), Hong Kong (76) and Japan (73), the Asia Pacific region hasn’t witnessed substantial progress in anticorruption efforts or results. In addition, low performers like Afghanistan (16), North Korea (17) and Cambodia (20) continue to highlight serious challenges in the region.

According to Transparency International, while often seen as an engine of the global economy, in terms of political integrity and governance, the Asia Pacific region performs only marginally better than the global average.

Many countries see economic openness as a way forward, however, governments across the region, from China to Cambodia to Vietnam, continue to restrict participation in public affairs, silence dissenting voices and keep decisionmaking out of public scrutiny.

Given these issues, it comes as no surprise that vibrant economic powers like China (41), Indonesia (40), Vietnam (37), the Philippines (34) and others continue to struggle to tackle corruption.

About Transparency International (TI)

TI, a nonpartisan, nonprofit nongovernmental organization (NGO) founded in Berlin in 1993 to expose corruption and reduce its harmful effects around the world, especially on the poor and underprivileged.
TI consists of a global network of approximately 100 national chapters devoted to fighting corruption in their home countries. Headquarters are in Berlin.

TI does not conduct investigations into corruption itself but instead brings together officials in the areas of government, business, civil society, and the media to promote transparency in private and public affairs and to lobby for anticorruption measures.

TI targets corruption at every level, from local governments to multinational corporations, in keeping with its belief that corruption creates and perpetuates poverty, weakens democracy, distorts national and international trade, endangers national security, and threatens natural resources around the world.

It focuses on five areas of concern:
1. corruption in politics,
2. corruption in the private sector,
3. corruption in public contracting,
4. poverty and development, and
5. international anticorruption conventions.

TI is governed by a board of directors, which is elected at an annual meeting of national chapters and individual members.

It publishes several annual reports, including the
1. Global Corruption Report,
2. Global Corruption Barometer, and
3. Corruption Perceptions Index, which ranks countries by perceived level of corruption based on surveys of experts.
4. It also publishes books on specific regions and issues Integrity Awards to individuals who expose corruption in their countries.

The organization is primarily funded by government development.
ICJ orders Myanmar to protect Rohingya

GS-II | 24 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Important International Institutions, agencies and fora - their Structure, Mandate.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the court’s ruling and its significance; about the Rohingya issue; about ICJ and its mandate.

**News:** The International Court of Justice (ICJ) on Thursday ordered Myanmar to take urgent measures to protect its Rohingya population from genocide, a ruling cheered by refugees as their first major legal victory since being forced from their homes.

**Background**

- More than 7,30,000 Rohingya fled Myanmar after a military-led crackdown in 2017, and were forced into squalid camps across the border in Bangladesh. UN investigators concluded that the military campaign had been executed with “genocidal intent”.

- **Majority Buddhist Myanmar** generally refuses to describe the Muslim Rohingya as an ethnic group and refers to them as Bangladeshi migrants.

What did the court rule and its significance?

- In a unanimous ruling by the 17 judge panel, the court said the Rohingya face an ongoing threat and Myanmar must act to protect them.

- Rohingya activists, who had come from all over the world to the Hague, reacted with joy to the unanimous ruling, which also explicitly recognised their ethnic minority as a protected group under the Genocide Convention.

- The court’s final decision could take years, and Thursday’s ruling dealt only with Gambia’s request for preliminary measures.

- ICJ rulings are final and binding, but countries have occasionally flouted them, and the court has no formal mechanism to enforce them.

Source: The Hindu

Sagarmatha Dialogue
GS-II | 24 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic:

- Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India’s interests.
- India and its Neighborhood- Relations.

Prelims and Mains focus: About the event and its significance
News: Nepal has invited the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan, along with several other heads of governments and states, for the Sagarmatha Dialogue (Sagarmatha Sambaad).

Background

- India and Pakistan have been caught up in a cycle of hostility which has prevented Islamabad from hosting the SAARC summit since 2016.

- The dialogue aims at drawing all the SAARC leaders and providing an opportunity to break the ice.

About the event

- The Sambaad (dialogue) is named after the world's tallest mountain Sagarmatha (Mount Everest) which is also a symbol of friendship and is meant to promote the notions of common good and collective well-being of humanity. Sagarmatha, being the highest natural landmark on the earth, is also the tallest witness of the unfolding global events.

- The three-day event (first-ever), to be held in Kathmandu, from April 2 will be the biggest diplomatic dialogue in Nepal’s recent history that will be attended by many global figures apart from the leaders of the SAARC countries.

- Invitations have been sent to over 150 foreign guests including heads of government and heads of states, Ministers, business leaders, media, members of multilateral organisations, think tank experts, academics, civil society leaders and activists.

- The event is expected to focus on the threat of climate change (Theme: "Climate Change, Mountains, and the Future of Humanity") to the
modern world. Given the large number of global leaders, the event is expected to emerge as a venue for bilateral interaction among leaders.

- Discussions will also dwell upon the ‘organic link’ between mountains, oceans and many other ecosystems. Largely, the dialogue will be an opportunity to devise on the actions needed to realize the Sustainable Development Goals and commitment made under the Paris Agreement to limit the global temperature increase to 1.5 °C to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

Note:

- **Sagarmatha National Park** is a national park in the Himalayas of eastern Nepal that is dominated by Mount Everest.

- It encompasses an area of 1,148 km² (443 sq mi) in the Solukhumbu District and ranges in elevation from 2,845 to 8,848 m (9,334 to 29,029 ft) at the summit of Mount Everest.

- In the north, it shares the international border with the Qomolangma National Nature Preserve of Tibet. In the east it is adjacent to Makalu Barun National Park, and in the south it extends to Dudh Kosi river. It is part of the Sacred Himalayan Landscape.

Source: The Hindu

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**New snake eel species discovered in Odisha**

GS-III | 24 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation,
Environmental Impact Assessment.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** About the new species of the eel; about ZSI and its functions

**News:** A new snake eel species residing in the Bay of Bengal has been discovered and documented this month (January) by the Estuarine Biology Regional Centre (EBRC) of the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) at Gopalpur-on-sea in Odisha.

**About the new species**

- This new marine species has been named *Ophichthus kailashchandrai* to honour the vast contributions of Dr. Kailash Chandra, Director of ZSI, to Indian animal taxonomy.

- *Ophichthus kailashchandrai* is the eighth species of the *Ophichthus* genus found on the Indian coast.

- It is the fifth new species discovered by the Gopalpur ZSI in the last two years.

- In 2019, two new species of marine eel, *Gymnothorax andamanensesis* and *Gymnothorax smithi* were been discovered by this ZSI centre.
About Zoological Survey of India (ZSI)

- It is a subordinate organization of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Govt. of India.
- It was established in 1916 as a premier Indian organisation in zoological research and studies to promote the survey, exploration and research of the fauna in the country.
- The headquarters is at Kolkata.

The main activities of the ZSI are:
UPSC "PT" DNA (Daily News Analysis)

- Study of the fauna of states
- Fauna of conservation areas
- Fauna of important ecosystems
- Status survey of endangered species
- Fauna of India and
- Ecological Studies & Environmental impact assessments.

Source: The Hindu

Republic Day 2020
GS-II | 24 January,2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Indian Constitution- historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the national war memorial; significance of the republic day

**News:** In a first, homage will be paid to the fallen soldiers during the Republic Day parade this year at the National War Memorial. The ceremony had so far been conducted at India Gate.

**About the National War Memorial**

- The National War Memorial is located at the ‘C’ Hexagon near India Gate. It was built in memory of 22,500 Indian soldiers who had laid down their lives for the country after Independence.

- A new Amar Jawan Jyoti was also established there.

- Since its inauguration in February last year, the National War Memorial has been the venue for the guard of honour at all national events. The Amar Jawan Jyoti will be used for regimental events.
Republic Day parade 2020

- A major attraction at the parade will be the **antisatellite missile tested under Mission Shakti** by the **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)**.

- The Army will showcase the **recently inducted 155 mm Dhanush towed howitzer**.

- There are 16 marching contingents this year, including six from the Army and 22 tableaux from various States and departments.

- The Army would be represented by a mounted column of 61 cavalry, eight mechanised columns, six marching contingents and a flypast by the **Rudra and Dhruv Advanced Light Helicopters** of Army Aviation.

- The traditional Christian hymn **“Abide with me”**, believed to have been a favourite of Mahatma Gandhi, is back on the list of tunes for this year’s **Beating Retreat ceremony**.

- Additionally, the **national song Vande Mataram** will be **played for the first time at the Beating Retreat** this year.

Why is 26th January celebrated as the Republic Day of India?

- The **Constitution came into effect on January 26, 1950**, a date specially chosen to coincide with the **anniversary of ‘Purna Swaraj Diwas’**. **January 26, 1930** was marked as ‘Purna Swaraj Diwas’, or the day the nation would attain complete freedom from its colonisers by the Congress.
The members of the drafting committee felt that the birth of the constitution should be observed on a day that held some significance in their fight for independence. When India was ultimately granted freedom by the British in 1947, but on August 15 and not January 26, the date was instead assigned to celebrating India’s Republic Day.

This was the day the Indian Independence Act was consequently repealed and India was established as a democratic republic, no longer a dominion of the British Crown.

About Mission Shakti

Mission Shakti is a joint programme of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

As part of the mission, an anti-satellite (A-SAT) weapon was launched and targeted an Indian satellite which had been decommissioned. Mission Shakti was carried out from DRDO’s testing range in Odisha’s Balasore.
UPSC "PT" DNA (Daily News Analysis)

Source: The Hindu

Prelims and Mains focus: about LCs: strength, selection of members, objectives

News: The Andhra Pradesh government seems to be contemplating abolishing the Legislative Council going by Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy’s assertion that the “Upper House” did not deserve to exist if it rejects important Bills by violating rules.

About Legislative Councils (LC)

India has a bicameral system i.e., two Houses of Parliament. At the state level, the equivalent of the Lok Sabha is the Vidhan Sabha or Legislative Assembly; that of the Rajya Sabha is the Vidhan Parishad or Legislative Council.

A second House of legislature is considered important for two reasons:

1. to act as a check on hasty actions by the popularly elected House and,
2. to ensure that individuals who might not be cut out for the rough-and-tumble of direct elections too are able to contribute to the legislative process.

Arguments in favour of LCs

• Having a second chamber would allow for more debate and sharing of work between the Houses.
• A Legislative Council can help check hasty actions by the directly elected House.
• The Legislative Council also enables non-elected individuals to contribute to the legislative process.

Arguments against LCs

• Rather than fulfilling the lofty objective of getting intellectuals into the
legislature, the forum is likely to be used to accommodate party functionaries who fail to get elected.

- They can be used to delay progressive legislation.
- It is also an unnecessary drain on the exchequer.
- Unlike Rajya Sabha which has substantial powers to shape non-financial legislation, Legislative Councils lack the constitutional mandate to do so. Legislative Assemblies have the power to override suggestions/amendments made to a legislation by the Council.
- While Rajya Sabha MPs can vote in the election of the President and Vice-President, members of Legislative Councils can’t. MLCs also can’t vote in the elections of Rajya Sabha members.
- As regards Money bills, only fourteen days’ delay can be caused by the Council, which is more or less a formality rather than a barrier in the way of Money Bill passed by the Assembly.

Creation of a LC:

- Under Article 169 of the constitution, Parliament may by law create or abolish the second chamber in a state if the Legislative Assembly of that state passes a resolution to that effect by a special majority.

- Currently, six states have Legislative Councils (Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Telangana).

- Jammu and Kashmir too had one, until the state was bifurcated into the Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh.

Strength of LCs

As per article 171 clause (1) of the Indian Constitution, the total number of members in the legislative council of a state shall not exceed one third of the total number of the members in the legislative Assembly of that state and the total number of members in the legislative council of a state shall in no case be less than 40.
Election of members of LCs

- \(\frac{1}{3}\)rd of members are elected by members of the Assembly.
- \(\frac{1}{3}\)rd by electorates consisting of members of municipalities, district boards and other local authorities in the state.
- \(\frac{1}{12}\)th by an electorate consisting of teachers.
- \(\frac{1}{12}\)th by registered graduates.
- The remaining members are nominated by the Governor from among those who have distinguished themselves in literature, science, art, the cooperative movement, and social service.
- Legislative Councils are permanent Houses, and like Rajya Sabha, one-third of their members retire every two years.

Powers of LCs vis-à-vis Rajya Sabha

The constitution gives Councils limited legislative powers. Unlike Rajya Sabha which has substantial powers to shape non-financial legislation, Legislative Councils lack the constitutional mandate to do so. Legislative Assemblies have the power to override suggestions/amendments made to a legislation by the Council.

Source: The Hindu
Syllabus subtopic: Salient features of the Representation of People’s Act.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the SC remarks on the criminalization of politics; various judgements of SC; about RPA, 1951

News: The Supreme Court on Friday agreed to examine a proposition made by the Election Commission (EC) to ask political parties to not give ticket to those with criminal antecedents.
About the SC judgements on this issue

- In 2002, it made it obligatory for all candidates to file an affidavit before the returning officer, disclosing criminal cases pending against them.

- The famous order to introduce NOTA was intended to make political parties think before giving tickets to the tainted.
In its landmark judgment of March 2014, the SC accepted the urgent need for cleansing politics of criminalisation and directed all subordinate courts to decide on cases involving legislators within a year, or give reasons for not doing so to the chief justice of the high court.

The September 2018 judgment of a Constitution Bench, which had directed political parties to publish online the pending criminal cases against their candidates was not complied with by the political parties.

The judgment had urged Parliament to bring a “strong law” to cleanse political parties of leaders facing trial for serious crimes.

The ruling by a five-judge Bench led by then Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra concluded that rapid criminalisation of politics cannot be arrested by merely disqualifying tainted legislators but should begin by “cleansing” the political parties.

RPA, 1951

Currently, under the Representation of Peoples (RP) Act, lawmakers cannot contest elections only after their conviction in a criminal case.

Section 8 of the Representation of the People (RP) Act, 1951 disqualifies a person convicted with a sentence of two years or more from contesting elections. But those under trial continued to be eligible to contest elections. The Lily Thomas case (2013), however, ended this unfair advantage.

What does the Law Commission say in its report?

The law commission in its report on electoral disqualification in 2014 deliberated on whether disqualification from contesting election should be
triggered upon conviction as it exists today, or at the time of framing of charges by the court? It was of the opinion that, “disqualification at the stage of charging, if accompanied by substantial attendant legal safeguards to prevent misuse, has significant potential in curbing the spread of criminalisation of politics.”

- The commission went on to specify some of these safeguards. One of them being that only criminal offences which have a maximum punishment of five years or more are to be included in this provision. The commission suggested that charges filed up to one year before the date of scrutiny of nominations would not lead to a disqualification. This safeguard would then minimise politically motivated cases from being filed against an individual before an upcoming election. It also suggested that in the case charges framed against sitting MPs/MLAs the trial should be conducted on a day-to-day basis and completed within a year. The election commission in its 2016 note on proposed electoral reforms agrees with the recommendation of the law commission.

Proposed measures to curb criminalization of politics:

- Bringing greater **transparency in campaign financing** is going to make it less attractive for political parties to involve gangsters.

- The Election Commission of India (ECI) should have the power to audit the financial accounts of political parties, or political parties’ finances should be brought under the **right to information (RTI) law**.

- Broader governance will have to improve for voters to reduce the reliance on criminal politicians.

- The Election Commission must take adequate measures to break the nexus between the criminals and the politicians.
• The forms prescribed by the Election Commission for candidates disclosing their convictions, cases pending in courts and so on in their nomination papers is a step in the right direction if it applied properly.

Conclusion

• The Supreme Court's long string of judgments against criminalisation of politics had hardly scratched the surface of the deep rot.

• The Election Commission had tried several measures to curb criminalisation of politics, but to no avail.

• Just a move to steer politics away from the denizens of the criminal world would definitely serve national and public interest.

Source: The Hindu

National Security Act (NSA)
GS-II | 25 January, 2020


Prelims and Mains focus: about the National security act and why it needs to be amended

News: The Supreme Court on Friday refused to pass a “blanket order” against Lieutenant Governor’s decision to place Delhi under the National Security Act (NSA), a law which allows the police to place anyone considered a threat to national security, law and order under preventive detention.
Background

- The NSA was imposed from January 19 to April 18.
- The notification was issued on January 10 amidst widespread protests across the Capital by people belonging to all walks of life against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) of 2019, which grants citizenship on the basis of religion.

What was the petition about?

- The petitioner had submitted that the imposition of NSA was a ruse to scare ordinary people from expressing their fundamental right to dissent on issues like the CAA, the National Population Register (NPR) and the National Register Citizens (NRC).

- The lawyer argued that the January 10 notification was an affront to free speech and expression and the right to dignity.

Reasons cited by the court

- The court cannot pass such general directions, which would “tie” the hands of the authorities.
- These are law and order issues and therefore the court cannot interfere. SC cannot pass a general direction or a blanket order restraining the government from invoking NSA, but it can definitely do something if individual cases of misuse of NSA by authorities are brought to its attention.

About the National Security Act, 1980

- National Security Act allows Central or State governments to prevent any person from acting as a threat to national security.

- The Act also allows the government to preventively detain any person from disrupting supply or maintenance of essential commodities and services to
As per the act, a person can be **detained for a maximum of 12 months** but can be **extended when fresh evidence is produced** by the government.

**Preventive detention in India**

- Preventive Detention is the most contentious part of the scheme fundamental rights in the Indian constitutions **Article 22(3)** provides that if the person who has been arrested or detained under preventive detention laws then the protection against arrest and detention provided under article22 (1) and22 (2) shall not be available to that person.

- Acts that allow preventive detention in India are present since colonial times.

- From the **Bengal Resolution III of 1818 to Rowlatt Acts of 1919** and the **Preventive Detention Act of 1950**, all allow preventive detention.

- The current NSA is close to the 1950 Act.

**Concerns**

- When a person is arrested normally, he or she has certain guarantees to safeguard their basic rights such as being informed of the reason for the arrest, the right to apply for bail, etc. But these rights do not apply for a person arrested under the NSA.

- No FIR is filed under the Act. He/she will not be informed on the grounds for their arrest for 5 days and in some cases, it may of up to 10 days.

- The arrested person is **cannot avail legal assistance before an advisory board** constituted by the government to deal with NSA cases.
Also, the exact data on how many people are detained under the NSA is not clear as the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) do not collect data on NSA cases.

**Arguements against the Act**

- The NSA Act is being misused by all the governments in the country.
- The intended objective to prevent acts that harm our national security is set aside and is being used for self-interests.
- It is like the government is using the act as an extra-judicial power.

**Conclusion**

In spreading democracy often acts such as this hampers the progress. Already, the act is 40 years old and reconsidering it is the need of the hour. Or else, the scary scenario of arbitrary detention for personal goals becomes the norm which does not augur well for the country.

Source: The Hindu

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**Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)**

*GS-II | 25 January, 2020*

**Syllabus subtopic:** Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the move and reasons for it; about the ICDS scheme and its objectives

**News:** Urban areas are likely to receive a renewed focus under the government’s ICDS programme, which provides for anganwadis or daycare centres across the country for delivery of nutrition and preschool education.
About the move

- The government’s think tank, the NITI Aayog, has prepared a draft working paper, which once approved would be circulated to different ministries for consultations.

- These include the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Ministry of Urban Housing and Affairs and the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation.

What are the challenges in the urban areas?

- The first-ever pan-India survey on the nutrition status of children, highlighted that malnutrition among children in urban India is characterised by relatively poor levels of breastfeeding as mothers have to travel long distances for work.

- It also found a higher prevalence of obesity because of relative prosperity and lifestyle patterns, along with iron and Vitamin D deficiency.

Why a new model for urban areas?

- According to government data from 2018, of the 14 lakh anganwadis across the country there are only 1.38 lakh anganwadis in urban areas.

- Health and ICDS models that work in rural areas may not work in urban areas because of higher population density, transportation challenges and migration.

- Because of these issues it may not be possible for a community worker to keep in contact with the beneficiaries, which she is able to achieve in rural settings.
Way ahead

- Improving infrastructure in urban areas would be key as the government embarks on improving service delivery under the ICDS programme.

- One thing which will be crucial for anganwadi services in urban areas is strengthening safety and infrastructure.

About the ICDS scheme

- Children in the age group 0-6 years constitute around 158 million of the population of India (2011 census). These Children are the future human resource of the country. Ministry of Women and Child Development is implementing various schemes for welfare, development and protection of children.

- **Launched on 2nd October, 1975**, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme is one of the flagship programmes of the Government of India and represents one of the world’s largest and unique programmes for early childhood care and development. It is the foremost symbol of country’s commitment to its children and nursing mothers, as a response to the challenge of providing pre-school non-formal education on one hand and breaking the vicious cycle of malnutrition, morbidity, reduced learning capacity and mortality on the other.

- The **beneficiaries under the Scheme** are children in the age group of 0-6 years, pregnant women and lactating mothers.

Objectives of the Scheme are:

- to improve the nutritional and health status of children in the age-group 0-6 years;

- to lay the foundation for proper psychological, physical and social
development of the child;

- to reduce the incidence of mortality, morbidity, malnutrition and school dropout;

- to achieve effective co-ordination of policy and implementation amongst the various departments to promote child development; and

- to enhance the capability of the mother to look after the normal health and nutritional needs of the child through proper nutrition and health education.

**Services under ICDS**

The ICDS Scheme offers a package of six services, viz.

1. Supplementary Nutrition
2. Pre-school non-formal education
3. Nutrition & health education
4. Immunization
5. Health check-up and
6. Referral services

- The last three services are related to health and are provided by Ministry/Department of Health and Family Welfare through NRHM & Health system. The perception of providing a package of services is based primarily on the consideration that the overall impact will be much larger if the different services develop in an integrated manner as the efficacy of a particular service depends upon the support it receives from the related services.

- For better governance in the delivery of the Scheme, convergence is, therefore, one of the key features of the ICDS Scheme. This convergence is in-built in the Scheme which provides a platform in the form of Anganwadi Centres for providing all services under the Scheme.
IT Intermediaries Guidelines (Amendment) Rules, 2018
GS-II | 25 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the new rules and their implications; the debate between security and right to privacy

Context: Later this month, the government will submit to the Supreme Court, The Information Technology Intermediaries Guidelines (Amendment) Rules, 2018, the new set of rules on regulation of social media.

Background

- The issue of messaging apps being required to break end-to-end encryption has been a sticky point between governments and messaging apps like Facebook-owned WhatsApp, especially after revelations last year on the use of spy software being used by governments to break into phones and conduct surveillance into private conversations of activists, journalists and lawyers, including in India.

- On November 21 last year, Minister of State for Electronics and Information Technology, in a written reply to a question in Rajya Sabha, confirmed that the Centre was going ahead with new amended rules for social media companies which will have to follow certain due diligence as laid out in the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines) Rules, 2011 under Section 79 of the Information Technology Act.

About the new rules
There could be two levels of online intermediaries defined in the new set of rules, each with different regulations, for social and non-social media.

Non-social media may have relatively lighter regulations given that there could be mandatory local legal incorporation for large social media intermediaries. Non-social media intermediaries will still have to appoint a local office for grievance redressal.

Suggested changes currently need production of a court order before a messaging intermediary is required to break encryption.

What could be the implications?

- The new rules will push for “traceability” of content which in effect means breaking end-to-end encryption, even of messaging intermediaries.
- This will make it difficult for large social media intermediaries, mostly international business conglomerates, to give in without a battle.
- The guidelines, which are not being discussed or debated publicly with only a few in the government privy to the details, are meant to control online content deemed “unlawful”. But these will raise fundamental questions on both freedom of speech and privacy of ordinary users.

Conclusion

The need to conduct surveillance for reasons of security versus the right to privacy of citizens and users has been a heated debate, and remains unresolved — the government appears to be pushing for more and intermediaries are insisting on greater transparency in the rules-framing process.

Note: To read about the ‘encryption debate in India’ in detail, click on the click given below.

https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/05/30/encryption-debate-in-india-pub-79213
Global Talent Competitiveness Index, 2020
GS-II | 25 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Important International Institutions, agencies and fora - their Structure, Mandate.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the index and its findings; India performance in the index

News: Global Talent Competitive Index (GTCI) 2020 was released at the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) on January 22, 2020.

What is this index?

- The GTCI report was launched by INSEAD, a partner and sponsor of the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Tent, with the help of Google and Adecco Group.

- This index shows the ability of countries to make the world progress, retain and attract talent. They are ranked based on their abilities.

- GTCI gives ranking based on six indicators – attract, retain, enable, grow, vocational skills and global knowledge skills.

- The GTCI is an-img-output based ranking system that takes ‘what does the country produce and acquires’ as img and ‘result from the skill’ as output.
Global Findings

- Switzerland secured the first position while the USA is on second and Singapore got third place.
- Among the top ten countries, Sweden ranked fourth, Denmark fifth, Netherlands sixth, Finland seventh, Luxembourg eighth, Norway ninth and Australia 10th.
- China ranked 42nd, Russia at 48th, Brazil secured 80th while South Africa grabbed the 70th position in the list.

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<td>10</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>72.53</td>
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India Specific Findings

- India has secured 72nd place in the list while last year India was ranked 80th in Global Talent Competitive Index.

- Kazakhstan, India and Sri Lanka have occupied the top 3 spots in the Central and South Asia region.

- According to the GTCI, India’s biggest challenge is to attract talent and retain them in the country. India got 92nd and 95th place respectively in this category.
India’s Vocational and Technical Skill score is 76 while secured 113th place in the Mid-Level Skills list.

Australia bushfires
GS-III | 25 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment.
Prelims and Mains focus: about the impact of Australian bushfires on global temperature

Context: Australia’s bushfires are contributing to one of the biggest annual increases in the concentration of carbon dioxide in the Earth’s atmosphere since record-keeping began more than 60 years ago, according to a forecast published by Britain’s Met Office on Friday.

Observations made by the Britain’s Met Office

- A forecast of the atmospheric concentration of carbon-dioxide shows that **2020 will witness one of the largest annual rises** in concentration since measurements began at Mauna Loa, in Hawaii, 1958.
- It said the atmospheric concentration of CO2 is expected to peak above 417 parts per million in May, with the average for the year forecast to be 414.2 ± 0.6ppm. This annual average represents a 2.74 ± 0.57 ppm rise on the 2019 average.
- While human-caused greenhouse gas emissions are responsible for the bulk of the increase in CO2 levels, **Australia’s bushfires have made the problem measurably worse**, underscoring the impact of the catastrophe on the global climate system.
- Although the data series started in 1958 has always shown CO2 concentrations increasing year-on-year, **driven by fossil fuel burning and deforestation**, the rate of rise has not been perfectly even.
- Fluctuations in the amount of CO2 absorbed by tropical forests and other natural carbon sinks can affect overall levels of the gas in the atmosphere.
This year, the Met forecasts that the impact of weather patterns on global ecosystems will increase the annual human-caused rise in CO2 concentration by 10%, with emissions from the Australian fires accounting for one-fifth of that increase.

Alarming levels of CO2 concentration

- Concentrations of CO2 in the Earth’s atmosphere have already far surpassed what scientists consider to be safe limits.

- At a climate summit in Madrid in December, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned that 400 ppm had once been considered “an unthinkable tipping point.”

- The last time there was a comparable concentration of CO2 in the atmosphere was between 3 and 5 million years ago, when the temperature was between 2 and 3 degrees Celsius warmer and sea levels were 10 to 20 meters higher than today, scientists say.

- Australia’s fires are themselves a foretaste of the kind of catastrophes that are liable to become normal as the planet warms, with prolonged drought and low humidity making arid landscapes more vulnerable to huge blazes, scientists say.

Conclusion

- The CO2 forecast underscored the urgency of the task facing negotiators trying to persuade big countries to cut emissions under the 2015 Paris Agreement to combat climate change, which is still nowhere near on track to spare the world from devastating temperature increases.

- The accord enters a crucial implementation phase this year, with governments due to submit more ambitious plans for climate action ahead of
a summit in Glasgow in November. Australia’s government is regarded as among the main laggards.

- The 2020 **Climate Change Performance Index** rated Australia as one of the worst performers among 57 high-emitters, awarding it 0 out of 100 possible points for its policies.

Source: Indian Express
Syllabus subtopic: Welfare Schemes for Vulnerable Sections of the population by the Centre and States and the Performance of these Schemes; Mechanisms, Laws, Institutions and Bodies constituted for the Protection and Betterment of these Vulnerable Sections.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the move and its significance; about PMJAY and its objectives

News: India is aiming to plug significant gaps in providing healthcare in smaller cities and towns under the ambitious Ayushman Bharat programme by signing up hospitals operated by state-run companies and Indian Railways.

Background

- The PMJAY, launched in September 2018, aims to provide health insurance for secondary and tertiary hospitalization to over 100 million poor and vulnerable families, which would total around 500 million beneficiaries.

- Since its launch, over 7.8 million patients have availed of insurance services under the scheme at over 21,271 hospitals across the country, information on the PMJAY website showed as of Saturday.

- However, a research conducted by PMJAY for April-July last year showed that there was disparity in where these services were availed of, based on the disease burden and socio-economic status.

About the move

It has been decided that all public hospitals should be empanelled under AB-
PMJAY (Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana) in order to expand its coverage.

Why?

- The government’s push to get public hospitals empanelled is due to a lack of secondary and tertiary healthcare facilities in poorer regions.

- A number of hospitals in smaller cities— including those run by state-run enterprises—are under-utilized, even though there is strong demand for their services in these regions especially because of the insurance programme.

**AB-PMJAY**

- Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme having central sector component under Ayushman Bharat Mission anchored in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW).

- It is an umbrella of two major health initiatives, namely Health and wellness Centres (HWCs) and National Health Protection Scheme (NHPS).

1. **Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs)**

Under this 1.5 lakh existing sub centres will bring health care system closer to the homes of people in the form of Health and wellness centres. These centres will provide comprehensive health care, including for non-communicable diseases and maternal and child health services.
List of Services to be provided at Health & Wellness Centre

- Pregnancy care and maternal health services
- Neonatal and infant health services
- Child health
- Chronic communicable diseases
- Non-communicable diseases
- Management of mental illness
- Dental care
- Eye care
- Geriatric care
- Emergency medicine

2. National Health Protection Mission (PM-JAY)

Benefits

- AB-PMJAY provides a defined benefit cover of Rs. 5 lakh per family per year. This cover will take care of almost all secondary care and most of tertiary care procedures.

- To ensure that nobody is left out (especially women, children and elderly) there will be no cap on family size and age in the scheme.

- The benefit cover will also include pre and post-hospitalisation expenses. All pre-existing conditions will be covered from day one of the policy. A defined transport allowance per hospitalization will also be paid to the beneficiary.

- Benefits of the scheme are portable across the country and a beneficiary covered under the scheme will be allowed to take cashless benefits from any public/private empanelled hospitals across the country.

- The beneficiaries can avail benefits in both public and empanelled private facilities. All public hospitals in the States implementing AB-PMJAY, will be deemed empanelled for the Scheme. Hospitals belonging to Employee State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) may also be empanelled based on the bed
occupancy ratio parameter. As for private hospitals, they will be empanelled online based on defined criteria.

- To control costs, the payments for treatment will be done on package rate (to be defined by the Government in advance) basis. The package rates will include all the costs associated with treatment. For beneficiaries, it will be a cashless, paper less transaction. Keeping in view the State specific requirements, States/ UTs will have the flexibility to modify these rates within a limited bandwidth.

Eligibility criteria

- AB-PMJAY is an entitlement based scheme with entitlement decided on the basis of deprivation criteria in the SECC database.

- The different categories in rural and urban areas include
  - families having only one room with kucha walls and kucha roof;
  - families having no adult member between age 16 to 59;
  - female headed households with no adult male member between age 16 to 59;
  - disabled member and no able bodied adult member in the family;
  - SC/ST households;
  - landless households deriving major part of their income from manual casual labour,
  - Families in rural areas having any one of the following: households without shelter, destitute, living on alms, manual scavenger families, primitive tribal groups, legally released bonded labour.
  - For urban areas, 11 defined occupational categories are entitled under the scheme - Occupational Categories of Workers, Rag picker, Beggar, Domestic worker, Street vendor/ Cobbler/hawker / Other service provider working on streets, Construction worker/ Plumber/ Mason/ Labour/ Painter/ Welder/ Security guard/, Coolie and another head-load worker, Sweeper/ Sanitation worker / Mali, Home-based worker/ Artisan/ Handicrafts worker / Tailor, Transport worker/ Driver/ Conductor/ Helper to drivers and conductors/ Cart puller/ Rickshaw puller, Shop worker/ Assistant/ Peon in small establishment/ Helper/Delivery assistant / Attendant/ Waiter, Electrician/ Mechanic/ Assembler/ Repair worker,
As per the SECC 2011, the following beneficiaries are automatically excluded:

- Households having motorized 2/3/4 wheeler/fishing boat
- Households having mechanized 3/4 wheeler agricultural equipment
- Households having Kisan Credit Card with credit limit above Rs. 50,000/-
- Household member is a government employee
- Households with non-agricultural enterprises registered with government
- Any member of household earning more than Rs. 10,000/- per month
- Households paying income tax
- Households paying professional tax
- House with three or more rooms with pucca walls and roof
- Owns a refrigerator
- Owns a landline phone
- Owns more than 2.5 acres of irrigated land with 1 irrigation equipment
- Owns 5 acres or more of irrigated land for two or more crop season
- Owning at least 7.5 acres of land or more with at least one irrigation equipment.
Source: Livemint
Syllabus subtopic:

- Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India’s interests, Indian Diaspora.
- Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India’s interests.

Prelims and Mains focus: About the move to withdraw and its implications, About Oslo Accords, West bank settlements; Six-Days war

News: Palestinian officials threatened on Sunday to withdraw from key provisions of the Oslo Accords, which define relations with Israel, if U.S. President Donald Trump announces his West Asia peace plan next week.

Why?

- Mr. Trump’s initiative will turn Israel’s temporary occupation (of Palestinian territory) into a permanent occupation.

- The Palestinians, who see east Jerusalem as the capital of their future state, say Mr. Trump’s plan buries the twostate solution that has been the cornerstone of global West Asia diplomacy.

About Oslo Accords

- The Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement, signed in Washington in 1995, sought to put into practice the first Oslo peace deal agreed two years earlier. The agreement set out the scope of Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza.

- Under the Oslo Accords, both Israel and the Palestinians agreed that the
status of settlements would be decided by negotiations. But the negotiations process has been all but dead for several years now.

- Israel walked into East Jerusalem in 1967 (Six-Day War), and subsequently annexed it. For Israel, Jerusalem is non-negotiable. The Palestinians want East Jerusalem as the capital of their future state. Most of the world’s nations look at it as occupied territory.

About West Bank

It is a landlocked territory near the Mediterranean coast of Western Asia, bordered by Jordan to the east and by the Green Line separating it and Israel on the south, west and north. The West Bank also contains a significant section of the western shore of the Dead Sea.
About West Bank settlements

- The West Bank was captured by Jordan after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.
Israel snatched it back during the Six Day War of 1967, and has occupied it ever since.

It has built some 130 formal settlements in the West Bank, and a similar number of smaller, informal settlements have mushroomed over the last 20-25 years.

Over 4 lakh Israeli settlers — many of them religious Zionists who claim a Biblical birthright over this land — now live here, along with some 26 lakh Palestinians.

**Settlements legal or illegal?**

- The United Nations General Assembly, the UN Security Council, and the International Court of Justice have said that the West Bank settlements are violative of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

- Under the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949), an occupying power “shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies”.

- Under the Rome Statute that set up the International Criminal Court in 1998, such transfers constitute war crimes, as does the “extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly”.

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**UPSC "PT" DNA (Daily News Analysis)**

- Israel snatched it back during the Six Day War of 1967, and has occupied it ever since.
- It has built some 130 formal settlements in the West Bank, and a similar number of smaller, informal settlements have mushroomed over the last 20-25 years.
- Over 4 lakh Israeli settlers — many of them religious Zionists who claim a Biblical birthright over this land — now live here, along with some 26 lakh Palestinians.

**Settlements legal or illegal?**

- The United Nations General Assembly, the UN Security Council, and the International Court of Justice have said that the West Bank settlements are violative of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

- Under the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949), an occupying power “shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies”.

- Under the Rome Statute that set up the International Criminal Court in 1998, such transfers constitute war crimes, as does the “extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly”.

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Source: The Hindu

Bar-Âheaded goose
GS-III | 27 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation,
Prelims and Mains focus: about the bar-headed geese: its conservation status and need for conservation

News: While the Kundavada lake on the outskirts of Karnataka’s Davangere city, which was the winter abode for many barheaded geese from Mongolia, has failed to attract these winged visitors this time, the Kondajji lake located nearby has emerged as their new home.

Why did it happen?

- The barheaded geese, known for their ability to fly in extreme altitude and weather conditions, used to arrive at the Kundavada lake in the third week of November.

- As the temperature drops in Mongolia in the last week of October, these birds migrate to comparatively warmer places in India.

- They used to stay at the Kundavada lake till the first week of March. The lake is spread over 260 acres and is also a source of drinking water for Davangere city. Bird enthusiasts have recorded the presence of barheaded geese in the Kundavada lake from 2012.

- Large tracts of agricultural land in the vicinity of Kundavada have been converted into residential layouts in recent times. The Department of Horticulture has established a glasshouse on the bank of the lake on a three-acre area in 2018. In November 2018, only 10 barheaded geese came to Kundavada. Last November, not a single goose visited the lake.

- Following the loss of habitat in Kundavada, the barheaded geese have made the Kondajji lake, located in a forest 14 km from Davangere, their
new abode. The geese were sighted in Kondajji for the first time in January 2019, and in the second week of January this year, as many as 430 geese have been counted here.

Way ahead

The onus is on the Department of Forest and Wildlife to ensure minimum human interference near the Kondajji lake to ensure a comfortable stay for the birds.

About the bird

- Geese, ducks and swans (the biological family Anatidae): collectively known as waterfowl.

- Geese, which are larger than ducks and smaller than swans, are subdivided into three groups: grey, black and white geese.

- About 73 cm long and weighing 1.6 kilograms, the Bar-headed Goose is a large bird. It eats mainly grasses, water plants, seeds and berries, but also partakes of smaller animal matter including insects and crustaceans. Its legs are well-developed for walking and running in soft wet land where it forages.

- It is a migratory bird. It spends the summer months in central Asia, nesting and raising its young. As winter sets in it migrates to warmer climes of Southern Asia.

- The Bar-headed Goose is one of few bird species known to fly over the Himalayas. There are reports of it actually flying over Mount Everest. How it deals with oxygen issues at enormous heights - as well as the reason for following that high-altitude route - is a matter of great interest for scientists.

- Conservation status: Least Concern (LC)
Fund crunch hits MGNREGA scheme
GS-II | 27 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the fund crunch in the scheme: reasons and likely implications; about MGNREGA and its significance

News: The Centre is on the verge of running out of funds for the crucial Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)
Why?

- **More than 96%** of the allocated money has **already been spent** or is needed to pay **pending dues**, with less than Rs. 2,500 crore left to sustain the scheme for the next two months.

**Background**

A number of economists have recommended that putting money into the hands of rural consumers via MGNREGA is key to kick-starting the economy. However, **this year’s budget allocation was Rs. 60,000 crore, lower than the amount spent in the previous year.**

**Disparity in funds across states**

- Fifteen States are already in the red. According to the scheme’s financial statement as on January 26, **Rajasthan has the highest negative net balance of Rs. 620 crore**, followed by Rs. 323 crore in Uttar Pradesh.

- In fact, the situation on the ground may be worse as **States do not always enter pending payments into the information system**. January, February and March are months with little agricultural activity, when rural workers desperately need employment. However, the scheme is running out of money, and will enter next year with pending liabilities.

- States are fast running out of funds for the crucial Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme with the **Centre yet to release pending dues**. In Rajasthan, for example, workers’ wages have not been paid since October-end.
About MGNREGA and its significance

- The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
(MGNREGA), also known as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS) is Indian legislation enacted on August 25, 2005. The MGNREGA provides a legal guarantee for one hundred days of employment in every financial year to adult members of any rural household willing to do public work-related unskilled manual work at the statutory minimum wage. The Ministry of Rural Development (MRD), Govt of India is monitoring the entire implementation of this scheme in association with state governments.

- This act was introduced with an aim of improving the purchasing power of the rural people, primarily semi or un-skilled work to people living below poverty line in rural India. It attempts to bridge the gap between the rich and poor in the country. Roughly one-third of the stipulated work force must be women.

- Adult members of rural households submit their name, age and address with photo to the Gram Panchayat. The Gram Panchayat registers households after making enquiry and issues a job card. The job card contains the details of adult member enrolled and his/her photo. Registered person can submit an application for work in writing (for at least fourteen days of continuous work) either to Panchayat or to Programme Officer.

- The Panchayat/Programme officer will accept the valid application and issue dated receipt of application, letter providing work will be sent to the applicant and also displayed at Panchayat office. The employment will be provided within a radius of 5 km: if it is above 5 km extra wage will be paid.

- The Gram Sabha is the principal forum for wage seekers to raise their voices and make demands. It is the Gram Sabha and the Gram Panchayat which approves the shelf of works under MGNREGA and fix their priority.

- MGNREGA focuses on the economic and social empowerment of women.
MGNREGA provides “Green” and “Decent” work.

Social Audit of MGNREGA works is mandatory, which lends to accountability and transparency.

MGNREGA works address the climate change vulnerability and protect the farmers from such risks and conserve natural resources.

Source: The Hindu

Cases of diabetes and cancer rise in rural areas of M.P.

GS-II | 27 January, 2020


Prelims and Mains focus: about the findings and their causes; about IHCI and its achievements; about non-communicable diseases and steps for their prevention; about National Health Mission (NHM)

News: Noncommunicable diseases like hypertension, diabetes and cancer are posing a bigger challenge in the nontribal rural areas of Madhya Pradesh than in the urban areas owing to a rapidly growing rate of incidence and the lack of awareness, according to the National Health Mission (NHM).

Background

Screening of 30 lakh persons above the age of 30 across the State in December has revealed that Raisen, Hoshangabad and Seoni districts face...
The State unit of the National Health Mission anticipates urban districts like Bhopal, Gwalior or Indore to fare the worst.

**Why more cases in non-tribal rural areas?**

**More awareness, as in the case of urban areas,** translates into patients undergoing treatment despite a high incidence. As a result, the burden is moderate in urban areas, but due to low awareness in rural areas, it is increasing there.

**Non Communicable Disease Control Programme**

- During the screening drive, taken up under the Centre’s **Non-Communicable Disease Control Programme,** what surprised officials was the low incidence in the 89 tribal blocks in the **State, which has largest tribal population in the country,** despite the low awareness levels.

- The programme, which was **launched recently** and under which **86% of those screened have been put under treatment,** focusses on **identifying noncommunicable diseases at the primary healthcentre (PHC) level itself,** and ensuring **treatment up to the districtlevel** and followups with patients to continue medication.

- In the first phase, 1,200 PHCs were roped in. In contrast to patients visiting a health centre, ASHA workers now go doortodoor to draft family profiles and screen them for the noncommunicable diseases, added Dr. Sidana.

**Case of hypertension in rural areas**

- **Trans fatty acids** when consumed in **hydrogenated forms** is a major cause of hypertension or high blood pressure levels. Cooking oil is still reused for
The India Hypertension Control Initiative, supported by the World Health Organisation, is catering to patients above 18 suffering from the diseases in Bhopal, Sehore, Chhindwara, Seoni, Ujjain and Ratlam districts.

- Of the screened persons, 2,55,420 were diagnosed for hypertension.

- Of the country’s 100 districts with the highest prevalence of hypertension, 15 were in Madhya Pradesh.

**About India Hypertension Control Initiative (IHCI)**

- The IHCI was launched in Kerala in April 2018 as a multi-partner five-year initiative with the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Indian Council of Medical Research, State government, and WHO India.

- The IHCI was also launched in Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, and Punjab.

- The results from Kerala had been the most impressive so far because of the infrastructure strength of non-communicable disease clinics across the State.

- Each patient was given a treatment book and the health card was kept at the hospital.

- Every month there was a follow-up on the patient by the hospital over the phone or by visit of an Accredited Social Work Activist.

- With the success of the initiative, the government is considering replicating it in other districts too.
About Non-communicable diseases (NCDs)

- NCDs are medical conditions or diseases that are **not caused by infectious agents**. These are **chronic diseases of long duration**, and generally **slow progression** and are the **result of a combination of genetic, physiological, environmental and behaviours factors**.

- NCDs are **one of the major challenges for public health in the 21st century**, not only in terms of human suffering they cause but also the harm they inflict on the socioeconomic development of the country. NCDs kill approximately 41 million people (71% of global deaths) worldwide each year, including 14 million people who die too young between the ages of 30 and 70. The **majority of premature NCD deaths are preventable**.

- According to **World Health Organization (WHO)** projections, the total annual
The number of deaths from NCDs will increase to 55 million by 2030, if timely interventions are not done for prevention and control of NCDs.

- In India, nearly 5.8 million people (WHO report, 2015) die from NCDs (heart and lung diseases, stroke, cancer and diabetes) every year or in other words 1 in 4 Indians has a risk of dying from an NCD before they reach the age of 70.

In a report “India: Health of the Nation’s States” by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW), Government of India (GOI), it is found that there is increase in the contribution of NCDs from 30% of the total disease burden—‘disability-adjusted life years’ (DALYs) in 1990 to 55% in 2016 and also an increase in proportion of deaths due to NCDs (among all deaths) from 37% in 1990 to 61% in 2016. This shows a rapid epidemiological transition with a shift in disease burden to NCDs.

Major NCDs and their risk factors

- The major NCDs are cardiovascular diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes.

- Physical inactivity, unhealthy diets (diets low in fruit, vegetables, and whole grains, but high in salt and fat), tobacco use (smoking, second-hand smoke, and smokeless tobacco), and the harmful use of alcohol are the main behavioural risk factors for NCDs.

- They contribute to raised blood pressure (hypertension); raised blood sugar (diabetes); raised and abnormal blood lipids (dyslipidaemia); and obesity. Air pollution is also leading risk factor for NCDs in terms of both outdoor air pollution and household air pollution that mainly results from burning solid fuels in the home for cooking and heat.

- Although morbidity and mortality from NCDs mainly occur in adulthood,
NCDs are rapidly increasing globally and reached epidemic proportions in many countries, largely due to globalization, industrialization, and rapid urbanization with demographic and lifestyle changes.

**Actions to beat non-communicable diseases**

- The epidemic of NCDs cannot be halted simply by treating the sick, healthy persons have to be protected by addressing the root causes. Reducing the major risk factors for NCDs is the key focus of MOHFW to prevent deaths from NCDs. Tackling the risk factors will therefore not only save lives; it will also provide a huge boost for the economic development of the country.

- MOHFW, GOI is already implementing “National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular disease and Stroke” (NPCDCS) with the objective to increase awareness on risk factors, to set up infrastructure (like NCD clinics, cardiac care units) and to carry out opportunistic screening at primary health care levels.

- In response to the “WHO Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs 2013-2020”, India is the first country to adopt the National Action Plan with specific national targets and indicators aimed at reducing the number of global premature deaths from NCDs by 25% by 2025. The global action plan has suggested 9 targets for countries to set. But India has taken the unprecedented step of setting a tenth target to address household air pollution. India’s National Monitoring Framework for Prevention and Control of NCDs has committed for a 50% relative reduction in household use of solid fuel and a 30% relative reduction in prevalence of current tobacco use by 2025.

- Integration of NPCDCS with the National Health Mission (NHM) resulted into augmented infrastructure and human resources particularly in the form of
frontline workers- the ANM and the ASHA. With the active participation of these frontline workers the population-based periodic screening of hypertension, diabetes, and common cancers (oral, breast, cervical cancers) is initiated to facilitate the early detection of common NCDs.

- Prevention and management of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and chronic Kidney disease (CKD); and better management of co-morbidities such as diabetes and tuberculosis are also considered under the programme.

- Integration of AYUSH with NPCDCS is a further step for promoting healthy life style changes among the population. Health promotion through social media is also being used to generate awareness about prevention and control of NCDs, such as use of mobile technology in applications called mDiabetes for diabetes control, mCessation to help for quit tobacco, and no more tension as a support for mental stress management.

- All people should join together to reduce premature deaths from NCDs by one third by 2030, the commitment made in 2015, as a part of Sustainable Development Goals. Young people can contribute in different ways to prevent NCDs such as sharing information/ targeted messages on key risk factors about NCDs on social media; organizing and supporting interventions to ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all people, at all ages.

Unite in the fight against NCDs by:

- being physical active,
- choosing healthy diets,
- saying no to tobacco,
- reducing harmful use of alcohol,
- promoting cleaner cities,
- through universal health coverage.

Source: The Hindu
Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA)

Syllabus subtopic:

- Public/Civil Service Values and Ethics in Public Administration

Prelims and Mains focus: about RUSA: objectives and corruption

News: The HRD Ministry has approached the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) to flag alleged corruption in the implementation of the Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA).

Background

In a meeting held in July, 2019 between the Ministry and TISS, the institute’s director pointed out some “serious irregularities” in utilisation of funds. Following the meeting, TISS was asked by the Ministry to conduct a complete audit of funds released under RUSA.

How was the corruption unravelled?

- An audit by Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) last year uncovered that Rs 23 lakh was allegedly spent out of RUSA funds on the personal trips of an IAS officer of the Kerala cadre, who was RUSA’s national mission director during her stint as joint secretary at the HRD Ministry. She left the Ministry seven months ago and is currently posted as Principal Secretary, Fisheries, in Kerala.
The audit also discovered that RUSA’s national coordinator allegedly misappropriated Rs 2.02 crore of the funds. He had submitted handwritten taxi bills of Rs 1.26 crore to justify some of the expenditure.

The alleged corruption undermines the Centre’s efforts to streamline functioning of higher educational institutions in states. RUSA aims to improve the quality of such institutions by ensuring conformity to prescribed norms and standards.

About Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA)

- RUSA, a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS), launched in October 2013, is aimed at improving higher education in states.

- The scheme is being operated in mission mode for funding state universities and colleges to achieve the aims of equity, access and excellence. Since 2016-17, the government has spent an average of Rs 1,500 crore every year on RUSA.

- TISS has been the implementing agency of the scheme since November 2013 and, as per the government’s MoU with the institute, will incur expenditure and submit claims to the HRD Ministry for reimbursement.

- The central funding (in the ratio of 60:40 for general category States, 90:10 for special category states and 100% for union territories) would be norm based and outcome dependent. The funding would flow from the central ministry through the state governments/union territories to the State Higher Education Councils before reaching the identified institutions. The funding to states would be made on the basis of critical appraisal of State Higher Education Plans, which would describe each state’s strategy to address issues of equity, access and excellence in higher education.

Objectives
The salient objectives of RUSA are to;

- Improve the overall quality of state institutions by ensuring conformity to prescribed norms and standards and adopt accreditation as a mandatory quality assurance framework.
- Usher transformative reforms in the state higher education system by creating a facilitating institutional structure for planning and monitoring at the state level, promoting autonomy in State Universities and improving governance in institutions.
- Ensure reforms in the affiliation, academic and examination systems.
- Ensure adequate availability of quality faculty in all higher educational institutions and ensure capacity building at all levels of employment.
- Create an enabling atmosphere in the higher educational institutions to devote themselves to research and innovations.
- Expand the institutional base by creating additional capacity in existing institutions and establishing new institutions, in order to achieve enrolment targets.
- Correct regional imbalances in access to higher education by setting up institutions in unserved & underserved areas.
- Improve equity in higher education by providing adequate opportunities of higher education to SC/STs and socially and educationally backward classes; promote inclusion of women, minorities, and differently abled persons.

Components

- RUSA would create new universities through upgradation of existing autonomous colleges and conversion of colleges in a cluster. It would create new model degree colleges, new professional colleges and provide infrastructural support to universities and colleges.

- Faculty recruitment support, faculty improvements programmes and leadership development of educational administrators are also an important part of the scheme. In order to enhance skill development the existing central scheme of Polytechnics has been subsumed within RUSA. A separate component to synergise vocational education with higher education has also been included in RUSA. Besides these, RUSA also supports reforming, restructuring and building capacity of institutions in participating state.
The following are the primary components of RUSA that capture the key action and funding areas that must be pursued for the fulfilment of the targets:

- Upgradation of existing autonomous colleges to Universities
- Conversion of colleges to Cluster Universities
- Infrastructure grants to Universities
- New Model Colleges (General)
- Upgradation of existing degree colleges to model colleges
- New Colleges (Professional)
- Infrastructure grants to colleges
- Research, innovation and quality improvement
- Equity initiatives
- Faculty Recruitment Support
- Faculty improvements
- Vocationalisation of Higher Education
- Leadership Development of Educational Administrators
- Institutional restructuring & reforms
- Capacity building & preparation, data collection & planning

Source: Indian Express

New Financial Resolution Authority on the anvil

Syllabus subtopic:

- Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment
- Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Prelims and Mains focus: About the proposed law and key changes to be brought by it; its advantages; about FRDI Bill; NBFCs

News: The Finance Ministry is working on putting in place a comprehensive resolution framework for financial institutions that have precarious financial position.
What is it for?

It is to ensure that failure of some of the systemically important financial institutions does not affect the entire system.

Background

- In the recent period, the failure of some large non-banking financial companies (NBFCs), along with co-operative banks, have created panic among depositors as well as the financial sector as a whole.

- In September 2019, the RBI had put Punjab and Maharashtra Co-operative Bank under “directions” due to weak financial health over its exposure to near-bankrupt realty player HDIL, to which it has loaned over 70 per cent of its Rs 9,000 crore in advances. While the central bank slapped restrictions on the bank for six months on September 24, it allowed withdrawal of only Rs 1,000, creating panic among the depositors.

- On September 26, following a spate of complaints from the depositors, the RBI relaxed the curbs and capped withdrawal at Rs 10,000 and then, on October 3, the cash withdrawal limit was raised to Rs 25,000. It was subsequently raised to Rs 40,000 and then to Rs 50,000 over the next one month.

- In November 2019, the government amended the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) rules to provide for a resolution of financial service providers (FSP) including NBFCs. This provided a generic framework for insolvency and liquidation proceedings of systemically important FSPs other than banks. Following this, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) moved for resolution of DHFL.

- However, government sources said these changes do not address the issue comprehensively and were aimed at immediate resolution of NBFCs.
About the proposed framework

- The mechanism proposed by the Ministry — which is likely to be brought in through a new law — envisages setting up of a Resolution Authority comprising members from financial sector regulators as well as senior government officials as its members.

- The government has held series of discussions — including during meetings of the Financial Stability and Development Council — to put in place a framework in this regard.

Ambit of resolution authority

- The ambit of the Resolution Authority is likely to be over banks, NBFCs, insurance companies, securities market players, co-operative banks and regional rural banks.

- In the recent period, the failure of some large non-banking financial companies (NBFCs), along with co-operative banks, have created panic among depositors as well as the financial sector as a whole. The central government is also working on increasing the deposit insurance limit of Rs 1 lakh at present to Rs 5 lakh.

Changes likely to be in FRDI Bill

- The central government is also working on increasing the deposit insurance limit of Rs 1 lakh at present to Rs 5 lakh.

- The Finance Ministry had, in 2018, withdrawn the proposed Financial Resolution and Deposit Insurance (FRDI) Bill over the controversial bail-in clause, which led to fears that the government may cancel or modify...
deposits in banks.

- The new resolution framework being piloted by the Department of Economic Affairs could tone down some of the bail-in provisions, providing protection to deposit holders.

- On the lines of the FRDI Bill, the proposed framework aims to address the issue of insolvency of firms in the financial sector — so that if a bank, NBFC, insurance company, pension fund or mutual fund run by an asset management company, fails, a solution is available to either sell that firm, merge it with another firm, or close it down, with the least disruption to the system, to the economy, and to investors and other stakeholders.

- This would require change in existing laws so that some of the powers of financial sector regulators are transferred to the Resolution Authority being proposed in the new regime.

- The Bill is expected to come in the Parliament after it is cleared by the Union Cabinet. Department of Economic Affairs has been piloting it and is expected to be ready with it. The bail-in provision was controversial and the government would truncate the issue and bring it. So, the government would be coming up with the revised version of the bill.

**Way forward**

A framework for resolution is required even for banks, insurance companies, mutual funds, securities market companies, so that their failure does not affect the financial system adversely. The proposed law is aimed at addressing this issue at the broader level.

Source: Indian Express
News: The Union government invited bids for a 100% stake sale of Air India (AI) and transfer of management control along with its complete share in two subsidiaries — lowcost international carrier Air India Express and groundhandling arm AISATS.

Background

- This is the second attempt in two years by the Modi-led government at privatising the national carrier.

- On May 31, 2018, when the deadline for bids closed, not even a single private player had shown interest. On the table is a 100% stake in AI, 100% stake in AI Express Limited (AIXL) and all of the government’s 50% stake in AISATS, which is a joint venture with the Singaporebased ground handling company SATS Limited.
What’s new this time?

- The government has offered to hive off liabilities worth nearly Rs. 40,000 crore to sweeten the deal.
The buyer will get a total of 146 aircraft, 56% of which are owned by the airline group, while the remaining are on lease. It will also benefit from as much as 50% of the international market share held by Indian airlines as well as the airline’s 4,400 slots at airports in the country and 3,300 slots in 42 countries, which will be available at least for six months after the sale is complete.

As many as 9,617 permanent employees, including pilots and cabin crew with deep technical and operational expertise, will be up for grabs along with the airline’s brand as well as the famous “Maharaja” and “Flying swan” logos.

The bid document also states that the existing FDI policy, which allows a foreign airline to buy up to 49% in Air India, will continue to apply.

Who will be eligible to bid for the sale?

- Any private or public limited company, a corporate body and a fund with a net value of Rs. 3,500 crore will be eligible to bid.

The last date for submitting interest to the transaction adviser is March 17 and the outcome of this round will be known by March 31, following which qualified bidders will be given two months to submit financial bids.

How will the deal go about?

- The private player keen to buy Air India will also have to take on liabilities of Rs. 32,474 crore, which includes the airline’s debt of Rs. 23,286 crore.

- The government will absorb Rs. 56,334 crore in liabilities, including Rs. 36,670 crore of debt. These have been transferred to a special vehicle known as Air India Assets Holding Limited (AIAHL), which will also comprise real
estate and other assets worth Rs. 17,000 crore. Therefore, the **net liability** to be borne by the government will be Rs. 39,259 crore.

- All employees will go to the new buyer. There are no excess employees in Air India. The buyer should retain these employees for a certain **lockin period**, which would be divulged in the share purchasing agreement. The government was exploring different modalities to **ensure that the retired staff have a medical cover**.

**Conclusion**

A clean exit by the government and exclusion of the entire nonaircraft related debt signal a **bold reform and a very determined effort** to exit the airline to **allow the taxpayers’ funds to be utilised for the government’s social agenda.** This may be the single biggest writeoff by the government.

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**Source:** The Hindu

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**Centre, Assam govt. sign accord with Bodo groups**

**GS-III | 28 January, 2020**

**Syllabus subtopic:** Linkages between Development and Spread of Extremism.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the Bodo Accord and its significance; about Bodo tribe

**News:** The **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)**, the **Assam government** and **Bodo groups** signed an **agreement** to **redraw and rename the Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) in Assam**, currently spread over the **four districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri.**
Background

Several Bodo groups, led by the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), have been demanding a separate land for the ethnic community since 1972, a movement that has claimed nearly 4,000 lives.

About the agreement

- As per the agreement, villages dominated by Bodos that were presently outside the BTAD would be included and those with non-Bodo population would be excluded.

- Bodos living in the hills would be granted Scheduled Hill Tribe status.

- As of now, the agreement had not addressed the issue of “citizenship or work permit” for non-domiciles in the BTAD, to be renamed as the Bodoland Territorial Region.

How will the settlement go through?

- The memorandum of settlement says that the criminal cases registered against members of the NDFB factions for “nonheinous” crimes shall be withdrawn by the Assam government and in cases of heinous crimes it will be reviewed.

- Around 1,500 cadres of NDFB (P), NDFB (RD) and NDFB (S) will be rehabilitated by Centre and Assam Government. They will be assimilated in the mainstream and will surrender on January 30 on Mahatma Gandhi’s death anniversary.

- The families of those killed during the Bodo movement would get Rs.5 lakh each.
After the agreement, the NDFB factions will leave the path of violence, surrender their weapons and disband their armed organisations within a month of signing the deal.

A **Special Development Package of Rs. 1500 crore** would be given by the Centre to undertake specific projects for the development of Bodo areas.

Source: The Hindu

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**Tribal protest in Odisha**

*GS-II | 28 January, 2020*

**Syllabus subtopic:** Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the tribal protest and its reasons; about FRA, 2006

**News:** Alleging **arbitrary cancellation of applications for land rights** under the **Forest Rights Act** by the administration, over 2,000 tribals began an **indefinite dharna** in front of the Collector’s office at Chhatrapur in **Odisha’s** Ganjam district.

**About the issue**

- The tribals alleged that of the total rejected applications, the highest number was from Ganjam, around 50% of total rejections in the State. The administration has not given any reason for cancellation.

- The protesters were united by **four organisations** — All India Kisan Mazdoor
The protesters have a list of nine demands which are mostly related to land rights of forest dwellers.

Tribals demand: All cancelled applications be returned for scrutiny and verification by the gram sabhas. Administration should accept the applications which will be approved by the gram sabhas.

**Source:** The Hindu

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**Thermal scanners for detecting Coronavirus**

GS-III | 28 January 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Science and Technology- Developments and their Applications and Effects in Everyday Life.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the utility of thermal imaging systems in virus detection; about coronavirus outbreak

**News:** The aviation ministry has asked airport authorities to screen travellers flying in from China to stop the coronavirus outbreak from spreading to India.

- So far, seven Indian airports have set up thermal scanners at immigration counters.

**Growth rates of thermal imaging systems**

The growth potential of thermal imaging systems is the highest in the US and
Canada, while India is seen offering moderate opportunities.

How do thermal scanners work?

- **All live objects emit infrared energy or heat.** Unlike regular cameras that record light reflected by objects, thermal cameras use heat sensors that can **record heat generated by the body** of a person or an object to **create a 2D image** with differing temperature levels.

- When a person stands before the cameras, on the computer screens the
hotter objects are highlighted with a different colour palette than the rest. These cameras can be calibrated to detect abnormal body temperatures such as over 101 degrees. Every pixel of the image has a temperature associated with it, so a higher resolution camera scan offers more detailed images.
When did airports start using them?

- This isn’t the first time thermal scanning is being used to screen higher body temperature related to infections that can cause an epidemic. During the 2002-03 outbreak of SARS virus, airports in Singapore and China deployed them and have been using them since. Mumbai was one of the first Indian airports to use them during the swine flu outbreak in 2009.

- During the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, many countries including India used the cameras. India is said to have these cameras at its major international airports. Heat scanners at Nigerian airports was one of the reasons the African country remained Ebola-free.

Why are thermal scanners used to screen coronavirus?

- International airports have very high footfalls. Checking every passenger’s body temperature using thermometers can be a logistics nightmare and lead to delays at immigration counters.

- Thermal cameras can scan large crowds and spot people with higher temperature than the rest. Once authorities identify possible vectors, they can segregate them for further screening.

How effective are thermal scanners?

- Thermal cameras are effective only to the point of telling who has a higher body temperature or is running a high fever. It may not mean the person is infected with coronavirus. Additional screening systems are needed for that.

- Studying thermal images is not as simple as observing a camera image. It requires training and understanding of thermal colours and their patterns. As far as their effect on the human body is concerned, these cameras are safe.
and discreet. There is no proven risk of any form of radiation.

Where else are these scanners used?

- Thermal imaging tech is widely used by law enforcement agencies and militaries across the world. It was first used during the Korean War in 1950-53 to detect enemy soldiers in the dark. Firefighters in the US are known to use them to find people through dense smoke.

- In 2019, police in Minneapolis used them to detect and nab a gang of car thieves in the dark.

- Companies in the manufacturing and automotive sectors also use thermal cameras to check machines and equipment that might be at risk of catching fire.

Source: Livemint

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EMI option for states to repay their dues to discoms

GS-II | 28 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the move and its significance, the debt trouble faced by discoms and govt.'s efforts in this direction; about UDAY scheme

News: The Union government is considering a unique initiative to let defaulting state government departments clear their outstanding dues to power distribution companies (discoms) through a dozen monthly instalments.
Background

- The move comes in the backdrop of worsening financial health of discoms, who in turn have delayed payments to generation utilities. State government departments have the lion’s share of the total dues totalling Rs.82,073 crore.

- The issue of repaying dues through 12 equated monthly instalments (EMI) was discussed at a review planning and monitoring (RPM) meeting of the power ministry with states earlier this month.

- It comes in the backdrop of the Rs. 2.86 trillion plan for India’s most ambitious power distribution reform scheme, tentatively named Atal Distribution System Improvement Yojana after former prime minister late Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

What led to the move?

- Government department dues getting delayed lead to cash losses of discoms, even though these get accrued as booked income. However, this causes problem in cash flow management in discoms, increases the requirements of working capital and leads to delay in payment of gencos (power generation companies).

- Therefore, such delays on part of one state have repercussions on the complete power sector value chain and in entities beyond the boundaries of their own states.
Discoms debt trouble and efforts made towards alleviation

- Discoms are the weakest link in the electricity value chain, plagued by

1. low collection,
2. higher power purchase cost,
3. inadequate tariff hikes and subsidy disbursement, and
4. mounting dues from government departments.

- In an attempt to ensure timely payments by states to generation utilities, the government has already made it mandatory for state discoms to offer letters of credit (LC) as part of the payment security mechanisms in power purchase agreements. However, while the states have offered LCs, their old arrears are still pending.

- In poor financial health, discoms have delayed payments to gencos even as the Centre steps up efforts to supply round-the-clock power to all. The inability of discoms to make payments has also added to the pain in the banking sector as power developers are facing difficulties to service their debt. The backlog of dues owed by discoms to gencos are as high as 913 days.

- The push for state government departments to clear their dues comes in tandem with the finance ministry’s proposed plans to withhold permission to defaulting states to borrow to the extent of electricity losses not funded by their respective governments.

- Plans to trim debt of discoms and pare their losses may feature in the forthcoming Union budget slated for 1 February.

Source: Livemint

Committee on Related Party Transactions norms
GS-II | 28 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic:

- Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.
- Corporate Governance
Prelims and Mains focus: About the committee and its recommendations; about RPTs and the need for reforms in the corporate governance.

News: The committee set up by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) on related party transactions (RPTs) has proposed sweeping changes to strengthen the monitoring and enforcement of norms and bring in more transparency and improve governance.

Background

• The capital markets regulator (SEBI), in November 2019, constituted a Working Group to review the policy space pertaining to RPTs.

• Many firms which defaulted on bank loans were found to have indulged in related party deals to siphon off funds.

What is Related Party Transactions (RPT)?

• Generally, RPT means a transaction involving a transfer of resources, services between the listed entity or its subsidiaries on the one hand and a related party of the listed entity or its subsidiaries on the other hand.

• Transaction between listed entity or its subsidiaries and any other entity which is aimed to benefit a related party should be considered as a RPT.

Need for the reform

• The Working Group noted that the current RPT regulatory framework may be insufficient to cover transactions where the listed entity could transfer its assets/value to a subsidiary, whether in India or overseas, and such entity could then transact with the related parties of the listed entity to move the assets out of the consolidated entity.
The need to regulate the consolidated entity as a whole was also recognised specifically in the report of the Kotak committee on corporate governance.

Several listed entities in India operate through a network of entities – where some companies have over 200 subsidiaries, step-down subsidiaries, associates, and joint ventures.

While investors hold direct equity only in the listed holding company, they have valued the entire business structure at the time of investment. Therefore, it is important for boards to ensure that good governance trickles down to the entire structure.

**Recommendations of the committee**

1. **Who should be considered as a related party?**
   - The panel has said that a related party should be any person or entity belonging to the promoter or promoter group of the listed entity.
   - Besides, any person or any entity, directly or indirectly (including with their relatives), holding 20 per cent or more of the holding in the listed entity should also be considered as related party.

2. The Sebi committee has also proposed changes to the process followed by a company’s audit committee for approval of RPTs that are material. Further, a format for reporting of RPTs to the stock exchanges has been mooted.

3. **Prior approval** of the audit committee of the listed entity should be mandatory for transactions carried out between the listed entity or any of its subsidiaries with a related party.

4. The materiality threshold should be amended to 5 per cent of the annual total revenues, total assets or net worth of the listed entity on a consolidated
5. The **net worth criterion** should **not apply** to companies with **negative net worth**. Further, companies can specify a lower materiality threshold as per their RPT policies.

Source: Indian Express

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**Syllabus subtopic:** History of the World will include events from 18th century such as Industrial Revolution, world wars, Redrawal of National Boundaries, Colonization, Decolonization, political philosophies like Communism, Capitalism, Socialism etc.— their forms and effect on the society.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about Auschwitz concentration camp and its significance in WWII

**News:** Survivors of the *Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp* gathered Monday for commemorations marking the **75th anniversary of the liberation of the camp.**

**About**

- During the Second World War, the government of Nazi Germany killed approximately 17 million people across Europe in half a dozen camps specifically designated for killings.

- Of these **seven killing centers**, the camp at *Auschwitz (in German-occupied Poland)*, perhaps the most well known, was the **largest in size.** In
many ways, Auschwitz has become the centre of Holocaust history and research and serves as a reminder of the horrors of the Holocaust.

- Most of the 1.1 million people murdered by the Nazi German forces at the camp were Jewish, but among those imprisoned there were also Poles and Russians.

- Allied forces liberated Auschwitz on January 27, 1945, finding hundreds of sick, starving and exhausted prisoners, who had somehow survived.

- In 2005, the UN-designated January 27 as the International Holocaust Remembrance Day.
Source: Indian Express
Easing Abortion laws in India

GS-II | 29 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the move and its significance; MTP Act, 1971

News: Moving to ease abortion laws in the country, the Union Cabinet is set to consider a host of changes to the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, 1971.

Background

- In recent years, there have been strong demands to raise the foetal gestation period for abortion beyond 20 weeks.

- The changes in law were proposed after an extensive consultation process with experts representing a range of stakeholders from central and state governments, NGOs, academic institutions, professional bodies and associations like Indian Medical Association, Indian Nursing Council and legal professionals.

What is the present scenario?

The present abortion law, which is about five decades old, permits abortion up to a maximum foetal gestation period of 20 weeks.

Section 3 (2) of the MTP Act, 1971 states “a pregnancy may be terminated by a registered medical practitioner,

a. where the length of the pregnancy does not exceed twelve weeks, if such medical practitioner is, or
b. where the length of the pregnancy exceeds twelve weeks but does not exceed twenty weeks, if not less than two registered medical practitioners are, of opinion that the continuance of the pregnancy would involve a risk to the life of the pregnant woman or of grave injury to her physical or mental health; or there is a substantial risk that if the child were born, it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities to be seriously handicapped.

What are the changes proposed in the Act?

1. to increase the upper limit for termination of a pregnancy from 20 weeks to 24 weeks.

2. It proposes requirement of opinion of one registered medical practitioner (RMP) for termination of pregnancy up to 20 weeks of gestation. Similarly, it also provides for the requirement of opinion of two RMPs for termination of pregnancy of 20 to 24 weeks.

3. The Bill also seeks to increase the upper gestation limit from 20 to 24 weeks for survivors of rape, victims of incest and other vulnerable women. “It will also include minor girls.”

4. For unmarried women, the Bill seeks to relax the contraceptive-failure condition for “any woman or her partner” from the present provision for “only married woman or her husband”, allowing them to medically terminate the pregnancy.

Way forward

The move to amend the MTP Act, 1971 is a progressive step towards empowerment of women. It will provide greater reproductive rights to women as abortion is considered an important aspect of the reproductive health of women. Deaths and injuries from unsafe abortions are largely preventable provided services are performed legally by trained practitioners.
Illegal sand mining
GS-III | 29 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic:

- Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment.
- Important Aspects of Governance, Transparency and Accountability.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the new guidelines for sand mining and its significance; about illegal sand mining in India and govt’s efforts to curb it; about NGT.

News: Following a series of orders by the National Green Tribunal in 2018, the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEF) has for the first time released guidelines to monitor and check illegal sand mining in the country.

Background:

- The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 has empowered state governments to make rules to prevent illegal mining, transportation and storage of minerals.

- But in the recent past, it has been observed that there was a large number of illegal mining cases in the country and in some cases, many of the officers lost their lives while executing their duties to curb illegal mining.

- Illegal and uncontrolled illegal mining leads to loss of revenue to the State and degradation of the environment.
Sustainable Sand Management Guidelines 2016

- While the MoEF has already put in place the Sustainable Sand Management Guidelines 2016, which focus on the management of sand mining in India, officials say that there is an urgent need to have guidelines for effective enforcement of regulatory provisions and their monitoring.

- While the Sustainable Sand Mining Guidelines, 2016, require the preparation of District Survey Reports (DSR), which is an important initial step before grant of mining lease, the government has found that the DSRs carried out by state and district administrations are often not comprehensive enough, allowing space for illegal mining.

- The new guidelines, therefore, list a detailed procedure of how the DSRs are to be made, including the development of an inventory, for the first time, of river bed material and other sand sources in the district.

About the new guidelines

- The Enforcement and Monitoring Guidelines for Sand Mining 2020 released by the Ministry this month include directions to states to carry out river audits, put detailed survey reports of all mining areas online and in the public domain, conduct replenishment studies of river beds, constantly monitor mining with drones, aerial surveys, ground surveys and set up dedicated task forces at district levels.

- The guidelines also push for online sales and purchase of sand and other riverbed materials to make the process transparent.

- They propose night surveillance of mining activity through night-vision drones.
The enforcement guidelines focus on the “effective monitoring of sand mining from the identification of sand mineral sources to its dispatch and end-use by consumers and the general public and looks at a uniform protocol for the whole country”.

The need for replenishment study for river bed sand is also required in order to “nullify the adverse impacts arising due to excessive sand extraction”. No riverbed mining will be allowed during the monsoon.

In cases where rivers become district boundaries or state boundaries, the districts or states sharing the boundary shall constitute the combined task force for monitoring of mined materials, mining activity and participate in the preparation of District Survey Reports (DSR) by providing appropriate imgs.

Detailed survey needs to be carried out for quantification of minerals and the demand and supply of the riverbed material through market survey, including the future demand for the next five years.

The guidelines also push for the sale and purchase of sand and river bed material (RBM) online to make the process more transparent.

The 2020 guidelines are to be enforced simultaneously with the Sustainable Sand Management Guidelines, 2016, but in instances where the two sets of guidelines may seem to be in conflict, the new set will hold legal precedence.

Source: Indian Express

African cheetahs to be introduced in India
GS-III | 29 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation,
News: The Supreme Court on Tuesday lifted its seven-year stay on a proposal to introduce African cheetahs from Namibia into the Indian habitat on an experimental basis. The plan was to revive the Indian cheetah population.

Background

- India’s last spotted cheetah died in 1947 and the animal was declared extinct in the country in 1952.

- In May 2012, the top court had stalled the plan to initiate the foreign cheetahs into the Kuno-Palpur Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh fearing they may come into conflict with a parallel and a much-delayed project to reintroduce lions into the same sanctuary.

- The court was also worried whether the African cheetahs would find the sanctuary a favourable clime as far as abundance of prey is concerned.

Arrangements made by SC

- The SC was hearing a petition filed by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) seeking permission for the introduction of African Cheetah from Namibia.

- But the Bench made sure that the right precautions are taken.

- It set up a three-member committee, comprising former Director of Wildlife

Environmental Impact Assessment.
of India, DG of Wildlife of India, and DIG, Wildlife, Ministry of Environment and Forests, to ‘guide’ the NTCA.

- It also directed the committee to **file a progress report every four months**.

- The Supreme Court made it clear that a proper survey should be done to identify the best possible habitat for the cheetahs. Every effort should be taken to ensure that they adapt to the Indian conditions. **The committee would help, advise and monitor the NTCA on these issues.**

- The **action of the introduction** of the animal would be **left to the NTCA’s discretion**. The court order notwithstanding, the actual process of translocation might be long-drawn.
India, France to partner on museums
GS-II | 29 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India’s interests.

Prelims and Mains focus: about India-France cooperation and its significance; Indo-France ties

News: India and France will work together in the field of museums, cultural spaces and research, and a joint working group will be established for this purpose, the Ministry of Culture said.

Task of the working group:

- The working group would explore partnership between the National Museum in Delhi and a French counterpart to be designated by the French government.

- The first meeting of this group would be held before April 30. The Ministers opened an exhibition of works by French artist Gerard Garouste at the National Gallery of Modern Art.

India-France historical ties:

- In the 17th century, the French East India Company established trading posts at Pondicherry, Chandernagore, Mahé, Karaikal and Yanam.
the Indian sub-continent, France was the dominant colonial power between the 17th and the 18th century.

- However, following the 1763 Paris Treaty, French power in India declined, restraining the French presence in India to five settlements. These were returned to India in 1962 under Delhi Treaty of 1954. Today, Pondicherry is the most visible historical heritage of that legacy and is an important French cultural and academic centre till date.

- The suppression of French influence in India was inevitable with the adoption of the British method of administration and education. A significant English domination of Indian thought and practices is still prevalent despite several years of Independence.

- In fact, India still makes a significant contribution to maintenance of the British Commonwealth War Graves, even though the contribution of Indian soldiers was muted till very recently. The French, more than the British, are responsible for modernising the Indian forces. This can be evidenced by the performance in the interstate wars in the colonial era.

- Both the countries have had deep relations with mutual influences and dependencies that go back nearly 300 years.

- Many French intellectuals such as Michelet, Cuvier, Anquetil-Duperon, Burnouff, Renan and Taine among many others recognised the richness of Indian culture and philosophy and brought it to the western audiences.

- Fascinated by India and "Indian exoticism", there was an eagerness to learn oriental languages. The first school of oriental languages was established in Paris in 1795, with a chair in Sanskrit in 1812 at the College de France, Paris. Even today, one of the largest collections of Indian manuscripts and artefacts outside India is with the Bibliothèque nationale de France and in private collections.
Both countries share similar orientations in foreign policy that is realist and not confined to alliances.

The symbiotic relationship **has stood the test of time** as for several years after India’s Independence, **France was the preferred nation next to the Soviet Union in terms of defence purchases.** More importantly, relations between the countries conspicuously defied Cold War tensions, with the French continuing to supply spare parts to Indian military, contrary to the stance of USA and UK in the sanctions period.

**Note:** to read about Indo-French relations in detail, click on the link given below:

https://in.ambafrance.org/Indo-French-relations-12465

Source: The Hindu

10 more wetlands in India declared as Ramsar sites

**Syllabus subtopic:** Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the new sites in the list of international wetlands; about wetlands and their importance; Ramsar sites in India; Efforts made by the govt. to conserve them

**News:** Ten more Indian wetland sites, **including the first from Maharashtra,**
have received the tag of international importance under the Ramsar Convention — an inter-governmental global treaty to preserve ecological character of selected wetlands across the globe.

Where are these wetlands?

The 10 new ones are

1. Maharashtra (1): Nandur Madhameshwar bird sanctuary
2. Punjab (3): Keshopur-Miani community reserve, Beas Conservation Reserve and Nangal wildlife sanctuary; and

- Maharashtra got its first Ramsar site: The site (Nandur Madhameshwar) is used by diverse group of species especially by resident birds for breeding and by migratory birds as a winter stopover site.

- With this, the list of wetlands in India under the Convention has grown to 37 with surface area of over 10,679 sq km, an area nearly the size of Sikkim and Goa put together.

Procedure for designating wetlands of international importance

- Under the Ramsar (Iran) Convention of 1971, the member countries identify those sites which are recognised as being of significant value not only for the country or the countries in which they are located, but for humanity as a whole.

- Globally, there are over 2,300 Ramsar sites around the world, covering over 2.1 million sq km.

Wetlands and their importance
The wetlands — land areas covered by water, either temporarily\seasonally or permanently — play a key role in flood control, water supply and providing food, fibre and raw materials. Besides, such land areas also support migratory birds from colder regions of the world in summers, apart from mangroves that protect coastlines and filter pollutants.

**Efforts made by India in wetland conservation**

- Sharing information on new Ramsar sites ahead of the World Wetlands Day (February 2), the environment ministry claimed that it has prepared a **four-pronged strategy** for the restoration of wetlands which includes preparing a baseline data, wetland health cards, enlisting wetland ‘mitras’ (friends) and preparation of targeted Integrated Management Plans.

- The ministry had on January 6 notified new guidelines for implementing **Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017** which prohibit setting up or expansion of industries, and disposal of construction and demolition waste within the wetlands.

- The inclusion of a wetland in the list embodies the government’s commitment to take steps necessary to ensure that its ecological character is maintained.
Trump unveils West Asia plan

GS-II | 29 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing
News: U.S. President Donald Trump on Tuesday unveiled West Asia plan as part of a peace plan to end decades of conflict in the region.

What are Trump’s proposals?

- The US will recognise Israeli sovereignty over territory that Mr Trump's plan envisages being part of Israel. The plan includes a conceptual map that Mr Trump says illustrates the territorial compromises that Israel is willing to make.

- The map will "more than double the Palestinian territory" and provide a Palestinian capital in eastern Jerusalem", where Mr Trump says the US would open an embassy. The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) said Mr Trump's plan would give Palestinians control over 15% of what it called "historic Palestine".

- Jerusalem "will remain Israel's undivided capital". Both Israel and the Palestinians hold competing claims to the holy city. The Palestinians insist that East Jerusalem, which Israel occupied in the 1967 Middle East war (Six Day War), be the capital of their future state.

- An opportunity for Palestinians to "achieve an independent state of their very own" - however, he gave few details.

- "No Palestinians or Israelis will be uprooted from their homes" - suggesting that existing Jewish settlements in the Israeli-occupied West Bank will remain. In exchange, Israel would agree to accept a four-year freeze on
new settlement activity while Palestinian statehood is negotiated.

- Israel will work with the king of Jordan to ensure that the status quo governing the key **holy site in Jerusalem known to Jews as the Temple Mount and al-Haram al-Sharif to Muslims** is preserved. Jordan runs the religious trust that administers the site.

- Territory allocated to Palestinians in Mr Trump's map "will remain open and undeveloped for a period of four years". During that time, Palestinians can study the deal, negotiate with Israel, and "achieve the criteria for statehood".
A plan that overturns Palestinian aspirations:

- Until now all of the most difficult aspects of an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal - the so-called final status issues - like borders; the future of Israeli settlements in the West Bank; the long-term status of Jerusalem; and the fate of Palestinian refugees, were to be left for face-to-face talks between the Israelis and Palestinians themselves.

- Not any longer. The deal proposed by President Trump and enthusiastically endorsed by Prime Minister Netanyahu essentially frames all of these issues in Israel's favour.

- The Palestinians were not just absent from this meeting - they have boycotted the Trump administration ever since it unilaterally moved its embassy to Jerusalem. But they have essentially been presented with an ultimatum - accept the Trump parameters or else, and they have been given some four years to come around.

- While President Trump is offering the Palestinians a state it would be a much truncated one. No Jewish settlers will be uprooted and Israeli sovereignty will apparently be extended to the settlement blocs and the Jordan Valley. The Palestinians might have a capital in the East Jerusalem suburbs. This "take it or leave it offer" will appal many long-standing students of the region. The question now is not so much what benefit this deal might bring but how much damage it may do by over-turning Palestinian aspirations.

What reaction has there been?

- In his address, President Abbas said it was "impossible for any Palestinian, Arab, Muslim or Christian child to accept" a Palestinian state without Jerusalem as its capital.
The militant Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, also rejected the deal which it said aimed "to liquidate the Palestinian national project".

The UN said it remained committed to a two-state solution based on the borders in place before the 1967 war, when Israel seized the West Bank and Gaza.

Israeli human rights group B'Tselem said the proposals envisaged a form of apartheid. It said Palestinians would be relegated "to small, enclosed, isolated enclaves, with no control over their lives".

Israel's Peace Now organisation said the plan was "as detached from reality as it is eye-catching". It said the plan’s green light for Israel to annex the settlements in exchange for a perforated Palestinian state is unviable and would not bring stability.

100 years of Israeli-Palestinian conflict: “Key moments”

- **Nov 2019**: Trump administration says it no longer considers Israeli settlements in occupied territory as inconsistent with international law, putting the US at odds with most of international community
- **Dec 2017**: Donald Trump announces US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital - Palestinians cut off relations with Trump administration
- **April 2014**: Last round of direct Israel-Palestinian peace talks collapse amid acrimony
- **Sept 2000- Feb 2005**: Second Palestinian uprising
- **Sept 1993**: Israel-Palestinians sign Oslo peace accords, agreeing framework for eventual peace deal; 20 years of on-off peace talks - and violence - follow
- **Dec 1987-Sept 1993**: First Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation
- **June 1967**: Middle East war - Israel occupies East Jerusalem, West Bank and Gaza Strip; years of hostility and bloodshed follow; UN Security Council Resolution 242 calls on Israel to withdraw from "territories occupied in recent conflict" and recognises the right of "every state in the area to live in peace within secure and recognised boundaries"
- **May 1948**: British Mandate for Palestine terminates; Israeli statehood
declared, Arab countries invade, conflict creates 700,000 Palestinian refugees; 800,000 Jews expelled or flee from Arab countries in wake

- **Nov 1947**: UN recommends partitioning Mandate Palestine into Jewish and Arab states - Jewish leadership in Palestine accept, Arab leadership reject; violence between two sides escalates

- **July 1922**: League of Nations entrusts Britain as Mandatory power to put terms of Balfour Declaration into effect

- **Dec 1917**: British forces conquer and occupy Palestine; in years that follow, violence between Jews and Arabs increases

- **Nov 1917**: Britain (fighting Ottoman Empire in WWI) issues "Balfour Declaration" expressing support for Jewish "national home" in Palestine on condition that the rights of non-Jewish communities there are not prejudiced

- **Pre-1917**: Turkish Ottoman Empire rules over Jewish and Arab communities in geographical area referred to as Palestine, the Holy Land or (by Jews) the Land of Israel.

Source: The Hindu

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**Indian Staffing Federation (ISF)**

**Syllabus subtopic:** Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the recommendations of the ISF; about labour reforms in India; about ISF

**News:** Indian Staffing Federation (ISF) has asked the government to make labour codes a reality and get them operational from April this year.

**Present scenario**

India currently had 44 Central, 387 State labour laws, 67 Central and 1,333 State labour filings and 674 Central and 26,484 State labour compliances.
Recommendations of ISF

- **Simplification, rationalisation, digitisation of labour laws** should be operational on an immediate basis to make them comprehensive, effective, easy to comply.

- To decongest cities and create more jobs across tier II and tier III cities, the government should ensure optimum utilisation of budgetary allocation towards infrastructure and development.

- Tier II and III cities and semiurban areas need to have clear and focussed development to help generate employment opportunities within them. This will put more money in the hands of people and consumption will improve.

- The government should focus on urbanisation, smart cities and infrastructural development on top priority to etch a comprehensive growth trajectory of the country.

- It is critical for the government to bring back positive sentiments in the domestic market, through necessary budgeting and policy initiatives, thereby unshackling the full potential of country’s high employment sectors such as telecom, ecommerce and automobiles.

About Indian Staffing Federation (ISF)

- The ISF is the **apex body representing the Staffing industry/Private Employment Services** that is authorised to discuss with government agencies and other trade bodies on behalf of the staffing industry/private employment services.

- The Staffing / private employment services is an enabler to provide social security and long term medical, and retirement benefits to temp/flexi-staff.
The purpose of ISF is to enhance long-term growth and ensure its continued ability to make positive contributions to the economy as well as the society through the services of the Staffing Industry.

**Staffing Industry covers a meager 2% penetration of the possible employable size in India.**

- Of the 400m employable in India, about 10% are employed in the organised sector, and while about 250m are self-employed.
- This leaves almost 110m who are employed by the temp/flexi-staffing and the unorganised sector. ISF is working towards growing this market.
- To bring effect, the laws and regulations haven't taken Staffing industry/Private Employment Services into cognizance.
- ISF expects to interact with law making authorities to recognize Staffing industry/Private Employment Services and create adequate and appropriate laws to manage it.

**What is Flexi-staffing?**

- Flexible Staffing is an arrangement in an organization where the employees can be from temporary agencies, leased employees or contract workers.
- It is more commonly known as temporary staffing and predominantly focuses on the white collar industry.

Source: The Hindu
Syllabus subtopic: Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the credit growth trend in the banking sector and its implications

News: India’s banking crisis, driven by high NPAs, has persisted for 6-7 years. During this time banks shifted to giving unsecured credit for personal loans, away from asset-backed secured lending. Many fear a bulk of these loans could be to subprime borrowers.

Credit situation trend

Personal loans offered by banks have increased over the years, peaking in the aftermath of the non-bank crisis in Sep 2018, while credit to industry has slowed.
What is a subprime borrower?

- A subprime borrower has a **higher chance of defaulting on a loan**. Typically, subprime borrowers have **lower credit ratings** and may have **delinquencies in their credit record**. A lower credit score does not automatically imply that a subprime borrower would be unable to source credit.
At the same time, lower the credit score, higher the interest rate charged by the bank to accommodate for the default risk. Many suspect that the recent saturation of the credit card market combined with severe competition in consumer lending businesses has resulted in extension of significant credit to subprime borrowers.

Why are subprime borrowers preferred?

- Even as corporate lending and mortgages are backed by a collateral, delay in securing those assets and recovering money through insolvency proceedings have led to risk aversion. Lenders are thus focusing on personal loans and credit cards as discretionary spending on clothes, ordering food, entertainment, travel and commuting rises.

- Developments in technology and the recent availability of data due to the integration of Aadhaar, PAN and bank accounts have lowered the costs of processing loans for banks. This has helped them lend small amounts as unsecured loans for personal consumption.

What has been the recent trend in credit extension?

A TransUnion CIBIL report for the June quarter showed that 32% of the credit cards were issued to subprime borrowers. This coincides with a sluggish extension of credit to industry at 2.3% in the September quarter, while lending to the farm sector grew 3.7% and personal loans rose 8.9%. Bankers are preferring to give personal loans and there is demand for the same.

Is there any link with the non-bank crisis?

While a major part of the NPA crisis may be behind us, fresh vulnerabilities have emerged due to a prolonged slowdown in the real estate sector. Non-banks (NBFCs) were often the front runners in providing last-mile availability of credit and the recent liquidity crisis has provided an opportunity for banks to try and get a share of the personal loan space. This can have positive implications for the sector and the economy as it can deepen the financial services industry,
What does it mean for the future of banking?

While financial services and banking would continue to grow in India as per capita income rises, much of the next stage of growth would come from servicing last-mile consumers. It could even be in financing of smaller size, short-duration loans. The policies seem conducive for the securitization industry. While a clean-up of the banking system was necessary, stiff competition could lead to some banks taking unmanageable risks on their balance sheets.

Source: Livemint

North-Eastern Council (NEC)

Syllabus subtopic: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the move and its significance; about NEC; SASEC; North east gas grid project

News: The Union cabinet on Wednesday allocated 30% of the North-Eastern Council’s (NEC’s) budget for developing deprived areas and integrating them with the mainstream.

- The government believes a portion of the funds can be utilized for building roads in remote hill regions and for addressing climate change challenges in the North-east.
The balance allocation shall be bifurcated in the existing two components—state component 60% and central component 40%.

The move, seen as part of the government’s Act East policy, will benefit marginalized and vulnerable groups of people in backward and neglected areas of North-eastern states.

**Background**

The special allocation issue was discussed in September when Union home ministry officials had met with governors and chief ministers of the eight North-eastern states as part of the North Eastern Council in Guwahati. Home minister had then described the region as pivotal to India’s growth story.

The Union cabinet’s decision comes close on the heels of the Centre stepping up its initiative to consolidate and integrate North-East India with the heartland. On Monday, the Centre signed the tripartite Bodo agreement with the banned National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and Assam government, ending a decades-old standoff with separatist groups and clearing the decks for further development of the Bodo regions of Assam.

The agreement with NDFB highlights the Centre’s attempts to pump greater infrastructure and economic support into the region and comes just days after the Centre signed a pact to permit the settlement of 30,000 Bru tribal refugees in Tripura.

Earlier in January, the Centre had announced the earmarking of ₹5,559 crore towards the construction of the North East Gas Grid project across the eight states, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura.
Other initiatives taken by the government for improving regional connectivity:

- **With an eye on China**: India is also working on a number of road and bridge projects to improve connectivity with Bangladesh, Nepal, and Myanmar. These include road networks connecting Aizawl in Mizoram with Kaladan in Myanmar and Imphal in Manipur with Tamu, also in Myanmar.

- India is also expediting the **South Asian Sub-Regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC)** road connectivity programme. Japan, too, has joined hands with India to develop infrastructure projects in the region with the setting up of the **India-Japan Coordination Forum for Development of Northeast**.

About North-Eastern Council’s (NEC)

- NEC was **established under the North Eastern Council Act, 1971** as an apex level body for securing balanced and coordinated development and facilitating coordination with the States.

- Subsequent to the Amendment of 2002, NEC has been mandated to function as a regional planning body for the North Eastern Area and while formulating a regional plan for this area, shall give priority to the schemes and projects benefiting two or more states provided that in the case of Sikkim, the Council shall formulate specific projects and schemes for that State.

- The Union Cabinet, in June 2018, approved the proposal of Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) for the nomination of the **Union Home Minister as ex-officio Chairman of North Eastern Council (NEC)**. The Cabinet also approved that Minister of State (Independent Charge), Ministry of DoNER would serve as Vice Chairman of the Council.
All the Governors and Chief Ministers of North Eastern States will be its members.

About South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC)

- It is a subregional program, set up in 2001
- Headquarters: Manila, Philippines
- Members: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, and Sri Lanka (BBIN-MMS)
- Objective: promote regional prosperity by improving cross-border connectivity, boosting trade among member countries, and strengthening regional economic cooperation
- SASEC priority areas of cooperation
  1. Transport
  2. trade facilitation
  3. energy
  4. economic corridor development (ECD)

- In 2016, the SASEC countries approved the SASEC Operational Plan 2016-2025, a 10-year strategic roadmap.

- SASEC Secretariat — ADB serves as the SASEC Secretariat

Source: Livemint

Anticipatory bail
GS-II | 30 January, 2020


Prelims and Mains focus: about the SC judgement on anticipatory bail and its
News: The protection of anticipatory or pre-arrest bail cannot be limited to any time frame or “fixed period” as denial of bail amounts to deprivation of the fundamental right to personal liberty in a free and democratic country, a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court ruled on Wednesday.

Context: The questions referred to the Constitution Bench were two-fold:

1. whether the protection granted to a person under Section 438 should be limited to a fixed period till the accused surrenders in court, and
2. whether the life of anticipatory bail should end when the accused is summoned by the court.

What is Section 438?

Section 438 (anticipatory bail) of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) protects people from the ignominy of detention in jail for days on end and disgrace to their reputation.
What did the SC say in its judgement?

- The court acknowledged that anticipatory bail helps thwart influential powers from implicating their rivals in false cases.

- It said that the life or duration of an anticipatory bail order does not normally end at the time and stage when the accused is summoned by the court, or when charges are framed, but can continue till the end of the trial.

- The history of our Republic — and indeed, the freedom movement — has shown how the likelihood of arbitrary arrest and indefinite detention and the lack of safeguards played an important role in rallying the people to demand independence.

- The spectre of arbitrary and heavyhanded arrests: too often, to harass and humiliate citizens, and often times, at the interest of powerful individuals (and not to further any meaningful investigation into offences) led to the enactment of Section 438.

- The court held that protection against arrest should inure in favour of the accused. Restricting the protection would prove unfavourable for the accused.

- However, it is open for a court to impose appropriate conditions for grant of anticipatory bail if the specific facts or the features of the offence involved demands it. Courts have to consider the nature of the offence, the role of the person, the likelihood of his influencing the course of investigation or tampering of evidence, including intimidating witnesses and fleeing justice. But restrictions/conditions can be imposed only on a casetocase basis.

- An application for anticipatory bail should be based on concrete facts and
not vague or general allegations. The application should also contain bare essential facts relating to the offence and why the applicant reasonably apprehends arrest. It should also have “his side of the story”.

- The court held that a plea for anticipatory bail can be filed even before the registration of FIR as long as there is reasonable basis for apprehension of arrest and clarity of facts.

- Nothing in Section 438 of the CrPC compels or obliges courts to impose conditions limiting the relief in terms of time or upon filing of FIR or recording of statement of witnesses by the police during investigation or inquiry, etc.

- Courts, depending on the seriousness of the threat of arrest, need not wait to hear the prosecution’s version before granting anticipatory bail. Issuance of notice to the prosecutor can be done simultaneously while granting protection from arrest to the accused.

- The grant of protection should not be “blanket” but confined to specific offence or incident for which relief from arrest is sought. It is open for the police to move court for arrest of the accused if there is any violation of bail conditions.

**What is bail?**

- Bail means temporary release of an accused person awaiting trial, sometimes on condition that a sum of money is lodged to guarantee their appearance in court. In other words release or secure the release of a prisoner on payment of bail.
- It may be defined as Security such as cash, a bond, or property, pledged or given to a court by or on behalf of one accused of committing a crime, to obtain release from incarceration and to ensure the person's future appearance in court when required during the criminal proceeding.
Types of Bail

1. **Interim Bail**: is for a certain period of time granted before hearing to the prosecution.

2. **Permanent Bail**: permanent in nature and granted only after hearing to the petitioner as well as the prosecution.

3. **Bail Before Arrest**: it is granted when the court feels that the accused is falsely involved in the case and an arrest would affect his honor and dignity badly.

4. **Bail On Arrest**: under Section 497 of Cr. Pc. Bail can be granted for both bailable as well as non bailable offences after the accused is arrested against a charge.

5. **Protective Bail**: A bail granted so that the accused can approach the provincial court for getting a pre-arrest bail without touching its merit.

6. **Directly Approaching Superior Court**: the Superior Courts can grant pre-arrest bail in some appropriate cases directly if the accused has been deprived or prevented of approaching lower courts.

7. **Bail For The Convict**: Once convicted, bail is granted to the accused even if the appeal for the same is accepted if court finds that there are considerable grounds for his/her release.

- **Anticipatory Bail**: The concept of Anticipatory Bail comes into place when the accused may rightfully fear arrest in cases of cognizable offences. Bail is a legal relief that a person may be entitled to in order to get temporary freedom until his case is disposed of. Depending on the gravity of the allegations, a person may be able to avoid arrest altogether. However, there
are cases in which arrest is made and the accused is set free as per the provisions of the bail as given under the Criminal Procedure Code. In cases of Criminal cases, especially those pertaining to dowry, anticipatory bail comes as a relief to many accused person. It is literally applied for in anticipation of arrest.

Source: The Hindu

Yellow rust disease
GS-III | 30 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Major Crops - Cropping Patterns in various parts of the country.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the yellow rust disease and its impact on the crop productivity; remedial measures to be taken to contain it.

**News:** The detection of **yellow rust disease in the wheat crop** in **sub mountainous parts of Punjab and Haryana** has raised anxiety among farmers about drop in the crop's yield even as respective agriculture departments are leaving nothing to chance to ensure the spread of the disease doesn't go beyond control.

- **Wheat, the main rabi (winter) crop**, is sown between late October till December while the harvesting of the crop will start from April onwards.

**What is Yellow rust disease?**

- Yellow rust is a **fungal disease** which **turns the crop's leaves into a yellowish colour** and **stops photosynthesis activity**, which **eventually could result in a drop of wheat crop productivity**.
The ideal growth conditions for yellow rust are temperatures of between 8-13 degree C for spore germination and penetration, and 12-15 degree C for further development and with free water. This makes yellow rust more of a spring disease. It should be noted, however, that whilst young plants can be susceptible, as they mature, they can develop “adult plant resistance”.

The optimum lifecycle for yellow rust is seven days, although symptom expression is more explosive than with brown rust, since the yellow rust fungus takes less time to build colonies of a size to support sporulation.

Yellow rust survives on late green tillers, volunteers and early sown crops. It originates as distinct ‘foci’ in crops and is spread long distances by wind.
What climatic conditions in Punjab and Haryana led to it?

- The recent **rains** in the region **coupled with slight increase in the temperature** and **humid conditions** are favourable for yellow rust.

- The minimum temperature have been hovering around 1.6 to 3.0 degree Celsius above normal at many places in parts of Punjab during the past few
After rain in the past few days, the minimum temperature had risen a bit, coupled with slightly humid conditions. However, in the next 34 days the minimum temperature is likely to dip.

Level of threat and remedial measures to be taken

- It’s in a very limited area that the crop has been affected as of now, but the team of experts has hit the fields to monitor the situation. However, at this stage it’s not threatening.

- It can’t be ignored as it can spread quickly and can cause severe losses in crop yield if not checked in time.

- Farmers should spray their crop with insecticides as per the advisory to contain the attack.

- Yellow rust is easier to control than brown rust with fungicides. This is because it forms its “looser” elongated pustules closer to the leaf surface, whereas brown rust forms very waxy dense pustules in the middle of the leaf, making it trickier for fungicides to access.

- Yellow rust is eight times less efficient at penetrating the wheat leaf than brown rust, because it doesn’t build specialised infection structures (appressoria). This renders it an easier target for fungicides with long-lasting protectant activity.

Source: The Hindu
Syllabus subtopic: Indian Culture - Salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

Prelims and Mains focus: about Nagoba jatara and the rituals associated with it

News: The month-long Nagoba jatara recently concluded in Telangana’s Adilabad district.

Key highlights

- The Betal puja involved display of martial art, in this case sword wielding, by the Adivasi Raj Gond and Pardhans from the Mesram clan near the Govad. The practised exercise has the ‘warrior’ jumping into the air wielding a thin bamboo stick like a sword.

- According to elders, the Adivasis were familiar with martial arts, having been from the once ruling clans. The Mesram exited Keslapur village to proceed towards Shampur in Utnoor mandal for the Budumdev jatara.

About Nagoba jatara

- Nagoba Jatara is a tribal festival held in Keslapur village, Inderavelly Mandal Adilabad district, Telangana, India.

- It is the second biggest tribal carnival and celebrated by Mesaram clan of Gond tribes. Tribal people from Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh belonging to the Mesram clan offer prayers at the festival.

- Thousands of Tribal people from Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Odisha,
Karnataka, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh belonging to the Mesaram clan offer prayers at the festival Nagoba.

- It's starts in pushya masam (December-January). A ceremony of 'bheting' is its integral part where the new brides are introduced to the clan god during first jatra after their marriage.

Nagoba Jatara Celebrations:

1. Rituals performed at Keslapur Nagoba Jatara begin in the morning, the Mesram elders will place the sacred ‘jhari’, a 1,400-year-old water container before performing its puja.

2. The group of Gond and Pradhan elders who had fetched holy water with pots from Hastina Madugu of river Godavari in Jannaram Mandal was given a traditional welcome under the old banyan tree.

3. Before the start of the pujas, the Gonds continue to ‘purify’ the temple with Ganga Jal or water from the Godavari drawn at a spot called ‘Hastina Madugu’ where Nagoba is believed to have quenched his thirst after partaking the ‘naivedyam’.

4. The event also includes a ceremony called ‘bheting’, which incorporates new brides into the clan. The Raj Gond Adivasis of Adilabad follow an elaborate ritual called Bheting, one of their many regalistic ceremonies, through which new daughters in law are formally introduced to the clan. All those who are married into the clan during the last year need to ‘meet’ clan deities through Bheting so that they become eligible to enter the deity’s temple.

5. The women clad in white saris are the Bheti Koriad or daughters in law to be introduced to goddess Jangubai and belong to the eight clans which have Jangubai as the clan deity.
6. The naivedyam carried in the bamboo baskets is made of freshly harvested food grains. The bamboo denotes the connection of the Gonds with the jungles while the naivedyam offering is a matter of thanksgiving for the crop harvested.

7. Adivasi celebrates with music and more than 15 types of dances.

8. The Gusadi Dance performance by dancers from the Gond tribe is a major special attraction of the event.

9. Gonds pilgrims and priests will play traditional folk music at the entrance of the Jangubai cave temple located in the hilly forest of Kota-Parandoli gram panchayat in Kerameri Revenue Mandal.

10. Later Gond women carry on with their daily grind, including grinding grain, with a smile on their face.

11. The women in the given group coming on pilgrimage to Jangubai caves prepare food at the spot, a small shed having been earmarked for the purpose.

12. In the night, the Gonds performed the Mahapuja of Nagoba, also known as Persa Pen or great god, which marks the actual beginning of the annual tribal fair.

Source: The Hindu

Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010
**Syllabus subtopic:** Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about FCRA and its objectives

**News:** The Open Society Foundations (OSF), an international grantmaking network promoted by billionaire philanthropist George Soros, has moved the Delhi High Court against the Centre’s decision to place it under a “watch list” for funding NGOs and associations that are not registered under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA).

**Background**

- The foreign donor was put under the watch list or “prior permission” category in 2016, but it moved the High Court only this month. Through its plea, the OSF sought to know the reasons for which it was placed under the list and why no prior notice was served to them.

- There are more than 20 foreign donors under the government’s scanner right now.

- Of these, eight were put under the priorpermission category during the UPA government and 13 after the NDA government came to power in 2014.

- As of now there are around 20,000 NGOs registered under the FCRA.

**What is the condition for receiving foreign funds?**

Any NGO that expects to receive foreign funds has to mandatorily register under the FCRA.

**About FCRA:**
The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 and rules framed under it (the “FCRA” or “Act”) regulate the receipt and usage of foreign contribution by nongovernmental organisations (“NGOs”) in India.

Since the Act is internal security legislation, despite being a law related to financial legislation, it falls into the purview of Home Ministry and not the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

To whom FCRA, 2010 is applicable?

As per Section 1(2) of FCRA, 2010, the provisions of the act shall apply to:

1. Whole of India
2. Citizens of India outside India; and
3. Associate Branches or subsidiaries, outside India, of companies or bodies corporate, registered or incorporated in India

Who can receive foreign contribution?

Any “Person” can receive foreign contribution subject to following conditions:-

a. It must have a definite cultural, economic, educational, religious or social programme.
b. It must obtain the FCRA registration / prior permission from the Central Government
c. It must not be prohibited under Section 3 of FCRA, 2010.

Who cannot receive foreign contribution?

As defined in Section 3(1) of FCRA, 2010, the following are prohibited to receive foreign contribution:

a. candidate for election;
b. correspondent, columnist, cartoonist, editor, owner, printer or publisher of a registered newspaper;
c. Judge, Government servant or employee of any corporation or any other body controlled or owned by the Government;
d. member of any legislature;
e. political party or office bearer thereof;
f. organization of a political nature as may be specified under sub-section (1) of
Section 5 by the Central Government.
g. association or company engaged in the production or broadcast of audio news or audio visual news or current affairs programmes through any electronic mode, or any other electronic form as defined in clause (r) of sub-section (1) of Section 2 of the Information Technology Act, 2000 or any other mode of mass communication;
h. correspondent or columnist, cartoonist, editor, owner of the association or company referred to in point (g).
a. Individuals or associations who have been prohibited from receiving foreign contribution.

Scope and objective of FCRA:

1. The intent of the Act is to prevent use of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality for any activity detrimental to the national interest.

2. It has a very wide scope and is applicable to a natural person, body corporate, all other types of Indian entities (whether incorporated or not) as well as NRIs and overseas branches/subsidiaries of Indian companies and other entities formed or registered in India. It is implemented by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

In order to achieve the above objective, the Act:

1. 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.

2. Regulates the inflow to and usage of foreign contribution by NGOs by prescribing a mechanism to accept, use and report usage of the same.

3. It defines the term ‘foreign contribution’ to include currency, article other than gift for personal use and securities received from foreign source. While foreign hospitality refers to any offer from a foreign source to provide foreign travel, boarding, lodging, transportation or medical treatment cost.
4. The Act permits only NGOs having a definite cultural, economic, educational, religious or social programme to accept foreign contribution, that too after such NGOs either obtain a certificate of registration or prior permission under the Act.

**Registration and prior approval under FCRA:**

1. In order to be registered under the FCRA, an NGO must be in existence for at least three years and must have undertaken reasonable activity in its field for which the foreign contribution is proposed to be utilised. Further, it must have spent at least INR 1,000,000 over three years preceding the date of its application on its activities.

2. The registration certificate is valid for a period of five years and must be thereafter renewed in the prescribed manner.

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

**The Act imposes various conditions on the use of foreign funds:**

1. All funds received by an NGO must be used only for the purpose for which they were received.

2. Such funds must not be used in speculative activities identified under the Act.

3. Except with the prior approval of the Authority, such funds must not be given or transferred to any entity not registered under the Act or having prior approval under the Act.
4. Every asset purchased with such fund must be in the name of the NGO and not its office bearers or members.

**Reporting requirement:**

Every NGO registered or having prior approval under the Act must file an annual report with the Authority in the prescribed form. This report must be accompanied by an income and expenditure statement, receipt and payment account, and balance sheet for the relevant financial year. For financial years where no foreign contribution is received, a ‘NIL’ report must be furnished with the Authority.

**Ensuring transparency**

A National Accreditation Council consisting of academicians, activist, retired bureaucrats should be made to ensure compliance by NGOs. There should be better coordination between Ministries of Home Affairs and Finance in terms of monitoring and regulating illicit and unaccounted funds.

Source: The Hindu

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Global Forum on Childhood Pneumonia
GS-II | 30 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the report and its findings; about the global forum on childhood pneumonia, about Pneumonia

**News:** A report on under-five mortality was released ahead of the first-ever
Background

- Deprived and marginalized children in the world’s poorest countries are most affected by the killer disease.

- Current trends forecast that 6.3 million children under five could die from the infection between 2020 and 2030 with the highest number of deaths predicted to be in Nigeria, with 1.4 million; India 880,000; the Democratic Republic of Congo 350,000; and Ethiopia 280,000.

Key findings of the report

- Fourteen per cent of under-five deaths in India — approximately 1,27,000 deaths annually — happen due to pneumonia. In 2013, this figure was about 1,78,000.

- It is estimated that half of these deaths are in the northern belt of the country. The current pneumonia mortality rate is five per 1,000 live births and the target is to reduce this to less than three by 2025.

- Outdoor air pollution contributes to 17.5 per cent — or nearly one in five — pneumonia deaths among children under five worldwide, according to a study by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation.

- Household pollution from the indoor use of solid cooking fuels contributes to an additional 1,95,000 (29.4 per cent) deaths.

Tackling Pneumonia

- According to a new scientific model produced by Johns Hopkins University, in the United States, scaling up pneumonia treatment and
prevention services can save the lives of 3.2 million children under the age of five the world over.

- It would also create ‘a ripple effect’ that would prevent 5.7 million extra child deaths from other major childhood diseases at the same time, underscoring need for integrated health services.

- As the current coronavirus outbreak shows, tackling pneumonia means improving timely detection and prevention. It means making the right diagnosis and prescribing the right treatment. It also means addressing the major causes of pneumonia deaths like malnutrition, lack of access to vaccines and antibiotics, and tackling the more difficult challenge of air pollution.

- According to World Health Organisation (WHO), the benefits of implementing key reduction-risk measures – such as improving nutrition, providing antibiotics and increasing vaccine coverage – would be many, including preventing the deaths of 2.1 million children from diarrhoea, 1.3 million from sepsis and another 280,000 from measles.

**About Pneumonia**

- Pneumonia is caused by bacteria, viruses or fungi, and leaves children fighting for breath as their lungs fill with puss and fluid.

- The current coronavirus epidemic which began in China, causes pneumonia and other respiratory diseases in patients.

- Pneumonia is the biggest single killer of children worldwide and claimed 800,000 last year, or one child every 39 seconds.

- Although some types of pneumonia can be easily prevented with vaccines
and treated with low-cost antibiotics, tens of millions of children remain unvaccinated and one-in-three children with symptoms do not receive medical care.

About the Global Forum on Childhood Pneumonia

- The first-ever global forum on childhood pneumonia kicked off on Wednesday in Barcelona, Spain, and will include discussions on a more affordable pneumonia vaccine and political commitments from governments in high-burden countries to develop national strategies to reduce pneumonia deaths.

- The forum is a major opportunity to ensure that pneumonia is at the forefront of national and global health agendas; galvanise national action, and mobilise the donor community to increase awareness of the scale of the pneumonia challenge.

- The Forum sets out to agree practical pathways that governments and their partners can take to meet the Sustainable Development Goal on child survival and the Global Action Plan for Pneumonia and Diarrhoea (GAPPD) target of three child pneumonia deaths per 1,000 live births.

- This is not a forum for reflection, but a call to action to deliver concrete measures with the potential to save hundreds of thousands of children’s lives.

Source: Indian Express
First case of coronavirus in India
GS-II | 31 January, 2020


Prelims and Mains focus: about the coronavirus and its spread across the world; measures taken by the Indian government in this regard

News: India reported its first case of novel coronavirus. An Indian student of Wuhan University in China tested positive in Kerala.

- This has put the focus on the extent of preparedness in the world's second-most populous nation to deal with a virus that has wreaked havoc in neighbouring China and is spreading swiftly across the world.

Background

The Indian case was announced as experts at the World Health Organization prepared to meet to decide whether to declare the outbreak a global epidemic.

Where did the virus originate?

- Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province in central China, is the epicentre of the outbreak. But the infection has spread to all 31 provinces of China, killing 170 people and infecting another 7,711. Across the world, it has been reported in 21 countries, including India.

Is India prepared?

- With the virus having entered India, monitoring and surveillance will have to be stepped up to prevent its further spread.
As there is no vaccine or drug available against the virus, the cases are managed according to their symptoms.

N-CoV is fatal but exact fatality is not estimated and how the virus will behave in the new population is also not known. Therefore, prevention and strict surveillance is very important in India.

When we talk about India, the cities here are overpopulated and the poor living conditions, inadequate amenities, poor waste management, unhygienic habits and practices, and the degraded sewerage system help spread viruses here with tremendous rapidity.

On the whole, the environment under which the virus grows has become dominant. At the same time, the possibilities of close contacts have become stronger due to concentration of people.

**Measures taken by the govt.**

- Stepping up its preparedness, the central government said that isolation wards have been readied in hospitals across all states and Union territories (UTs) to face any contingency.

- **Personal protection equipment** and masks are available in adequate quantities in all the states and UTs.

- Health authorities continued to screen all passengers coming from China and Hong Kong at over 21 airports.

- The government is procuring more of the thermal screening sensors that are operational in airports. Immigration and other staff members at airports have been sensitized and ambulances are on standby. Medical and paramedical staff are being deployed in shifts for round-the-clock service.
What is the criteria for declaring global health emergency?

The WHO declares a Public Health Emergency of International Concern when
there is "an extraordinary event which is determined… to constitute a public health risk to other states through the international spread of disease".

It has previously declared five global public health emergencies:

1. **Swine flu, 2009** - The H1N1 virus spread across the world in 2009, killing more than 200,000 people
2. **Polio, 2014** - Although closer than ever to eradication in 2012, polio numbers rose in 2013
3. **Zika, 2016** - The WHO declared Zika a public health emergency in 2016 after the disease spread rapidly through the Americas
4. **Ebola, 2014 and 2019** - The first emergency over the virus lasted from August 2014 to March 2016 as almost 30,000 people were infected and more than 11,000 died in West Africa. A second emergency was declared last year as an outbreak spread in DR Congo.

Source: Livemint

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**Airport Collaborative Decision Making (A-CDM) System**

**Syllabus subtopic:** Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about A-CDM and its benefits

**News:** Guwahati has become the eighth Indian airport to implement an Airport Collaborative Decision Making (A-CDM) system.

**About A-CDM**
The ACDM system, uses aircraft expected time of arrival, runway in use, and runway handling capacity among other factors to determine the aircraft arrival and departure sequence.

- The system improves the performance of airport operations and ensures a smooth arrival and departure sequence for airlines.

- Airport CDM (A-CDM) is about partners (airport operators, aircraft operators/ground handlers, ATC and the Network Operations) working together more efficiently and transparently in the way they work and share data. Efficiency of the Air Transport System is highly dependent on traffic predictability.

- The Airport CDM project aims to improve the overall efficiency of operations at an airport, with a particular focus on the aircraft turn-round and pre-departure sequencing process.

- One of the main outputs of the CDM process will be more accurate Target Take Off Times which can be used to improve en route and sector planning. This is being achieved through implementation of a full set of Departure Planning Information messages (DPIs) sent to Network Operations. The advantages for the network will start to multiply as more and more airports implement A-CDM.
Possible benifits of A-CDM:

1. Safety
2. Cost efficiency
3. Reduction of delay through improved airport operations and optimal en-route
4. Capacity
5. Environmental impact of aviation and fuel burn
6. Predictability
7. On-time performance
8. Reduce ground movement costs
9. Use of ground handling resources
10. Use of stands, gates and terminals
11. Use of the airport infrastructure and reduce congestion
12. Flexible pre-departure planning
13. Reduce apron and taxiway congestion

Source: The Hindu

Central Water Commission (CWC)
GS-II | 31 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Statutory, Regulatory and various Quasi-judicial Bodies.

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the issue and e-flow norms; about CWC, its functions

**News:** Over a year after the government made it mandatory for hydro power projects on the upper reaches of the river Ganga’s tributaries to release minimum quantities of water through the year, 4 of the 11 projects are flouting norms, says a report by the Central Water Commission (CWC).

**Background**

- The Centre’s e-flow notification came into effect last October and gave companies three years to modify their design plans, if required, to ensure that a minimum amount of water flowed during all seasons. Power producers generally hoard water to create reserves to increase power production.

- In September 2019, the government advanced this deadline, from October 2021 to December 2019. This was after the CWC undertook field visits to hydro power sites and reported that most of the power projects could begin...
implementing the norms right away and didn’t need three years.

What are these norms?

- The ecological flow, or e-flow notification as it is called, specifies that the upper stretches of the Ganga — from its origins in the glaciers and until Haridwar — would have to maintain: 20% of the monthly average flow of the preceding 10-days between November and March, which is the dry season; 25% of the average during the ‘lean season’ of October, April and May; and 30% of monthly average during the monsoon months of June-September.

- The CWC is tasked with measuring the flow and ensuring that plants comply with the law.

Way ahead

Violating the e-flow norms can mean closure of the project or a hefty fine but the government isn’t contemplating such action yet.
UPSC "PT" DNA (Daily News Analysis)
About the Central Water Commission (CWC)

Central Water Commission is a premier Technical Organization of India in the field of Water Resources and is presently functioning as an attached office of the Ministry of Jal Shakti, Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, Government of India.

Functions

- The Commission is entrusted with the general responsibilities of initiating, coordinating and furthering in consultation of the State Governments concerned, schemes for control, conservation and utilization of water resources throughout the country, for purpose of Flood Control, Irrigation, Navigation, Drinking Water Supply and Water Power Development.

- It also undertakes the investigations, construction and execution of any such schemes as required.

Composition

- CWC is headed by a Chairman, with the status of Ex-Officio Secretary to the Government of India.

- The work of the Commission is divided among 3 wings namely,
  1. Designs and Research (D&R) Wing,
  2. River Management (RM) Wing and

- Each wing is placed under the charge of a full-time Member with the status of Ex-Officio Additional Secretary to the Government of India and comprising of number of Organizations responsible for the disposal of tasks and duties falling within their assigned scope of functions.
Pollution by dairy farms
GS-III | 31 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the issue and the directions given by NGT; about various categories of industries; about NGT; CPCB

News: The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed pollution control boards of all States to obtain information from all local bodies pertaining to pollution caused by dairy farms and submit relevant data to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

Background
The directions came when the green panel was hearing a set of pleas seeking remedial action for compliance of environmental norms by the dairies.

Directions given by NGT
• The State pollution control boards and pollution control committees were directed to furnish factual and action-taken reports to the apex pollution control body by April 2020.
Private operators, including cooperative societies or other entities, not falling within the jurisdiction of local bodies, may also furnish the requisite information to the State PCBs within one month.

While observing that dairy activities were categorised as “orange” category, the NGT said the guidelines prepared by the CPCB need to be revised by specifying that State boards or committees must enforce ‘consent mechanism’ and in particular, follow an appropriate sitting policy in the light of the carrying capacity of the area for commercial dairy activities, having potential for air and water pollution.

Way ahead
The State PCBs/ PCCs (pollution control committees) may publish an appropriate notice on the subject within two weeks requiring furnishing of information and also adopting all necessary safeguards in the matter.

Various categories of industries

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has developed the criteria of categorization of industrial sectors based on the Pollution Index which is a function of the emissions (air pollutants), effluents (water pollutants), hazardous wastes generated and consumption of resources.

The Pollution Index PI of any industrial sector is a number from 0 to 100 and the increasing value of PI denotes the increasing degree of pollution load from the industrial sector.

Based on the series of brain storming sessions among CPCB, SPCBs and MoEFCC, the following criteria on ‘Range of Pollution Index’ for the purpose of categorization of industrial sectors is finalized.
1. **Red category**: Industrial Sectors having Pollution Index score of 60 and above.

2. **Orange category**: Industrial Sectors having Pollution Index score of 41 to 59

3. **Green category**: Industrial Sectors having Pollution Index score of 21 to 40

4. **White category**: Industrial Sectors having Pollution Index score incl.& upto 20

Source: The Hindu

Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)

**Syllabus subtopic**: Statutory, Regulatory and various Quasi-judicial Bodies.

**Prelims and Mains focus**: about the issue of using chemicals in fruits and vegetables; about FSSAI

**News**: The Delhi High Court has observed that use of pesticides and chemicals to ripen fruits amounts to poisoning the consumer, while noting that invoking penal provisions against the culprits would have a deterrent effect.

**Background**

- Apart from the petition initiated by the court on its own, the High Court was also hearing two other pleas by private individuals seeking directions to the
authorities to curb the use of pesticides and other chemicals on food products, especially the agricultural produce, coming into the national capital.

- Due to excessive usage of pesticides in fruits and vegetable, various countries have banned the import of Indian vegetables and fruits and many more were under scrutiny.

**Directions by the court**

- The High Court asked the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India [FSSAI] if calcium carbide was still being used to ripen fruits, like mangoes and sought the presence of its Chief Executive Officer to assist it on the next date of hearing.

- It also asked the Ministry of Agriculture if any kit was available for consumers to test for calcium carbide at home. The Ministry replied that no such kit was available as the presence of calcium carbide can only be tested in laboratories with the help of proper equipment and additional chemicals.

**Ripening agents used in fruits and vegetables**

Ripening is a process in fruits that causes them to become more palatable. In general, fruit becomes sweeter, less green (typically "redder"), and softer as it ripens. Even though the acidity of fruit increases as it ripens, the higher acidity level does not make the fruit seem tarter.

- Ripening agents speed up the ripening process. They allow many fruits to be picked prior to full ripening, which is useful, since ripened fruits do not ship well. For example, bananas are picked when green and artificially ripened after shipment by being gassed with ethylene.
Ethylene glycol, a compound made up of ethylene gas and hydrogen peroxide, costs anywhere from $15 to $19 in the U.S. Unfortunately, there is evidence that when ingested, the compound is poisonous, and eating the compound can cause kidney failure.

Calcium carbide is also used in some countries for artificially ripening fruit. When calcium carbide comes in contact with moisture, it produces acetylene gas, which is quite similar in its effects to the natural ripening agent, ethylene. Acetylene acts like ethylene and accelerates the ripening process. Industrial-grade calcium carbide may also contain traces of arsenic and phosphorus which makes it a human health concern. The use of this chemical for this purpose is illegal in most countries.

About Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)

- It is an autonomous body established under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India.

- It has been established under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 which is a consolidating statute related to food safety and regulation in India.

- FSSAI is responsible for protecting and promoting public health through the regulation and supervision of food safety.

- The FSSAI is headed by a non-executive Chairperson, appointed by the Central Government, either holding or has held the position of not below the rank of Secretary to the Government of India.

- The FSSAI has its headquarters at New Delhi. The authority also has 6 regional offices located in Delhi, Guwahati, Mumbai, Kolkata, Cochin, and Chennai.
New power scheme to replace UDAY

GS-II | 31 January, 2020

**Syllabus subtopic:** Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the new scheme to be launched and how is it going to be a game changer for discoms and consumers; about UDAY and its shortcomings

**News:** The upcoming Budget is likely to introduce a new scheme directed at the power sector that would replace the NDA government’s earlier scheme, UDAY, which had floundered in its attempt to revive the country’s power distribution companies (discoms).

**Background**

UDAY, launched in 2015, was aimed at reviving ailing state power discoms and make them operationally and financially efficient through various measures, like reducing aggregate technical and commercial (AT&C) losses to 15 per cent by FY2019. The losses had come down to 18.79 per cent. The new scheme aims to achieve this 15 per cent target.

**About the new scheme**

- The project would combine elements of strengthening the distribution system and the trajectory of loss reduction of UDAY.

- Now it will be conditional — if states follow the trajectory of loss reduction, the central govt. will give them the money for strengthening the system. UDAY
envisaged that the development funds will be conditional, but it was never implemented.

- The new scheme is also expected to contain a plan to diversify power distribution across the country by moving from a mostly state-owned discom system to one where private firms would be allowed franchises to supply electricity to consumers. This would ensure competition and better service and would also ensure timely collection of money for the power distributed.

- The govt. has suggested that the new set of reforms would be stricter in its implementation.

Source: Indian Express

UK finally leaves European Union

GS-II | 31 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India’s interests, Indian Diaspora.

Prelims and Mains focus: all about the Brexit issue; the Irish backstop agreement; about European Union

News: After more than three years of political wrangling, the departure of two prime ministers, and dozens of furious protests across the United Kingdom, Brexit is finally happening.

Context: At 23:00 GMT, January 31, the UK will officially end its 47-year membership of the European Union - becoming the first country ever to leave
the bloc, and enter a transition period scheduled to end on December 31, 2020.

- For about half of the UK population - **52 percent voted to quit** the bloc in the June, 2016 referendum, Brexit day is being greeted with long-awaited celebrations. But for the other half - the **48 percent who voted to remain** - it is a day of mourning.

**Is this the end of the road?**

The breaking of the ranks **does not signal the end of Brexit, but the start of a new, potentially tumultuous chapter in the saga, leaving the UK just 11 months to negotiate a deal to be agreed by all 27 remaining EU states.**

**What next?**

**1. The transition period**

- During the **11-month transition period**, the UK will **continue to follow all of the EU's rules and its trading relationship** will remain the same, but it will not be part of EU political institutions and there will be no British members of the European Parliament.

- The **government's first priority** will be to arrange a **trade deal for future commercial relations with Europe**, if it wants to avoid economic losses with its largest trading partner, but analysts question whether a comprehensive deal can be achieved in 11 months - a deadline Prime Minister Boris Johnson has insisted upon.

- The **key issue** is "whether the UK is going to stick to its position of maintaining regulatory autonomy and not agreeing to alignment with EU rules, and what impact that could have on trade deals". The EU has said it requires the UK to stay in line if it wants a zero tariffs, zero quotas trade deal.
If no trade deal has been agreed and ratified by the end of 2020, the UK could face World Trade Organization-mandated tariffs on exports to the EU. Trade would suffer and some foreign investors would likely pull out of major industries, such as the thriving automotive sector. In October, a joint statement from aerospace, automotive, chemicals, food and drink and pharmaceutical sectors, which contribute a total of 98 billion pounds ($128bn) to the UK economy each year, warned the UK's Brexit plans could pose a "serious risk to manufacturing competitiveness".

The UK and EU will also have to negotiate the future of its relationship on law enforcement, data sharing and security, aviation standards and safety, access to fishing waters, and the regulation of medicines. For example, the UK is set to leave the European Arrest Warrant scheme - which allows British police to arrest EU nationals on behalf of European police services - and will have to agree to a replacement.

2. Migration

After the transition period, the UK will create a new immigration system that will end freedom of movement.

The right of EU nationals who currently live in the UK, however, will not be affected, officials have promised.

The ruling Conservatives have pledged to introduce an "Australian-style points-based system to control immigration", an approach that will treat non-EU citizens and EU citizens (unless they are Irish citizens) wishing to move to the UK the same. The independent Migration Advisory Committee dismissed the system as "pointless". It is still uncertain exactly how the plan will work.

In practice, EU citizens will probably find it harder to live and work in the UK in the future.
For UK citizens, it will also be harder to live and work abroad - but this ultimately depends on negotiations with individual member states.

Conclusion

• Some analysts are concerned that an EU without the UK means a weaker Europe, particularly in a global context in which the US is increasingly protectionist, and China increasingly aggressive.

• Clearly, losing one of the big member states is a significant blow to the EU, and it does reduce its geopolitical and security clout. It's hard to know what the medium to long-term impacts will be.

Source: Indian Express

20th Livestock Census
GS-III | 31 January, 2020

Syllabus subtopic: Economics of Animal-Rearing.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the key findings; about livestock in India and challenges

News: The number of stray cattle in the country has marginally come down to 50.22 lakh in 2019 from 51.88 lakh in 2012 — a decline of 3.2 per cent — according to the latest data of the 20th Livestock Census released by the Ministry of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries.

Background
On October 16 last year, the ministry had released provisional figures of the 20th Livestock Census. However, at that point, the number of stray cattle was not known. The government had started collecting information about stray cattle from the 19th Livestock Census in 2012.

According to the 20th Livestock Census, the information on the approximate number of stray cattle was collected from a single source in the village or ward such as sarpanch or a panchayat member or a patwari.

**Key findings**

- The number of stray cattle is additional to the total cattle population in the country, about 19.34 crore in 2019 — 1.3 per cent up from 19 crore in 2012.

- While the data shows a decline at the national level, there is substantial increase in stray cattle population in states such as Uttar Pradesh (17.34 per cent), Madhya Pradesh (95 per cent), Rajasthan (34.48 per cent), Gujarat (17.59 per cent), Chhattisgarh (33.93 per cent) and Punjab (38.69 per cent) in 2019 in comparison to 2012.

- However, in some states, a sharp decline has been registered in the stray cattle population. These include Odisha (86.68 per cent decline), West Bengal (73.59 per cent), Bihar (66.54 per cent) and Tamil Nadu (23.95 per cent).

- West Bengal has the highest number of cattle — 190 lakh in 2019 from 165 lakh in 2012. Bengal has become the state with the largest cattle population during the tenure of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

- In the same period, the number of cattle has also gone up in other eastern states, such as Bihar (from 122 lakh to 153 lakh) and Jharkhand (from 8.7 lakh to 112 lakh).
Case of Uttar Pradesh
The sharp increase in the number of stray cattle in Uttar Pradesh shows that efforts to control the problem have not yielded desired results.

The state government had imposed special duty on liquor in its last budget to raise Rs 165 crore for maintenance of stray cattle.

It also allocated Rs 247.60 crore for construction of gaushalas (cow shelters) in rural areas and Rs 200 crore for Kanha Gaushalas to house the stray animals in urban areas. But the increase in the stray cattle population shows no relief on ground.

Importance of livestock in poverty alleviation:

- Livestock rearing is a key livelihood and risk mitigation strategy for small and marginal farmers, particularly across the rain-fed regions of India.

- Share in agricultural GDP: Livestock products comprised 32 per cent of the total value of agriculture and allied activities in 2006-07 which was a noticeable increase from 27 per cent in 1999-2000 and from 1980-81 when it represented 14 per cent of the agricultural gross domestic product.

Why does it require special attention?

- Livestock rearing at the household level is largely a women-led activity, and therefore income from livestock rearing and decisions related to management of livestock within the household are primarily taken by women.

- Livestock rearing, particularly in the rain-fed regions of the country, is also emerging as a key risk mitigation strategy for the poorest. They face increasingly uncertain and erratic weather conditions which negatively impact crop productivity and wage labour in the agriculture sector.
Challenges:

- Although livestock products make important contributions to food security and poverty reduction for many low-income rural families, the policy and institutional framework has failed to serve the needs of these poorest households and to get them onto the conveyor belt of development.
- A lack of public services in animal health that reach out to the poorest in rural areas and a failure to link small holder livestock keepers to better paying markets.
- The institutional and policy frameworks tend to support intensive and commercial livestock rearing, both in the provision of services and also in facilitating access to markets.
- Livestock producers, including traditional pastoralists and smallholders, are both victims of natural resource degradation and contributors to it.
- Animal health systems have been neglected in many parts and this has led to institutional weaknesses that in turn lead to poor delivery of animal health services and higher risks to livelihoods and human health.

Way forward:

Livestock wealth is much more equitably distributed than wealth associated with land. Thus, when we think of the goal of inclusive growth, we should not forget that from equity and livelihood perspectives, livestock rearing must be at the centre of the stage in poverty alleviation programmes.

Source: Indian Express

Paharis to get reservation in J&K
GS-II | 31 January,2020

Syllabus subtopic: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.
Prelims and Mains focus: about the new reservation policy in J&K; about Paharis


Background

- After reorganisation of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories and the enactment of Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Act, it had become imperative to rationalise the existing reservation percentage available to different categories so as to include Pahari-speaking people into the category of socially and educationally backward classes (SEBCs).

- Because of the remoteness and inaccessibility of the areas of their residence, the Pahari community has historically faced considerable economic distress leading to overall socio-economic backwardness.

- On one hand, they are not able to compete with other sections of the society who are better placed in terms of socio-economic position as also in terms of access to services like Education and Health Care due to above mentioned disadvantages. On the other hand, the Pahari People are not able to derive any benefit even at the lower rung in respect of getting employment. The reservation provided to them will go a long way in improving their status, educational and job opportunities.

What was the reservation policy until now?

As per the existing rules, there is 8 per cent reservation in direct recruitment for Scheduled Castes, 10 per cent for Scheduled Tribes, two per cent for weaker
and underprivileged classes, **three per cent** for residents of areas adjoining Line of Actual Control/ International Border, **20 per cent** for residents of backward areas, besides horizontal reservation of **6 per cent** for ex-servicemen and **3 per cent** for persons with disabilities.

**What has changed?**

- The residents of backward areas will now have **10 per cent reservation**, **Pahari-speaking people 4 per cent** and **10 per cent quota for EWS**. The SCs will continue to have **8 per cent reservation**, STs **10 per cent**, weaker and underprivileged classes **4 per cent**, residents of areas adjoining the Line of Actual Control and the border **4 per cent**, besides **6 per cent horizontal reservation for ex-servicemen** and **4 per cent for persons with disabilities**.

- For admission in professional institutions, there will be **8 per cent reservation for SCs**, **10 per cent for STs**, **4 per cent for residents of areas along the Line of Actual Control**, **10 per cent for residents of backward areas**, **4 per cent of Pahari-speaking people**, **4 per cent for persons with disabilities**, **10 per cent for EWS**, among others.

- The Administrative Council (chaired by Lieutenant Governor) has directed the **Social Welfare Department** to redraw the reservation roster.

**Eligibility**

For claiming the benefit, a person

1. **must be a member of Pahari clan, community or tribe** having **distinct cultural, ethnic and linguistic identity**;
2. **must be speaking Pahari language** and **Pahari must be his mother tongue**.
3. An Aadhaar Card or Domicile Certificate is required to avail the benefit.

Source: Indian Express