GS-I

Bathukamma Festival

Why in News?
- For the first time ever the New South Wales Parliament in Sydney, Australia celebrated the ethnic festival of Bathukamma.
- Pochampally Handloom Weavers also got a chance to promote their sarees in this celebration.

About Bathukamma
- Bathukamma that means 'Mother Goddess come Alive' is a colourful floral festival of Telangana celebrated towards the end of monsoon.
- Bathukamma is a beautiful flower stack of different unique seasonal flowers most of them with medicinal value, arranged in seven concentric layers in the shape of temple gopuram.
- The final day of Bathukamma, known as Pedha or Saddula Bathukamma falls two days before Dussehra.

About Pochampalli Sarees
- The art originated in 18th Century in Pochampally town of Telangana and is locally called as Chit-ku. The town is popularly known as the silk city of India.
- These sarees are culturally popular for the Ikat styling and designs (geometrical) imprinted on this fabric.
- The Poochampalli Ikat Sarees also have GI tag in their name.

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Sir Chhotu Ram

Why in news?

Recently, Prime Minister unveiled a statue of Sir Chhotu Ram (1881-1945) in Rohtak district.

Political activities of Sir Chhotu Ram

- He founded the **Jat Sabha**, followed by the launch of the **Jat Gazette** in 1915.
- He joined the **Congress** in 1916. In 1920, he launched Zamindaran Party, which later became the Unionist Party in 1923 in alliance with Fazl-e-Hussain and Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan.
- His party **won the general elections** of 1936 and formed a coalition government along with the Congress and Sikh Akali Dal. He became the Revenue Minister.

Reforms initiated by Sir Chhotu Ram

- He conceived the **Bhakra Dam project** way back in 1923. He, along with the King of Bilaspur, signed the Bhakra Dam project.
- He was considered as an **agrarian reformer**. Under him, **various legislations** were passed such as Punjab Land Revenue (Amendment) Act, 1929, Punjab Agricultural Produce Markets Act was passed in 1939 (Mandi Act), Punjab Relief of Indebtedness Act, 1943.
- For his work, the peasantry rewarded him with the titles of **Deen-bandhu** and **Rahbar-e-Azam**. Also, the British honoured him with a **knighthood** in 1937.

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Azad Hind Government

- *Context:* Seventy years after Subhash Chandra Bose assumed the leadership of the 'Azad Hind Government', PM Narendra Modi will hoist the national flag and unveil a plaque to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the erstwhile government on October 21 at the Red Fort.

About Azad Hind Government:

- Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose had announced the establishment of the provisional government of Azad Hind in occupied Singapore in 1943.
- Known as *Arzi Hukumat-e-Azad Hind*, it was supported by the Axis powers of Imperial Japan, Nazi Germany, the Italian Social Republic, and their allies.
- The revered freedom fighter had launched a struggle to free India from British rule under the banner of the provisional government-in exile during the latter part of the Second World War.

Objectives:

- Bose was convinced that armed struggle was the only way to achieve independence for India. He had been a leader of the radical wing of the Indian National Congress in the late 1920s and 1930s, rising to become Congress president in 1938 and 1939 but was ousted following differences with Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress leadership.
- Under his provisional government, the Indians living abroad had been united. The Indian National Army drew ex- prisoners and thousands of civilian volunteers from the Indian expatriate population in Malaya (present- day Malaysia) and Burma (now Myanmar).

The formation:

- On October 21, 1943, in his address announcing the setting up of the provisional government, he said India's Army of Liberation was drawn up in military formation on the battlefield of Singapore which was once the bulwark of the British Empire.
- Under the provisional government, *Bose was the head of the state, the prime minister and the minister for war and foreign affairs. Captain Lakshmi headed the women's organisation while S A Ayer headed the publicity and propaganda wing*.
- Revolutionary leader *Rash Behari Bose was designated as the supreme advisor*. The provisional government was also formed in the Japanese-occupied Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The islands were reoccupied by the British in 1945.
- Bose's death was seen as the end to the Azad Hind movement. The Second World War, also ended in 1945 with the defeat of the Axis powers.

Vishwa Shanti Ahimsa Sammelan

Why in news?
Vishwa Shanti Ahimsa Sammelan (VSAS) 2018 took place in Mangi-Tungi in Satana Taluka of Nashik District, Maharashtra.

About Mangi Tungi Hills:
- These are the two hills of Sahyadri range.
- The hills have about 10 cave temples belonging to Jainism.
- These two peaks have special significance in Jainism because around 990 million Digambar Jains achieved salvation on these two hills. Therefore, the area is called 'Siddha Kshtera' (gateway to the state of enlightenment).
- Mangi Tungi is also the site of the 108-feet tall statue of Jain Tirthankar Bhagwan Rishabhdev. This is the tallest monolithic Jain statue in the world, erected in 2016.
- Before that 57-feet tall Gommateswar statue of Bahubali (Son of Lord Rishabhdev) at Sravan Belagola was the tallest single-rock Jain statue in the world.

CORE BELIEFS

Both sects (Swetambar - monks; Digambar - monks) aim to make sure their soul does not receive any more Karma so that the Karman inside of them will be eliminated

Mahavira created the Three Jewels: Right Belief (Samyak Darshan) Right Knowledge (SamkyakJnan) and Right Conduct

In the Three Jewels are the Five Abstinences: Ahisma (Non Violence), Satya (truthfulness), Asteya (Not stealing), Aparigraha (Non Acquistion), and Brahmacarya (Chaste Living).

Believe that souls: Exist forever, always independent, responsible for actions, can be liberated from cycle of Birth, Death, and Rebirth but not all souls are capable of this.

When human dies, the soul goes to its next body instantly. May not even be human or animal

About Lord Rishabhdev
- He is the first Jain Tirthankara (spiritual teacher). He is also called Adi Nath.
- He introduced the philosophy of Non-Violence.
- His symbol or emblem is Bull.

- He is considered as the founder of Ikshvaku dynasty to which Lord Rama belonged.

Tirthankara (ford-maker): Also called Jina (victor), is a great human being who attains liberation by destroying all his karmas and becomes a role model for every living being. A Tirthankara not only attains salvation himself but also helps all those who are sincerely trying to seek nirvana by preaching and guiding them.

Unesco Global Geopark Network Status

What is UNESCO Global Geopark Network Status?

- **UNESCO Global Geoparks** are single, unified geographical areas where sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed with a holistic concept of protection, education and sustainable development.
- It aims to enhance awareness and understanding of key issues facing society, such as using our earth's resources sustainably, mitigating the effects of climate change and reducing natural disasters-related risks.
- **The Global Geoparks Network (GGN),** is a legally constituted not-for-profit organisation. Its membership is obligatory for UNESCO Global Geoparks.
- At present, there are **140 UNESCO Global Geoparks in 38 countries.**
- An aspiring Global Geopark must have a dedicated website, a corporate identity, comprehensive management plan, protection plans, finance, and partnerships for it to be accepted.
- As of now there is **no geo-heritage site from India is included under UNESCO Geo park Network**.

About the sites chosen:

- **Lonar Lake, Maharashtra:**
  - o It is the **world's oldest meteoric crater** formed around 50,000 years ago and the **only one formed in basalt rock**.
  - o It is a salt water lake.
  - o It became **a national geo-heritage site in 1979**.

- **St. Mary's Island and Malpe Beach, Karnataka:**
  - o It is a **hexagonal mosaic of basaltic rocks** in an island off Udupi.
  - o It is estimated to be **an 88-million-year-old formation** that goes back to a time when Greater India broke away from Madagascar.
  - o It was declared a **national geo-heritage site in 1975**.

Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV)

About the Scheme

- **Objective**: KGBV scheme under **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)** provides residential elementary educational facilities at upper primary level to girls belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, minority communities and families below the poverty line in **Educationally Backward Blocks**.
- **Present Status**: There are 3703 KGBVs, out of which 3697 KGBVs are operational, enrolling 3.78 lakh girls.
- **Convergence with other Scheme:** Under the newly launched **Integrated Scheme of School Education**- **Samagra Shiksha,** provision has been made to upgrade the existing KGBVs at upper primary level to upto senior secondary level in convergence with the erstwhile **Girls Hostel Scheme.**

Challenges in Implementation

- **Poor Management**: There are wide variations in the management of KGBVs within and across the states as both government and NGOs are involved in the management of KGBVs.
- **Lack of Funding**: Recurring costs of KGBV component of the SSA programme that had not been revised since 2004.
- **Infrastructure Gaps**: Construction of school buildings along with proper toilets, library facilities and low female teachers ration where observed as a significant performance gaps.
- **Underutilization of funds:** due to the reasons such as low strength of girl children, untimely availability of funds and low teachers' strength.
- **Security problem in KGBV**: Girls feel that lack of boundary wall and lack of security guard is a matter of concern for their security.
- **Role of teacher**: The number of teachers per school is less than the requirement, also temporary nature of teaching impact the efficiency of schooling.

Way Forward

- **Better implementation and monitoring**: Independent management for KGBV at the national level for better implementation and monitoring of the scheme as variations have been reported in or within the states resulting in deviations from the scheme objectives.
- **Fortifying safety and security aspects:** For eg- provision of boundary walls, security personnel etc. are required in KGBVs.
- **Improving Amenities**: Better maintenance and repair of infrastructure facilities in hostels, school, library and computer facility.
- **Improving Teachers ratio**: Appointment of permanent teachers with training exposure and better salary to focus on teaching-learning activities.

TEENAGE GIRLS (TAG) REPORT

About the TAG report
- The report includes the teenage girls from **13 to 19 years of age group**.
- It reveals what it really means to be a teenage girl in India.
- Subsequently report/survey findings have also been used to prepare an Index called the TAG Index

Key Takeaway from the report
- **On Education**
  - During teenage, the percentage of girls studying decreases, nearly 92.3 per cent are studying, at the age of 13 years. Whereas only 65.5 per cent are studying at age 19.
  - Presently, 80 per cent teenage girls are currently studying.
  - In term of current school enrolment, rural India is almost on par with urban India when it comes to girls being in school. The dropout rate in rural areas is also low now.
- **On Health & Hygiene**
  - Overall, 39.8 per cent reported open defecation because; Most of the toilets lack a water connection and the current practice of attached toilet and bathroom has not been a traditional practice thus girls feel shy to use the toilet.
  - Every second teenage girl in India is using unhygienic methods of mensural protection.
  - Nearly, 51.8 per cent teenage girls in India are having anaemia.
- **On Aspiration**
  - Survey showed that nearly, 96% of teenage girls are unmarried with hardly any difference in rural (95.5%) and urban (96.6%).
  - Around 70% girls wish to pursue higher studies and most adolescent girls aspire to work after their studies and marry only when they are able to earn a living.
  - Approx. 73.3% girls want to get married after the age of 21 and wish to pursue higher studies with a specific career in mind.

Significance of empowerment of teenage girl
- **Economic Prospect:** various studies by United Nation agencies highlighted that empowering the girls creates a ripple effect in society in term of economic growth. For instance; 10 percent increase in girls going to school can increase the national income (GDP) by three percentage points**.**
- **Demographic Dividend:** In order to utilise this demographic dividend (which is going to last for 25 years) investment in health and education for teenage girls (which is huge proportion of workforce) is paramount.
- **Child Health:** The health of the teenage girl holds significance not only for her own life, but also for the health and well-being of the children she may have.

Women In Agriculture

Why in News?
October 15 is celebrated as **National Women's Farmer's Day** (Rashtriya Mahila Kisan Diwas) by recognising the multidimensional role of women at every stage in agriculture.

Current trends in feminisation of Agriculture

- According to the **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO),** women's contribution to Indian agriculture is about **32%,** while in some states (such as Hills, Northeast, and Kerala) contribution of women to agriculture and rural economy is **more than men.**

- **Economic Survey 2017-18** says that with growing rural to urban migration by men, there is '**feminisation' of agriculture sector**, with increasing number of women in multiple roles as **cultivators**, **entrepreneurs**, and **labourers**. According to **Census 2011**, out of total female main workers, **55% were agricultural labourers** and **24% were cultivators.**

- A research by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) shows that the **participation of women is 75% in the production of major crops, 79% in horticulture and 51% in post-harvest work.**

Impact of women in agriculture:

- **FAO** estimates that if women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could **increase yields on their farms by 20-30%**. This could raise total the **agricultural output** in developing countries by **up to 4%** which would mean a **dramatic reduction in hunger.**

- Research worldwide shows that women with **access to secure land, formal credit** and **access to market** have greater propensity in **making investments** in improving **harvest**, increasing **productivity**, and improving **household food security and nutrition.**

- Women are more likely than men to hold **low-wage, part-time, seasonal employment** and they tend to be paid less even when their qualifications are higher than men's, but new jobs in **high-value, export-oriented agro-industries** offer much better opportunities for women.

- Women can propel the country towards **second Green Revolution** and they can change the landscape of the development if they get opportunities and facilities.

Reasons behind Feminization of Agriculture

- **Male Migration**- There has been a need for men to find better avenues for income for the sustenance of their family. Urban centres have been seen as providing lucrative job opportunities for them. Men from rural areas migrate to cities seeking a means for regular income leaving behind the agricultural chores to women.

- **Low level of Skills**- The women in turn face various hardships while operating agricultural chores such as low level of agricultural skills, lack knowledge to improve productivity thereby entering into a vicious cycle of poverty.

- **Lack of Property Rights**- Given the social and religious set up in India, women do not generally enjoy equal property rights as their male counter parts. The property related rules and rights are governed by the religious laws which are inherently unequal.

- **Lack of bargaining power to women**- Due to lack of property rights, women are generally not given the land rights in their name. Because of this, women lack bargaining power in the family as against the property holding male member. Also, due to low level of skills, they work much longer hours than men and are paid lesser than their counterpart.

- **Farmer Suicides:** The increasing numbers of suicides among male farmers

forces women to take up farming as they cannot manage their families with the compensation that they may get.

Challenges faced by women in Agriculture:

- **Issue of land ownership**: The biggest challenge is the **powerlessness** of women in terms of **claiming ownership of the land** they have been cultivating. As per Census 2011, **only 12.8%** of the operational holdings were owned by women, which reflect the **gender disparity** in ownership of landholdings in agriculture.
- **Lack of Institutional Credit**: Lack of ownership of land does not allow women farmers to approach banks for **institutional loans** as banks usually consider land as collateral.
- **Non-recognition**: According to **Oxfam India**, women are responsible for about 60-80% of food and 90% of dairy production, respectively. But the work by women farmers, in crop cultivation, livestock management or at home, often goes unnoticed.
- **Contract farming**: Female farmers are largely **excluded from modern contract-farming arrangements** because they lack secure control over land, family labour and other resources required to guarantee delivery of a reliable flow of produce.
- **Innovation in Agriculture:** When a new technology is introduced to automate specific manual labour, women may loose their jobs because they are often responsible for the **manual duties.**
- **Lack of Training**: Attempts by the government to impart them training in poultry, apiculture and rural handicrafts is trivial given their large numbers.
- **Gender discrimination:** The 17-country study by **Corteva Agriscience** revealed that almost **78% women farmers** in India face **gender discrimination.**
- **Poor Representation**: As of now, women farmers have hardly any representation in society and are nowhere discernible in farmers' organisations or in occasional protests.
- **Access to resource and inputs:** When compared to men, women generally have less access to resources and modern inputs (seeds, fertilizers, pesticides) to make farming more productive.

National Women's Farmer's Day (Rashtriya Mahila Kisan Diwas)

- The **United Nations** observes **October 15** as **International Rural Women's Day** to highlight the contribution of rural women to the world's economic development.
- Taking cue from this, the Government of India declared **October 15 as Rashtriya Mahila Kisan Diwas** in 2016.
- This was a welcome step, especially in the context of the agricultural collapse that has engulfed the country and has manifested itself through farm suicides and exclusion of women agricultural labourers from the narrative of agricultural reforms in India.

Government Interventions to improve women's role in Agriculture

- The government is earmarking **at least 30% of the budget allocation for women beneficiaries** in all ongoing schemes-programmes and development activities.
- Government is also giving preference to women under various policies such as **organic farming**, **self-employment scheme**, **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana** etc.
- Recognizing the critical role of women in agriculture, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare has declared **15th October** of every year as **Women Farmer's Day.**
- **Cooperative education programs** of women are organized through State Cooperative Societies to ensure women participation in various activities in the field of cooperatives.

- Under Agriculture policies, provisions of issuing **Kisan Credit Card to women** and creating livelihood opportunities through livestock practices, agricultural processing are mentioned.
- Focussing on **women self-help groups (SHG)** to connect them to **micro-credit** through capacity building activities and to provide information and ensuring their representation in different decision-making bodies.
- Special importance is being given to the role of women in achieving the goal of **doubling farmers' income by 2022.**

Way Forward

- **Provision of credit without collateral** under the **micro-finance initiative of NABARD** should be encouraged. Better access to **credit**, **technology**, and provision of **entrepreneurship** abilities will further boost women's confidence and help them gain recognition as farmers.
- A declining size of land holdings may act as a deterrent due to lower net returns earned and technology adoption. The possibility of **collective farming** can be encouraged to make women self-reliant.
- **Training and skills** imparted to women as has been done by some **self-help groups** and **cooperative-based dairy activities** (Saras in Rajasthan and Amul in Gujarat). These can be explored further through farmer producer organisations.
- Government flagship schemes such as the **National Food Security Mission**, **Sub-mission on Seed and Planting Material** and the **Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana** must include **women-centric strategies** and dedicated expenditure.
- Most of the farm machineries are difficult for women to operate, so it is important to have **gender-friendly tools and machinery** for various farm operations. **Farm machinery banks** and **custom hiring centres** can be roped in to provide subsidised rental services to women

farmers.

- According to Food and Agriculture Organisation, **equalising access to productive resources** for female and male farmers could increase agricultural output in developing countries by as much as **2.5% to 4%. Krishi Vigyan Kendras** in every district can be assigned an additional task to **educate and train women farmers** about innovative technology along with extension services.
- An '**inclusive transformative agricultural policy'** should aim at **gender-specific intervention** to raise productivity of small farm holdings, integrate women as active agents in rural transformation, and engage men and women in extension services with gender expertise.

Easy to PICK – "UPSC Monthly Magazine" October - 2018

State Of Internal Migrants In India

Why in news?

The recent exodus of migrant workers from Gujarat especially workers from UP and Bihar, following a rape incident has brought into limelight the issue of internal migration in India.

Reasons of Migration

- **Structural transformation of the economy**- The economic reforms of 1992 brought about fundamental changes in the economy of India. There was thrust on the secondary sector in order to boost employment. According to Census 2011, the average growth rate of the economy was 7.7 per cent per annum mainly secondary and service sector led pulling people to migrate to the places witnessing this growth.

- **Underdevelopment of development**- Agricultural growth has been, on average, lower than that in non- agriculture, including industry. Demographic pressure has pushed to 0.2 hectares of cultivable land per head of rural population. It has also progressively pushed down the size structure of landholdings. Thus, agricultural surplus labor is pushed to cities in search of work.

- **Urbanization**- The process of urbanization accompanying growth has caused regional imbalance. As per the census, the level of urbanization in India has increased from 27.81% in 2001 to 31.16% in 2011. Cities promised better education, work, health facilities, and autonomy etc. attracting huge rural population.

- **Migration network and Migration Industry**- The already established friends and families provide finance, information and places to live thus promoting migration. Also, migration is facilitated by a wide range of individuals and agents like brokers; labor recruiters etc. who derive profit from migration.

Why migration matters?

- **Positive Impact on the economy**- The migrants are often engaged in the construction, textile, mines, domestic work, and hotel etc. performing semi-skilled and low skilled jobs giving impetus to these sectors. They form a big part of the informal economy which is 87% of Indian economy. E.g. Green Revolution owes its success to migrant labors.

- **Social Cohesion and urban diversity**
  o Migration provides opportunity to escape caste divisions and restrictive social norms and to work with dignity and freedom at the new place.
  o Left-behind women enjoy empowerment, with increased interaction in society, including their participation as workers and decision makers of households.
  o It promotes diverse culture in India through people to people interaction and reducing information gaps in society.

- **Brain Gain**- Migrants bring back a variety of skills, knowledge and information known as 'social remittances', including change in tastes, perceptions and attitudes. For example, awareness about workers' rights, non-acceptance of poor employment conditions, low wages, semi-feudal labor relationships and improved knowledge.

- **Domestic Remittance Industry**- Domestic remittance industry is huge and is expected to increase by 1.5 lakh crores. The remittances increase purchasing power parity of native people and people start investing in health and education also.

Challenges of Migration

- **Development Cost**
  o Unplanned development has serious consequences both for the in-

migration destination and the migrant.

o It creates pressure on resources like land, housing, transportation and jobs. Migrant's population can indulge in criminal activity disrupting the social fabric of the in-migration area. The recent backlash in Gujarat was about migrants taking away jobs of locals and committing crimes.

o Migrants due to low bargaining power and skills have to face numerous constraints, including lack of political representation; inadequate housing and lack of formal residency rights; low-pays, insecure or hazardous work; limited access to state provided services such as health and education; and discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, class or gender.

- **Low priority in governance -** Regulations and administrative procedures exclude migrants from access to legal rights, public services and social protection programmes given to residents, because of which they are often treated as second class citizens.

- **Weak Law -** The Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act (1979) is weak.

o It remains silent on provision for crèches, education centres for children or mobile medical units for the laborers and it has no guidelines for inter-state cooperation.

o The law covers only regulation of employment and conditions of service of migrants and does not address access to social protection of migrants, their right to the city and the special vulnerabilities of children and women migrants.

o The Important provisions of the Act such as minimum wages, displacement allowance, medical facilities and protective clothing remain unenforced.

- **Lack of reliable data**- There exists a serious data gap on the extent, nature and magnitude of internal migration. Databases such as the Census fail to adequately capture real information about migration leading to problems in defining, designing and delivering services to migrants.

Way forward

- **Coherent Policy Framework and strategy-**
  o Mainstreaming migration in a comprehensive and focused manner in policy and national development plans e.g. smart city mission, AMRUT, housing for all, ayushman bharat etc.
  o Develop a universal national minimum social security package covering minimum wages and labor standards and incorporating portability of benefits in all government social protection schemes and public services through an interstate registration process.
  o In Kerala, the construction industry, for example, which has a huge percentage of migrant labor, has a welfare board with a ₹ 1,000 crore corpus, and the government has announced a survey of migrant workers' living conditions, and assistance in procuring health insurance and legal aid.
  o Amend the 1979 the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act to make it more inclusive of migrants.

- ☐ **Evidence based policy making**- A comprehensive data needs to be collected scientifically through mapping, profiling etc. in order to understand the nature of migration in India wrt to gender, region, caste, seasonal cycle etc.

- ☐ **Capacity building and state coordination**

o Create inter-district and inter-state coordination committees to jointly plan institutional arrangements between administrative jurisdictions of sending and receiving areas to ensure service delivery.

o Build capacity of panchayats to maintain a database of migrant and establish vigilant committees at the local level.

o Establish migrant labor cells in each state labor department with the support of the Labor Ministry.

o Increase financial and human resources in migration-prone areas.

o Promote public-private partnerships (PPP) for the promotion of safe internal migration.

o Ensure access to formal banking facilities for migrants to enable safe and secure transfer of remittances.

Assam Wage Compensation Scheme

- **Context**: Assam Government has become the first Indian state to offer a Wage Compensation Scheme for pregnant women working in the tea gardens of the state.
- *Aim:* The scheme is aimed at providing better health and nutrition supplements to the pregnant women. It stresses on providing proper healthcare facilities to the pregnant women working in the tea gardens of the state.

Highlights of the scheme:
- Under the scheme, an amount of Rs 12,000 will be given to the pregnant women so that they can take care of themselves and the unborn baby without compromising the livelihood of their family.
- The compensation of wages to pregnant women will be given in 4 instalments – Rs 2,000 in the first trimester, Rs 4,000 in the second trimester, Rs 3,000 for institutional delivery and Rs 3,000 for registration of the child's birth.
- The women would also be given a maternity leave. They will not be engaged in work from the third trimester of pregnancy to three months after delivery.
- In addition, they will get assistance for ante-natal care and the first cycle of immunization of the child.

Significance of the scheme:
- The bulk of the workforce in Assam's tea gardens is women. The maternal mortality rate of women working in the tea plantations of Assam is unusually high. The scheme is likely to benefit over 60,000 women in the state. It is expected to reduce maternal and neonatal mortality in the tea areas.

Background:
- In the Annual Health Survey of 2012-13, Assam recorded one of the highest maternal mortality rates in India, with over 300 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births.
- The MMR in the state's tea gardens was even higher, as it was recorded to be 404. The national average during 2014-16 was 130.
- Further, almost 50% of the pregnant women aged between 15 and 49 years in the state were recorded to be anaemic, which is a leading contributor to maternal mortality.

Justice Verma Committee

- *Context:* The Centre recently announced its plan to set up a panel of judges to look into the legal and institutional framework to curb sexual harassment at workplaces following the *#MeToo campaign* on social media.
- However, as early as 2013, the *Justice J.S. Verma Committee*, in its landmark report on gender laws, had recommended setting up of an employment tribunal instead of an internal complaints committee (ICC) in sweeping changes to the Sexual Harassment at the Workplace Bill.
- The panel was formed in the aftermath of the December 16 Nirbhaya gangrape in 2012 and the ensuing nationwide protests, and submitted its report on January 23, 2013.

Background:
- At that time of the submission of the report, the Sexual Harassment at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Bill had already been passed by the Lok Sabha and was awaiting the Rajya Sabha's nod. The Bill was passed unchanged by the Upper House a month later.
- The Committee, chaired by Justice Verma and including Justice Leila Seth and senior lawyer Gopal Subramanium, termed the Sexual Harassment Bill "unsatisfactory" and said it did not reflect the spirit of the Vishakha guidelines — framed by the Supreme Court in 1997 to curb sexual harassment at the workplace.

Major recommendations made by the panel:
- *Punishment for Rape:* The panel has not recommended the death penalty for rapists. It suggests that the punishment for rape should be rigorous imprisonment or RI for seven years to
- *Punishment for other sexual offences:* The panel recognised the need to curb all forms of sexual offences and recommended – Voyeurism be punished with upto seven years in jail; stalking or attempts to contact a person repeatedly through any means by up to three years. Acid attacks would be punished by up to seven years if imprisonment; trafficking will be punished with RI for seven to ten years.
- *Registering complaints and medical examination:* Every complaint of rape must be registered by the police and civil society should perform its duty to report any case of rape coming to its knowledge. Any officer, who fails to register a case of rape reported to him, or attempts to abort its investigation, commits an offence which shall be punishable as prescribed.
- *Marriages to be registered:* As a primary recommendation, all marriages in India (irrespective of the personal laws under which such marriages are solemnised) should mandatorily be registered in the presence of a magistrate. The magistrate will ensure that the marriage has been solemnised without any demand for dowry having been made and that it has taken place with the full and free consent of both partners.
- *Amendments to the Code of Criminal Procedure:* The panel observed, "The manner in which the rights of women can be recognised can only be manifested when they have full access to justice and when the rule of law can

be upheld in their favour." The proposed Criminal Law Amendment Act, 2012, should be modified, suggests the panel.

- *Bill of Rights for women:* A separate Bill of Rights for women that entitles a woman a life of dignity and security and will ensure that a woman shall have the right to have complete sexual autonomy including with respect to her relationships.

- *Review of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act:* The panel has observed that the "impunity of systematic sexual violence is being legitimised by the armed forces special powers act." It has said there is an imminent need to review the continuance of AFSPA in areas as soon as possible. It has also recommended posting special commissioners for women's safety in conflict areas.

- *Police reforms:* To inspire public confidence, the panel said, "police officers with reputations of outstanding ability and character must be placed at the higher levels of the police force." All existing appointments need to be reviewed to ensure that the police force has the requisite moral vision.

- *Role of the judiciary:* The judiciary has the primary responsibility of enforcing fundamental rights, through constitutional remedies. The judiciary can take suo motu cognizance of such issues being deeply concerned with them both in the Supreme Court and the High Court. An all India strategy to deal with this issue would be advisable. The Chief Justice of India could be approached to commence appropriate proceedings on the judicial side. The Chief Justice may consider making appropriate orders relating to the issue of missing children to curb the illegal trade of their trafficking etc.

- *Political Reforms:* The Justice Verma committee observed that reforms are needed to deal with criminalisation of politics. The panel has suggest that, in the event cognizance has been taken by a magistrate of an criminal offence, the candidate ought to be disqualified from participating in the electoral process. Any candidate who fails to disclose a charge should be disqualified subsequently. It suggested lawmakers facing criminal charges, who have already been elected to Parliament and state legislatures, should voluntarily vacate their seats.

Global Hunger Index

Growth pangs

India ranked 103 out of 119 countries in the Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2018. India's score was 31.1, which was 7.7 points lesser than in 2000, but higher than the global average of 20.9 (higher the score, worse the situation)

More 'wasted children'
India has shown a rise in the percentage of 'wasted children' (low weight for their height)

- **Context:** The 2018 **Global Hunger Index report** has been released. The report is a peer-reviewed publication released annually by **Welthungerhilfe and Concern Worldwide**.
- The GHI scores are based on a formula that captures three dimensions of hunger—insufficient caloric intake, child undernutrition, and child mortality—using four component indicators:
  - o **UNDERNOURISHMENT:** the share of the population that is under-nourished, reflecting insufficient caloric intake
  - o **CHILD WASTING:** the share of children under the age of five who are wasted (low weight-for-height), reflecting acute undernutrition.
  - o **CHILD STUNTING:** the share of children under the age of five who are stunted (low height-for-age), reflecting chronic undernutrition.
  - o **CHILD MORTALITY:** the mortality rate of children under the age of five.

Performance of India:
- India has been ranked at 103 out of 119 countries in the Global Hunger Index 2018, with hunger levels in the country categorized as "serious".
- At least one in five Indian children under the age of five is wasted. The only country with a higher prevalence of child wasting is the war-torn nation of South Sudan.
- India's ranking has dropped three places from last year, although the Index says its results are not accurately comparable from year to year and instead provides a few reference years for comparable data.
- India has shown improvement in three of the indicators over the comparable reference years. The

percentage of undernourished people in the population has dropped from 18.2% in 2000 to 14.8% in 2018. The child mortality rate has halved from 9.2% to 4.3%, while child stunting has dropped from 54.2% to 38.4% over the same period.

Concerns:

- The report terms hunger and forced migration for the severity worldwide.
- Globally, the level of hunger still falls into the "serious" category, despite improvement over the last two decades.
- The Index projects that at the current rate of progress, 50 countries will fail to reach the "low" hunger category by 2030.
- This puts the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 2, which aims to end hunger by 2030, in jeopardy.

Way ahead:

- Child wasting is high across South Asia, constituting a "critical public health emergency". Wasting rates are highest for infants aged 0 to 5 months. Therefore, attention to birth outcomes and breastfeeding is important. Also, child wasting in the region is associated with a low maternal body mass index. Hence, there is need for a focus on the nutritional status of the mother during pregnancy.
- Factors that could reduce child stunting in South Asia include increased consumption of non-staple foods, access to sanitation, women's education, access to safe water, gender equality, and national food availability.

Should India Have Two Time Zones?

- *Context:* Scientists at the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research's National Physical Laboratory (CSIR-NPL), which maintains Indian Standard Time, have published a research article describing the necessity of two time zones, with the new one an hour ahead of the existing time zone.

Background:
- Over the years, various citizens and political leaders have debated whether India should have two separate time zones. The demand is based on the huge difference in daylight times between the country's longitudinal extremes, and the costs associated with following the same time zone.
- Opposition to the idea is based on impracticability — particularly the risk of railway accidents, given the need to reset times at every crossing from one time zone into another.

Need for two time zones:
- India extends from 68°7'E to 97°25'E, with the spread of 29° representing almost two hours from the geographic perspective.
- Legislators, activists, industrialists and ordinary citizens from the Northeast have often complained about the effect of IST on their lives, and pursued the issue of having a separate time zone with the Central government, without much success.
- In the Northeast, the sun rises as early as four in the morning and in winter it sets by four in the evening. By the time government offices or educational institutions open, many daylight hours are already lost. In winter this problem gets even more accentuated and the ecological costs are a disaster with much more electricity having to be consumed.

The proposal:
- The research paper proposes to call the two time zones IST-I (UTC + 5.30 h) and IST-II (UTC + 6.30 h). The proposed line of demarcation is at 89°52'E, the narrow border between Assam and West Bengal.
- States west of the line would continue to follow IST (to be called IST-I). States east of the line — Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Andaman & Nicobar Islands —would follow IST-II.
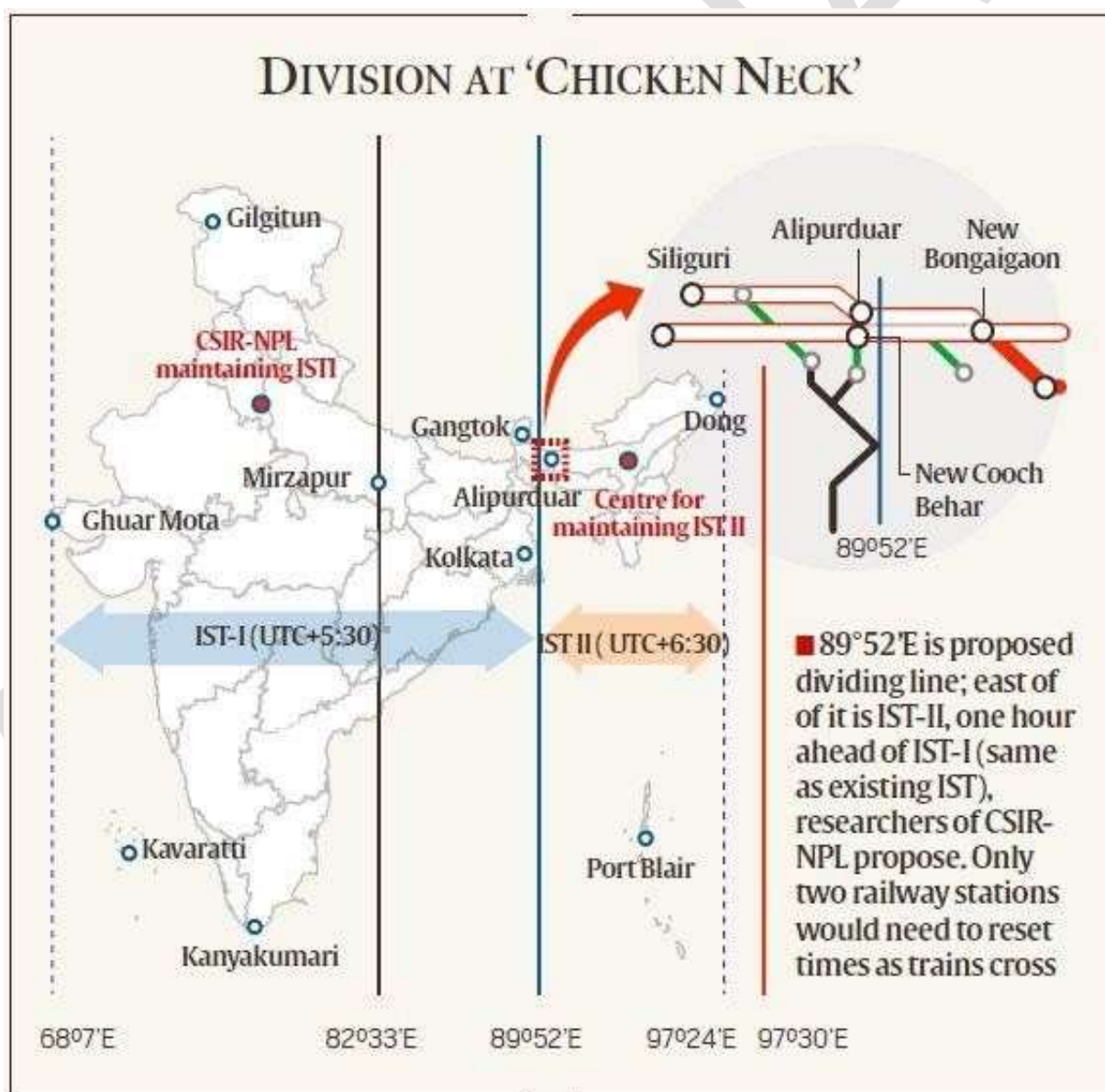
Concerns:
- India has a huge population; if the country were divided into two time zones, there would be chaos at the border between the two zones. It would mean resetting clocks with each crossing of the time zone. There is scope for more dangerous kinds of confusion. Railway signals are not fully automated and many routes have single tracks. Trains may meet with major accidents owing to human errors. Just one such accident would wipe out any benefits resulting from different time zones in the country.
- Partitioning the already divided country further into time zones may also have undesirable political consequences. Moreover, our research shows that the energy saving from creating two time zones is not particularly large.
- While there is merit in the argument, the potentially adverse consequences of introducing a new time zone within the country are many. Not forgetting the fact that a country like Russia has as many as nine time zones across

contiguous territory, having to cope with the zones and to be forced to reset the watch each time you need to cross a domestic line could be complicated.

- With a time difference of one hour in the mornings and in the evenings, there would be nearly 25% less overlap between office timings in the two zones. This could be important for banks, offices, industries and multinational companies which need to be constantly interconnected. This will be further detrimental to productivity and to the interests of the eastern region.

- There is already a sense of alienation between the relatively prosperous and industrialised western zone and the less developed eastern zone. The people in the Northeast sense a distance from the mainland and a separateness in clock time may accentuate it.

- Having a separate time zone for the eastern region will provide no energy or other benefits to the rest of the country. Moreover, India will continue to be in off-set time zones, five and a half hours in the west and six and a half in the eastern region ahead of.

DIVISION AT 'CHICKEN NECK'

How Are Cyclones Named?

- *Context:* Cyclonic storm '**TITLI'** has hit the Bay of Bengal and another cyclonic storm '**LUBAN'** has hit the Arabian sea.

How are cyclones named?
- In September 2004, an international panel on tropical cyclones decided that countries from the region would each put in names, which would be assigned to storms in the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea.
  - Eight countries — India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Maldives, Myanmar, Oman, Sri Lanka and Thailand – participated and came up with a list of 64 names.
  - In the event of a storm, the Regional Specialized Meteorological Centre, New Delhi, selects a name from the list.

Why it is necessary to name cyclones?
- The late origin of this naming system — unlike storms in the Atlantic, which have been getting named since 1953 — was ostensibly to protect sensitivities in the ethnically diverse region.
- The purpose of the move was also to make it easier for "people easily to understand and remember the tropical cyclone/hurricane in a region, thus to facilitate disaster risk awareness, preparedness, management and reduction.

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Guidelines for naming cyclones:
- Citizens can submit names to the Director General of Meteorology, IMD, for consideration, but the weather agency has strict rules for the selection process.
  - A name, for instance, 'should be short and readily understood when broadcast'.
  - The names must also be neutral, 'not culturally sensitive and not convey some unintended and potentially inflammatory meaning'.
  - Furthermore, on the account of the 'death and destruction' a storm in the Indian Ocean causes, their names are retired after use, unlike those in the Atlantic and Eastern Pacific lists, which are reused every few years.

Names reused every six years:
Atlantic and Pacific storm names are reused every six years, but are retired "if a storm is so deadly or costly that the future use of the name would be insensitive or confusing," according to forecasters at the US National Hurricane Center in Miami.

Cyclone season:
- The country's cyclone season runs from April to December, with severe storms often causing dozens of deaths, evacuations of tens of thousands of people from low-lying villages and wide damage to crops and property.

What's the difference between hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons?
- Hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons are all tropical storms. They are all the same thing but are given different names depending on where they appear. When they reach populated areas they usually bring very strong wind and rain which can cause a lot of damage.
- Hurricanes are tropical storms that form over the North Atlantic Ocean and Northeast Pacific. Cyclones are formed over the South Pacific and Indian Ocean. Typhoons are formed

over the Northwest Pacific Ocean.

Cyclone categories:

Category 1: Wind and gales of 90-125 kph, negligible house damage, some damage to trees and
crops.

Category 2: Destructive winds of 125-164 kph. Minor house damage, significant damage to trees, crops and caravans, risk of power failure.

Category 3: Very destructive winds of 165-224 kph. Some roof and structural damage, some
caravans destroyed, power failure likely.

Category 4: Very destructive winds of 225-279 kph. Significant roofing loss and structural damage, caravans destroyed, blown away, widespread power failures.

Category 5: Very destructive winds gusts of more than 280 kph. Extremely dangerous with widespread destruction.

Third Pole

- *Context:* Scientists conducting research in the third pole area have warned of disturbing global warming trends, and how, if they continue, they could affect the lives of 1.3 billion people. The glacier has lost 60% of its mass and shrunk 250 m since 1982.

What is the Third Pole?

- The Hindu Kush-Himalayan region spans an area of more than 4.3 million square kilometres in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan.
- The region stores more snow and ice than anywhere else in the world outside the polar regions, giving its name: 'The Third Pole'. The Third Pole contains the world's highest mountains, including all 14 peaks above 8,000 metres, is the source of 10 major rivers, and forms a formidable global ecological buffer.

Significance:

- The Third Pole region has enormous socioeconomic and cultural diversity; it is home to many different ethnic communities speaking more than 600 languages and many more dialects. It is endowed with rich natural resources and contains all or part of four global biodiversity hotspots.
- The mountain resources provide a wide range of ecosystem services and the basis for the livelihoods to the 210 million people living in the region, as well as indirectly to the 1.3 billion people — one fifth of the worlds' population — living in the downstream river basins.
- More than 3 billion people benefit from the food and energy produced in these river basins that have their origin in the mountains.

The Third Pole and Climate Change:

- Climate change has become a major concern in the Third Pole. Mountain systems are particularly sensitive to climate change and the Third Pole region is home to some of the people most vulnerable to these changes in the world. Changes in the river systems and their basins have impacted directly on the wellbeing of millions of people.
  - o The rate of warming in the Third Pole region is significantly higher than the global average, and the rate is higher at higher altitude, suggesting a greater vulnerability of the cryosphere environment to climate change. This trend is expected to continue.
  - o Climate change projections suggest that all areas of South Asia are likely to warm by at least 1°C by the end of the century, while in some areas the warming could be as high as 3.5-4°C. The life and livelihoods of the people in the Third Pole region is challenged due to climate change, and the stability and prosperity of the region affected by the Third Pole is at risk, which will have implications for all of Asia and for the world.
  - o However, there is still little knowledge of this situation, and its potential implications, outside the immediate vicinity; a special effort is needed to raise awareness of the fragility of the mountain social- ecological system.

Concerns:

- The melting of glaciers of the Third Pole could affect the lives of 1.3 billion people because of its

proximity to densely populated and industrialised regions. And the continuous melting of glaciers will be catastrophic for the people who depend on water from the Third Pole.

Facts for Prelims:
The Third Pole Environment (TPE): TPE, an international research program, was launched in 2009 and focuses on the Tibetan Plateau and surrounding mountain ranges.

Earth's Inner Core Is Softer, A Study Reveals

- *Context:* Contrary to the fact the Earth's inner core is solid, researchers from Australian National University (ANU) have found that it is comparatively softer.

Facts about the inner core of the Earth:
- *Radius:* 1,220 kilometres (760 miles) i.e. 70 per cent of the Moon's radius.
- *Composed of:* Nickel-iron alloy.
- *Temperature:* 5,700 K (5,430 °C) or 9806 °F, which is almost the temperature of Sun.

What is inner core made of?
- The inner core is made up of two layers outer and inner.
- Outer core is 1,355 miles (2,180 km) thick.

Why is the radius of inner core unknown?
- There is no estimated radius of the inner core; however, it plays a distinct role in making Earth's magnetic field.
- The inner core is measured by shear waves, a seismology term, which so tiny and feeble that it can't be observed directly.
- In fact, detecting them has been considered the 'Holy Grail' of global seismology since scientists first predicted the inner core was solid in the 1930s and 40s.

Purpose of the Earth's inner core:
- When charged particles from the solar wind collide with air molecules above Earth's magnetic poles, it causes the air molecules to glow, causing the auroras – the northern and southern lights.

How has it been discovered?
- Researchers came up with a way to detect shear waves, or "J waves" in the inner core – a type of wave which can only travel through solid objects.
- According to the research published by the university, the wavefield method looks at the similarities between the signals at two receivers after a major earthquake, rather than the direct wave arrivals. The study shows these results can then be used to demonstrate the existence of J waves and infer the shear wave speed in the inner core.
- It has been found that the inner core shares some similar elastic properties with gold and platinum.

What is the significance of this method?
The understanding of the Earth's inner core has direct consequences for the generation and maintenance of the geomagnetic field, and without that geomagnetic field there would be no life on the Earth's surface.

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12th Asia-Europe Meeting

Why in News?
The 12th **Asia-Europe Meeting** (ASEM12) was held in October 2018 in **Brussels**, Belgium. Discussions focused on the theme *"***Europe and Asia: Global Partners for Global Challenges***"*.

About ASEM

- It is an **intergovernmental process** established in 1996 to **foster dialogue and cooperation** between 51 Asian and European countries plus two institutional partners (the EU and the Association of South East Asian Nations - ASEAN). India joined the forum in 2008.
- The **first summit** was held in Bangkok, Thailand. It also seeks to strengthen the relationship between regions and spread peace, respect and equality.
- It aims at promoting a more global vision among European and Asian policymakers by allowing them to exchange views on political, economic, financial, social and cultural issues. ASEM also aims at stimulating a wide range of contacts and dialogue between the two regions on topics such as education, social protection and employment, and co-operation on the protection of cultural heritage.

US To Withdraw From Russia Missile Pact

Why US want to withdraw?

- **Russian Violation**- Russia has breached the treaty as it has developed an intermediate-range ground-based cruise missile, known as 9M729, or SSC-8. With this Russia can launch a nuclear strike on NATO countries at very short notice.
- **Military Imbalance vis-a-vis China**- China is developing and deploying intermediate range missiles as it is not under the purview of the INF. China's Dong Feng-26 ballistic missile, which has a range of 3,000-4,000 km, was deployed in 2015, allowing it to target most US bases in the Pacific.
- **Weakness of the treaty-** INF like many arms control treaty faces **enforcement lacunas** as parties take advantage of absence of verification process.

What it means for the world?

- **American push for unipolar world-** America under its American first policy is trying hard to dismantle the very multipolar world system it created for its hegemony. As it has worked more in the favor of China vis-à-vis US. Withdrawing from the cold war arms treaty is one such way to re-establish American supremacy.
- **Restarting Arms race-** The global nuclear arms control architecture is crumbling today as it is no longer able to respond to the underlying shift in global power realities. U.S and Russia are more or less equally responsible for reneging on their arms control promises. Now U.S and Russia can build their weaponry unhindered hence encouraging proliferation.
- **Resurgence of European Rivalry**-The day INF Treaty is gone; Russia will find itself completely unbound in its efforts to reshape the conventional and nuclear military balance in Europe. Russian land-based missile systems are also mobile, and can be readily transported from the far eastern border with China to the European theater.

Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF)

- It is a cold war treaty between the two super powers signed in 1987.
- The INF treaty prohibits US and Russia from possessing, producing or test-flying ground-launched cruise missiles with ranges of 500 to 5,500 kilometers.
- The cold war era treaty also covers all land-based missiles, including those carrying nuclear warheads.
- However, it does not cover air-launched or sea- launched weapons.

Implications for India

- **Asia pacific new war theatre**- If the US deploys a new INF in Asia, to deter China, Beijing is bound to react. Asia will go in intense competition have implications for Indian national security.
- **New technological requirements**-The focus of a potential new arms race will be less on traditional nuclear armed missiles, but precise hypersonic equipped with conventional warheads. Russia and China have already invested in the development of hypersonic systems.
- **Impact on Indio-Russia partnership**-India's traditional defence cooperation with Russia may come under intense US scrutiny and pressure as US conflict with Russia deepens e.g. S-400 missile sanctions. Also Russia China may be forced to work together casting shadow on Russian- India defence ties.

Thus, India needs to revise its national security policy and diversify its defence ties.

History of Arms Control treaties
Before 1945

Easy to PICK – "UPSC Monthly Magazine" **October - 2018**

- The industrial revolution has led to the increasing mechanization of warfare, as well as rapid advances in the development of firearms.
- The **1817** Rush–Bagot Treaty between the United States and the United Kingdom was the first arms control treaty of what can be considered the modern industrial era.
- The Hague Convention of 1899 that led to rules of declaring and conducting warfare as well as the use of modern weaponry, and also led to the setting up of **the** Permanent Court of Arbitration.
- After the World War I, the League of Nations was set up which attempted to limit and reduce arms.
- The 1925 Geneva Conference led to the banning of chemical weapons (as toxic gases) during war as part of the Geneva Protocol.

1945 onwards

- After World War II, the United Nations was set up as a body to promote and to maintain international peace and security.
- The International Atomic Energy Agency **was set up in 1957** to promote peaceful uses of nuclear technology and apply safeguards against the diversion of nuclear material from peaceful uses to nuclear weapons. The **1968** Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was signed to prevent further spread of nuclear weapons technology to countries outside the five that already possessed them.
- The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks **(SALT)** between the United States and Soviet Union in the late 1960s- 1970s led to further weapons control agreements.
- The 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention was signed banning the manufacture and use of chemical weapons. **The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties were signed, as** START I **and** START II, by the US and Soviet Union, further restricting weapons.

- The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty was signed in 1996 banning all nuclear explosions in all environments, for military or civilian purposes, but it has not entered into force due to the non-ratification.
- The **United Nations** is preparing for entry into force of the Arms Trade Treaty, which has been ratified by 89 nations, pending ratification by Russia and China and United States.

Conclusion

Geopolitical developments, emergence of new technologies and the declining domestic political support has led to the failure of arms control regime. The need of the hour is to arrest this failure. Arms control regimes have to become comprehensive, inclusive, transparent, verifiable and responsive in order to protect the international world order from collapsing.

Europe's Answer To China's Belt And Road

European Union (EU) recently came out with a document outlining the bloc's vision for a **new and comprehensive strategy** to better **connect Europe and Asia.**

More on news

- The EU will combine a principled approach to connectivity and recognition that Asia, which is home to very diverse countries in terms of economic models and level of development, with concrete action based on three strands:
  - o Creating **transport** links, **energy** and **digital networks** and **human** connections;
  - o Offering **connectivity partnerships** to countries in Asia and organisations;
  - o Promoting sustainable finance through utilising **diverse financial tools.**
- It will offer a different approach to that taken by Beijing with its flagship **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).** The EU emphasis is on sustainability, proposing that investments should **respect labour rights, not create political or financial dependencies, and guarantee a level playing field** for businesses.
- A **better-connected Europe and Asia** through transport links, energy, human and digital networks will strengthen the **resilience of societies and regions,** facilitate **trade,** promote the **rules-based international order,** and create avenues for a more sustainable, **low-carbon future.**
- The new strategy will give Asian and European states a much **clearer idea on the basis of which the EU wishes to engage** with them, and what they can expect.

African Continental Free Trade Area

African countries are set to launch the African Continental Free Trade Area or **AfCFTA**, the **biggest free trade agreement in the world since the World Trade Organization.**

Where do India Africa Relations trade relations stand today?

- Since 2000, the economic cooperation between India and Africa has increased, helped by the **India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) process.**
- Over the years we are witnessing robust trends in trade relations, wherein bilateral trade has increased five-fold in a decade – **from $11.9 billion in 2005-06 to $56.7 billion in 2015-16.**
- However, the recent trends show a steady decline in the India-Africa trade from 2013 to 2017. In 2014-2015, the total India-Africa trade stood at US$71.5 billion, which went down to US$56.7 billion in 2016-2016 and has further dropped to US$51.96 billion in 2016-2017.
- Also, India's investment has been witnessing a slump since 2013 i.e. **$14 billion in 2016-2017, from $16 billion in 2011-12.**
- The increasing **Mega Regional Trade Agreements like RCEP** etc. are negatively impacting India-Africa trade. Africa's exports to India will decrease because there will be erosion of preferences and increased competition in the MRTA markets.
- India's exports to the African countries have been majorly dominated by petroleum products. Therefore India needs to diversify its export basket.

- **The African Continental Free Trade Area** (AfCFTA) is the result of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement among all
- 55 members of the African Union. African

heads of state gathered in Kigali, Rwanda in March 2018 to sign the proposed agreement.

- The **Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA)** is a continent-wide free-trade agreement brokered by the African Union (AU) and initially signed on by 44 of its 55 member states in Kigali, Rwanda on March 2018.
- The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa estimates that the agreement will boost intra-African trade by 52 percent by 2022.
- The proposal will come into force after ratification by 22 of the signatory states

Potential Gains

- A bigger and integrated regional market for African products.
- Improved conditions for forming regional value chains (RVCs) and integration to global value chains (GVCs).
- Elimination of challenges associated with multiple and overlapping trade agreements.

INDIA-AFRICA TOTAL TRADE

How India-Africa trade relations can benefit from the AfCFTA?

- **One Stop Trade Bloc-** AfCFTA will provide a number of opportunities for the Indian firms and investors to tap into a

larger, unified, simplified and more robust African market. AfCFTA is projected to **increase intra-African trade by 52.3 percent by 2022;** from 2010 levels. It is critical for India to view Africa not just as a destination for short-term returns but as a partner for medium and long-term economic growth. India's exports to Africa could increase by US$4.3 billion (or 10 percent) by 2022 if AfCFTA is established.

- **Geo-Strategic advantage-** Increased engagement in terms of trade between India and Africa can balance out increasing Chinese engagement in Africa. It can boost India's economic relations with Africa which is developmental partnership based unlike Chinese extractive engagement.

- **Geo economic gains-** India hugely depends on energy resources for energy security. Africa is huge resources and untapped potential. A trade bloc like AfCFTA can provide an unlimited opportunity to invest and use these resources. More engagement will spill to the **blue economy** as potential and strategic area of future cooperation.

- **Decline of WTO-** With WTO declining a largest trade bloc like this is need of the hour where India can actively engage, diversify and develop along. Africa and India suffer from similar problems of unemployment, poverty, malnutrition, hunger; illiteracy etc thus can work together on one platform to fight these issues.

- **Complimenting other steps for better trade-** India is also working on other projects for improving economy and trade with the region like Asia Africa Growth Corridor. Engaging with AfCFTA with enhance and compliment such efforts and benefit both the regions in the long run.

India-Russia Relations

Russian President Vladimir Putin recently visited India for the 19th Annual Bilateral Summit in New Delhi.

State of India Russia Relations

Cold war period lay the foundation of the Indian Russian relations especially the signing of India Russia Peace and Friendship treaty of 1971. For India, Russia has been at the fulcrum of its strategic interests which it manifested by inferring special and privileged strategic partnership status to this relation. The relation between the two has been one of 'Multidiverse partnership', highly influenced by their defence relations. Various aspects of their Multidiverse partnership include-

- **Defence partnership-** For India, Russia remains the **sheet anchor of India's security policy**. The defence ties, one of the highly influential aspect of their relation, **rest on 3 features** of technology transfer, joint development, marketing & selling and export of equipments, **an agreement nonexistent with any other country**. This arrangement has provided significant enhancement to India's indigenous defence manufacturing.
  - o For example, besides providing us a range of equipment from tanks to fighter aircraft and frigates, the Russians have helped us perfect our ballistic missiles and build a ballistic missile submarine. They have leased us a nuclear attack submarine, and are a crucial partner in the ongoing BrahMos program.
- **Economic Relations-** It is an important pillar of the relations yet there remains a lot of scope to improve it further. India and Russia are exploring various ways for enhancing bilateral trade.

- **Energy Security**- In Energy sector Russia has built nuclear reactors in India (kudankulam reactors), adopted strategic vision in nuclear energy, offered oil, gas and investment opportunities in the fuel sector of Russia e.g. Sakhalin I etc.
- **Space technology**- India and Russia have a four-decade strong relationship in the field of space. The former Soviet Union launched India's first two satellites, Aryabhata and Bhaskar. It has provided India Cryogenic technology to build heavy rockets.
- **Regional balancing**-Russia is more inclined to align itself with India's interests. It has supported India on Kashmir. The two shared the opposition to Taliban rule in Afghanistan. Russia is India's solution to the China problem. It has observed a self imposed moratorium in selling offensive weapon to China. Also it has maintained an arms distance from Pakistan.
- **International standing**- Russia has supported India's bid for permanent seat in UNSC. It has been favoring Indian entry to Nuclear Supplier Group. In
- international grouping it sponsors India's membership e.g. Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Also, both are members of important organizations like BRICS.
- **Cultural Relations**- This is one the crucial aspects of cooperation between the two. From people to people contacts (through programs like 'Namaste Russia') to sharing educational brilliance of both the countries through institutes like Jawaharlal Nehru Cultural Centre, both the countries have had good cultural links.

India Russia relations have remained close but they have lost intensity of India-Soviet relation.

Recently, we have seen a definitive decline in India Russia Relation.

Why this downturn?
- **Changing Geopolitical Order-** With rise of China, America see a threat to a global liberal order it created. Thus America is reasserting itself by

dismantling this order through an America first policy. India is reacting to this change by adopting an enhanced partnership with US as China is becoming a real threat in the neighbour. For Russia it has been a period of great hostility with West, thus pushing it to align with China.

- **Defence partnership**- India has been recently diversifying its defence relations with US, Israel etc. Russia's share of Indian defense imports fell from 79 percent between 2008 and 2012 to 62 percent between 2013 and 2017. India withdrew from Russia's fifth-generation fighter aircraft project because of delays and differences over cost, technologies and flexibility for future upgrades. India has signed logistic agreements like LEMOA, LSA with US. India US has seen enhanced interoperability between the two militaries a result of agreements and exercises between the two. India Russia relation lacks this aspect.

- **One Dimensional Trade**-Trade has been one-dimensional i.e. defence based. Despite a 42 percent boost from the previous year, trade still only touched $10.7 billion in 2017-18 — compare that to India's trade with China ($89.7 billion), the United States ($74.5 billion), or even Germany ($22 billion). There are a number of issues that hinder India-Russia trade – connectivity issues, distance, weak banking links, cumbersome regulations on both sides and Russia's restrictive visa regime.

- **Regional Fallouts-** Russia's **developing relationship with Pakistan** has got under India's skin. Driven in part by concerns about Afghanistan, Moscow's diplomatic and military exchanges with Islamabad have witnessed an uptick. Russia and Pakistan conducted a military exercise in September 2016, reportedly in disputed territory. Moreover, Pakistan and Russia have since formed a joint military consultative committee and signed a military training agreement. Moscow has also sold attack helicopters to the Pakistani military.
  - o Russia is showing **inclination towards Taliban** in Afghanistan while India continues to have concerns about the group.
  - o Russia's **partnership with China** has further complicated its relations with India. Despite assurances to the contrary, Moscow has sold advanced military technology to Beijing. It has endorsed China's One Belt One Road and has urged India to overcome its objections to it. There has also been concern about Moscow leaning toward Beijing in forums like the BRICS.

Amidst this came the much-awaited Summit between India Russia which has more or less tried to arrest the downturn in the relation.

What has this summit achieved?
- **Re-established the trust and cooperation**- This meet along with an informal meeting at Sochi has regained the mutual trust, confidence and close understanding of each other's position. Both countries have pledged to cooperate and converge on all major issues which are essential in rebuilding the multi polar world order.

- **Reinforced Defence**-The major breakthrough was the materializing of the S-400 deal despite threats of sanctions by US under the Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). It's the biggest arms deal in recent times. Both sides realized that Military and Military-Technical cooperation is essential to their strategic partnership. The meeting of the Indian-Russian Intergovernmental Commission on Military- Technical cooperation in December 2018 is a step to increase this cooperation. The continuation of INDRA Exercise, the Military Industrial Conference and High-Level Committee on Cooperation in High Technologies (2017) will bolster the cooperation between the militaries

and industry.

Breathing new life into trade

- Both countries evaluated the two way USD 30 billion investment goal to be achieved by 2025. In 2017 **trade between both countries increased** by 20%. Both the sides agreed to actively promote joint projects in third countries in sectors such as railways, energy and others.
- In 2018 there will be a first meeting of **Strategic Economic dialogue** between NITI Aayog and Russian ministry of economic development. A consultation on the Free Trade Agreement between the Eurasian Economic Union and its member states, on one side, and India will start. A MoU between National Small Industries Corporation of India and the Russian Small and Medium Business Corporation was signed in order to give a fillip to small and medium industries.
- For increasing connectivity both sides called for the development of **International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**. Iran, India and Russia transport links will be explored to increase connectivity. The early launch of the Green Corridor project aim at the simplification of customs operations in respect of goods being transported between India and Russia. Also, there are talks of the signing of an **FTA between Indian and the Eurasian Economic Union** (EaEU).
- **Interstate ties** will be promoted like Assam and Sakhalin etc and participation by regional delegations in major events like Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum, Eastern Economic Forum and Partnership/Investment Summits and also welcomed the intention to organize and hold the **India-Russia interregional forum**.
- **A joint Declaration** – "India-Russia Economic Cooperation: The Way Forward was signed. Also the decision to hold the first ever India-Russia Start-Up Summit in december. The idea to launch an online portal that would enable startups, investors, incubators and aspiring entrepreneurs of both countries to interact and provide relevant resources to expand and enable globalization of start-ups is promoted.

Strengthening Energy and science & technology

- Both countries aimed at widening the energy relations by strengthening the nuclear energy and also diversifying it to hydro, renewable energy, piped gas, LNG, oil etc.
- Both sides will cooperate in development of oil in Russia including its arctic shelf and joint development of projects on the shelf of the Pechora and Okhotsk Seas.
- Cooperation is promoted in India's ongoing investment in Vankorneft and Taas-YuryakhNeftegazodobycha in Russia and the participation of the PJSC Rosneft oil company in the Essar Oil capital.
- Both sides expressed their interests in Science and technology. They aimed to increase academic, research and development work between both the countries. Russia will support India in its first man mission to space i.e. Gaganyan.

Other Areas of Cooperation

- **International Cooperation-** Respect for International Law and multilateral trade- Both sides reaffirmed "equality, mutual respect and non-interference as universally acknowledged norms of international law basis for a just , equal and multipolar world order. Both sides favored strengthening of multilateral trade regimes.
- **Regional Balance-** In Afghanistan both countries sided a Afghan govt led peace process supported through Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Moscow

Format and joint developmental activities etc. On Syria and Iran both political solutions based on UNSC resolution 2254 and underlined the importance of Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in Iran.

- **Terrorism and chemical war**- They rejected the possible arms race in the space. Efforts and initiatives are aimed at preserving the role of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction, and preventing the politicization of the activities of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. Both sides called for importance of adopting the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism, pending in the United Nations.

- **Reiterated support**- Russia has backed India's entry in NSG and UNSC permanent membership. Both will advance low carbon economy and promote Sustainable Development Goals. They will establish Regional Security architecture that provides equal and indivisible security to all countries in Asia and in the regions of Pacific and Indian Oceans. BRICS, SCO, G20 etc. will be strengthened together.

Conclusion
India Russia today needs each other more than ever in this changing geopolitical landscape and both has to learn the art of balancing in order to sustain the newly found bonhomie.

INDIA-JAPAN RELATIONS

Indian PM recently visited Tokyo for the 13th Indo – Japan annual bilateral summit and issued a joint vision statement.

What Importance does the summit hold?

- **Converging Indo pacific interest-**India and Japan share similar interest in Indo pacific hence called **for a free, open, transparent, rule based and inclusive Indo pacific region.** Both place ASEAN at the centre of Indo Pacific but also call for others countries presence like US, Australia etc.

Why India Japan is anchoring for Indo Pacific?

- **Key to Global security-The** region is home not only to the world's fastest-growing economies, but also to the fastest-increasing military expenditures and naval capabilities, the fiercest competition over natural resources, and the most dangerous strategic hot spots.
- **The convergent economic and strategic imperatives-** What China is doing in Indo pacific has been a continuous concern for both the countries. It is disturbing the regional order through an expansionist behavior.
- **Maritime security concern-** Indo-pacific is both strategic as well as an economic domain comprising important sea- lines of communication that connect the littorals of the two oceans. An open and free indo pacific is need of the hour for trade and cooperation.

Areas of Cooperation

- **Increased Economic Cooperation-** The biggest take away was the $75 billion currency swap that Japan Offered to India 50 percent higher than the last swap.
  - Both appreciated the progress made under Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) signed in 2011 as it has helped in boosting bilateral trade.

  - Japan had **pledged Rs 33,800 crore** in government and private sector investments.
  - Japan has been **one of the biggest sources of investment flows** into India**, accounting for $28.16 billion in FDI between April 2000 and June 2018.**
- **Connectivity through Huge Infrastructure projects**
  - **Within India-** Japan has been a leading financial donor in the form of ODA (Official Development Assistance) to India.
    - ✓ It continues to maintain a high degree of interest and support for **India's mega infrastructure projects** like the Delhi-Mumbai Freight Corridor, Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor, Chennai-Bangalore Industrial Corridor and the Ahmedabad-Mumbai High Speed Rail system. The joint statement underscores the importance that Japan attaches to these projects.
    - ✓ **North East integration-** India's Act east policy has North east development at its core. Japan promises to undertake several projects in the region under north East Forum. It has security (chicken neck corridor) and developmental implications for India.
  - **Outside India-** Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGR) announced in 2017 and joint projects in some third countries like Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka and in Africa as well will be taken jointly.
- **Defence ties- Quadrilateral Security Dialogue** is a strategic dialogue between India, United States, Japan and Australia will be carried out.
  - Trilateral naval exercise called **Exercise Malabar** involving the

United States, Japan and India will be carried on continuous basis.

- o Till now India and Japan had **a 2+2 dialogue** at the secretary-level now they decided to have a 2+2 dialogue mechanism between Defence and Foreign ministers. This is aimed at giving political muscle to the existing diplomatic, security and defence cooperation. Both are concentrating on sharing Japanese defence technology with India.
- o They announced the commencement of negotiations on an Acquisition and Cross-servicing Agreement. This agreement, as and when it comes into effect, would enable Japanese ships to get fuel and servicing at Indian naval bases.

Global Partnership- They will support each other at UNSC, climate, disaster risk management, SDG's etc

Weaknesses in the relation

- In spite of CEPA India Japan trade it has not produced the anticipated results. In 2011-12, the total volume of the bilateral trade was $18.43 billion, but it declined to $13.48 billion during 2016-17.
- The defence technology sharing is still a thorn. The US-2 amphibian aircraft has been on the back burner.
- Both have diverging interest with respect to Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.
- Both countries do not have a specific China policy.
- India needs to strengthen its naval power vis-à-vis China and hasten its pending projects in the Indian Ocean.

Way Forward

Both need to work on trade, defence and regional issues. A strong Indo- Japan will arrest the inconsistency being witnessed in the region thus contributing to peace and prosperity in the region and the world.

Liquidity Boost

WHAT IS CURRENCY SWAP:
One country exchanges its national currency for that of another or even a third one

INDIA-JAPAN SWAP:
India can acquire yen or dollars from Japan up to $75 billion in exchange for rupees. The exchange has to be reversed after an agreed period

TERMS OF AGREEMENT:
The facility is entered into between central banks of two countries. The terms of the swap and its cost are also included. The exchange rate is typically fixed for a transaction. The borrowing bank pays intrest for use of funds

How Does It Help
- RBI's $393-billion chest gets a one-shot $75 billion boost
- There is no immediate cost; only when an amount is drawn
- Short-term liquidity mismatches can be met quickly
- It improves market sentiment, curbs speculative pressure on the rupee
- Foreign investors will draw comfort from the arrangement

Office Of Profit

- *Context:* President R N Kovind has dismissed a petition seeking disqualification of 27 AAP MLAs from Delhi on grounds of having held *'office of profit'* as chairpersons of patient welfare committees (Rogi Kalyan Samiti) constituted by Delhi government.

Background:
- The decision was based on an opinion tendered by the Election Commission in July, stating that the said office was exempt from purview of 'office of profit' under provisions of the Delhi MLAs (Removal of Disqualification) Act, 1997.
- Government of NCT of Delhi, in its submission to EC, had made it clear that *Rogi Kalyan Samitis* were constituted by it and that their chairpersons were not entitled to any remuneration and would therefore fall under the exemption granted by item 14 of the Schedule of the Delhi MLAs (Removal of Disqualification) Act.
- The Act provides for exemption of office of chairman, vice-chairman and members of the hospital advisory committee, Delhi, from purview of "office of profit".

What is the underlying principle for including 'office of profit' as criterion for disqualification?
- Makers of the Constitution wanted that legislators should not feel obligated to the Executive in any way, which could influence them while discharging legislative functions. In other words, an MP or MLA should be free to carry out her duties without any kind of governmental pressure.

What the law says

Article 102 (1)(a) says a person shall be disqualified from being a member of either House of Parliament if he holds any office of profit, among other grounds

Article 103 says if a question arises whether a member has incurred such disqualification, it will be referred to the President's decision. The President shall obtain the Election Commission's opinion and act accordingly

Article 191(1) contains a similar provision for MLAs and MLCs in the States. Legislators in Delhi are covered by corresponding provisions in the Government of National Capital Territory Act, 1991

What is an 'office of profit'?
- If an MLA or an MP holds a government office and receives benefits from it, then that office is termed as an "office of profit".
- A person will be disqualified if he holds an office of profit under the central or state government, other than an office declared not to disqualify its holder by a law passed by Parliament or state legislature.

What are the basic criteria to disqualify an MP or MLA?
- Basic disqualification criteria for an MP are laid down in Article 102 of the Constitution, and for an MLA in Article 191.
- They can be disqualified for:
  a) Holding an office of profit under government of India or state government;
  b) Being of unsound mind;
  c) Being an undischarged insolvent;
  d) Not being an Indian citizen or for acquiring citizenship of another country.

Anti- Defection Law

Context: In a major relief to the AIADMK government in Tamil Nadu, the Madras High Court has upheld the state Assembly Speaker's decision disqualifying 18 AIADMK legislators last year.

Background:

- In 2017, a group of 19 lawmakers met then Governor C. Vidyasagar Rao and gave a memorandum expressing loss of confidence in Palaniswami and requested him to appoint a new Chief Minister.
- The Speaker then issued notice to the lawmakers asking them why they should not be disqualified under the anti-defection law. Subsequently, one of legislators, S.T.K. Jakkaiyan, switched over to the Palaniswami side and the others were disqualified.

The anti-defection law:

- *The 10th Schedule to the Constitution*, popularly referred to as the 'Anti-Defection Law,' was inserted by the 52nd Amendment in 1985. The grounds for disqualification are mentioned under Articles 102 (2) and 191 (2). A Member of Parliament or state legislature is deemed to have defected:
- When the elected member voluntarily gives up his membership of a political party.
- If he votes or abstains from voting in such House contrary to any direction issued by his political party or anyone authorised to do so, without obtaining prior permission.
- Independent members would be disqualified if they joined a political party.
- Nominated members who were not members of a party could choose to join a party within six months; after that period, they were treated as a party member or independent member.

Exceptions under the Law:

- Any person elected as speaker or chairman could resign from his party, and rejoin the party if he demitted that post.
- A party could be merged into another if at least two-thirds of its party legislators voted for the merger.
- The law initially permitted splitting of parties, but that has now been outlawed.

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.

Electoral Bond Scheme

- *Context:* The Finance Ministry has authorised the sale of sixth tranche of electoral bonds. The State Bank of India, will issue and encash them from November 1 to November 11 via its 29 authorised branches.

About Electoral bonds:

- *What are electoral bonds?* Electoral bonds will 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.

Large Vacancies For Judges In Lower Courts

- *Context:* Describing as "unacceptable" the existence of 5,133 vacancies of judges in "Higher Judicial Service" and "Lower Judicial Service", the Supreme Court has sought the response of the State governments and the High Courts whether the time for the ongoing recruitment of 4,180 judicial officers could be shortened.

Directions issued:
- Passing a suo motu order on the huge number of vacancies in the subordinate judiciary across the country, the court has sought the response from the High Courts/State governments as it noted that the recruitment process for filling 4,180 posts was already underway.
- Noting that there was a mismatch in the number of vacancies, the number of posts for which recruitment process is underway and those still pending, the apex court also sought details of the vacancies that have occurred since the current recruitment process commenced.
- The court also sought information whether "infrastructure and manpower available in the different states is adequate if all the posts that are borne in the cadre are to be filled up.

Malik Mazhar Sultan case:
- A seven-month schedule for recruitment has been formulated by the top court in the Malik Mazhar Sultan case.
- If the time taken exceeds the schedule fixed by this Court, the reasons thereof should be furnished by the Registries of such High Courts/concerned authorities of the State where the recruitment is done through the Public Service Commission(s) which are in default.

Central recruitment to fill judges' vacancies is the right idea:
- The Union law ministry is working with the Supreme Court to conduct a nationwide examination to recruit around 6,000 judges for the lower judiciary as a one-time measure.
- Under the nationwide recruitment scheme, a central agency will conduct the test with due importance given to local languages for those opting for a particular state. Subsequently, an all-India merit list will be prepared based on which the state governments will make the final appointments.
- Although this has been proposed as a one-time measure, there is a case here to have a permanent central judicial recruitment mechanism. This will also help ensure uniformity in judicial recruitment across the country.

Significance:
- This is much needed given the huge number of vacancies for judges and the high pendency of cases. In fact, lower courts currently have a backlog of 2.78 crore cases.
- Unless judges are quickly recruited, this number can't be kept down.
- True, appointment of judges in district and subordinate courts is the responsibility of state governments and the high courts concerned.
- But things have come to this pass because of inordinate delays in holding examinations for judicial recruitment at the state level.

Renaming Of States

- *Context:* West Bengal government's move to rename WB as "Bangla" has hit a roadblock after concerns that the new name may sound like Bangladesh, and it would be difficult to differentiate the two at international forums.
- In a letter to Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), the Union Home Ministry stated that the proposed name "Bangla" may sound similar like Bangladesh and some confusions may arrive in the international arena over Bangla and Bangladesh.
- Since Bangladesh shares a cordial relationship with India, Home Ministry was advised to seek a response from MEA on the issue.

Background:
- In 2016, the West Bengal Assembly passed a resolution to change the name of West Bengal to Bangla in Bengali, Bengal in English and Bangal in Hindi.

Rationale behind renaming:
- The state government first proposed the renaming in 2016. West Bengal parliamentary affairs minister Partha Chatterjee had then argued for the change saying bureaucrats and politicians from the state often complain that they are asked to speak at the end of every national-level meeting in Delhi.
- This was because the speakers' lists at such meeting are prepared according to alphabetical order of the states they represent. If West Bengal gets the new name, it will leapfrog from bottom of the list to the top of the pecking order.
- The renaming will help the state appear at the fourth spot after Arunachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Assam in the alphabetic order of the states.

The procedure of renaming of the state can be initiated by either the Parliament or the State Legislator and the procedure is as follows:
- The renaming of a state requires Parliamentary approval under Article 3 and 4 of the Constitution.
- A bill for renaming a state may be introduced in the Parliament on the recommendation of the President.
- Before the introduction of the bill, the President shall send the bill to the respective state assembly for expressing their views within a stipulated time. The views of the state assembly are not binding, neither on the President nor on the Parliament.
- On the expiry of the period, the bill will be sent to the Parliament for deliberation. The bill in order to take the force of a law must be passed by a simple majority.
- The bill is sent for approval to the President. After the approval of the said bill, the bill becomes a law and the name of the state stands modified.

Initiation by a State:
- If any fresh proposal comes from states to the Home Ministry, it will prepare a note for the Union Cabinet for an amendment to the Schedule 1 of the Constitution.
- Thereafter, a Constitution Amendment Bill will be introduced in Parliament, which has to approve it with a simple majority, before the President gives his assent to it.

Competition Commission Of India

- *Context:* The Competition Commission of India (CCI) has amended the Combination Regulations. This amendment inter alia provide certainty & transparency and expedites faster disposal of combination cases before CCI.

Latest amendments:
- The provisions of the Competition Act, 2002 ("Act") relating to the regulation of combinations as well as the Combination Regulations have been in force with effect from 1st June 2011.
  - A key change brought about by the present amendments is that *the parties to combinations can now submit remedies voluntarily in response to the notice issued under Section 29(1) of the Act*. If such remedies are considered sufficient to address the perceived competition harm, the combination can be approved. This amendment is expected to expedite disposal of such combination cases.
  - In another significant amendment, where the notice is found to exhibit significant information gaps, *parties to combinations are allowed to withdraw the notice and refile the same*. With this amendment, the parties could address the deficiencies without facing an invalidation by CCI. Further, fee already paid in respect of such notice shall be adjusted against the fee payable in respect of new notice, if the refiling is done within a period of 3 months.
  - Apart from these, certain consequential and other clarificatory changes have also been made in the Combination Regulations.

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

The following are the objectives of the Commission:
- To prevent practices having adverse effect on competition.
- To promote and sustain competition in markets.
- To protect the interests of consumers.
- To ensure freedom of trade.

Functions of the commission:
- It is the duty of the Commission to eliminate practices having adverse effect on competition, promote and sustain competition, protect the interests of consumers and ensure freedom of trade in the markets of India.
- The Commission is also required to give opinion on competition issues on a reference received from a statutory authority established under any law and to undertake competition advocacy, create public awareness and impart training on competition issues.

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

Urban Slums

within India.Maharashtra government recently launched a new initiative to redevelop Dharavi- one of the largest slums in the world.

Slum in India

- A Slum, for the purpose of Census has been defined as residential areas where dwellings are unfit for human habitation by reasons of dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty arrangements and design of such buildings, narrowness or faulty arrangement of street, lack of ventilation, light, or sanitation facilities or any combination of these factors which are detrimental to the safety and health.
- **Facts from Census 2011** Results and National Sample Survey (NSS) 69th Round on Urban Slums in India, 2012
  - o A total of 65.49 million population live in slums. The slum population enumerated constitutes 5.4 per cent of the total population of the country and 17.4 percent of the total urban population.
  - o An estimated total of 33510 slums existed in the urban areas of India of which only 13761 were notified.
  - o Maharashtra, with an estimated 7723 slums, accounted for about 23% of total slums in urban India, followed by Andhra Pradesh (14%) and West Bengal, which had a share of about 12%.
  - o The proportion of Scheduled Castes was higher in the slum areas (20.4%) compared to the population of Scheduled Castes in the non-slum areas (11.0%), and urban areas of the country (12.6%).
  - o About 8.08 million children are living in slums in India. In other words, **every fifth urban child in the country in the age group of 0-6 is a slum dweller**.

Reason for development of Slums: Slums are natural by- products of urbanisation, especially in a labour-surplus country like India.

- Urbanisation requires provision of various kinds of consumer services. In a labour-surplus economy, cheap labour is available to provide these services. Hence, an informal sector develops to complement the formal sector. Wages are low but, at the same time, these jobs require physical proximity to centres of employment (cities). So, slums develop.

Governments Approach towards Slum Re-development

- Development of basic infrastructure around a city (roads, electricity, water, sewerage, security) is state responsibility. Yet, we are increasingly witnessing withdrawal of the state from all kinds of public utilities due to financial constraints and push for privatization.
- Increasingly, governments across the globe have come to recognise the right of people to occupy unutilised land for housing as their livelihood is intrinsically linked with where they live. The right to occupy unused land is guaranteed in Brazil's constitution. But in India, citizens don't have such rights. In fact, we have the Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorized Occupants) Act, 1971, which prohibits the general public from occupying any public premises.
- Most official policies have looked at slums in isolation — not as part of the larger problem of housing and mass deprivation, rural and urban, that confront a city. The emphasis has been on providing built units to replace the 'kutcha' houses of slums.
- In a high-value real estate market, government-owned lands and places where the slums exist are seen as potential sources of funding infrastructure and mixed residential

development. Accordingly, when such lands are developed, only a fraction of the built area is dedicated to social housing and an opportunity is lost to accommodate more of the slum population.

- Many State governments have failed to implement the National Urban Housing and Habitat Policy's recommendation to allocate 15 per cent of land in residential projects for housing the poor.
- Though there are more than 13.7 million households living in abysmal conditions, States have formally notified only about a third of them as slums. This leaves a large number of others in a more vulnerable condition: health and sanitation facilities hardly reach non-notified slums, and they are prone to forced eviction.
- At the All- India level, only 24% of slums benefited from any welfare schemes like Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY) or any other scheme for improvement of slums run by the Central Government or State Government or any local body.

Way forward

To address the growing needs and deficiencies in slums of India, several sustainable models to improve are recommended in four different categories- administrative, infrastructural, financial and architectural.

- **Administrative:** There is a need to replicate Mumbai's in-situ Slum Redevelopment Scheme in cities of similar land and population characteristics such as Delhi, Hyderabad, Chennai, and Pune. In these places, a fully subsidized, in-situ slum redevelopment policy, quite similar to the Slum Redevelopment Scheme-Housing for All, would likely see the same success as in Mumbai.
- **Infrastructural:** Construct and retrofit apartment buildings with decentralized infrastructure such as solar energy and anaerobic digestion sanitation.

  o Solar energy proves to be a potential solution for slum redeveloped buildings because of good solar resource in India. Analysts estimate savings up to ₹2, 35,790 over a twenty five year lifetime of the project.
  o On a national policy level- Housing for All, energy analysis resulted in identifying potential of 10 MW worth of solar panel installation across India.
  o Decentralized Sanitation can prevent the environmental pollution and health risks associated with open defecation common among slum households. Upgrading existing septic tanks into bio digester facilities, and increasing dependence on resource recovery technologies, can reduce maintenance and costs, produce energy and nutrient resources, and improve water quality.
- **Financial:** Government needs to ensure long-term ownership rights and improved access to formal financial resources. It is recommended that -
  o The government should grant leasehold rights during the interim period while incentivizing households to work toward an ownership, and encourage innovative lending mechanisms from Housing Finance Companies and Micro-finance Institutions to ensure that housing finance is accessible to large sections of slum population at the end of the transit period.
  o In this way whenever slum dwellers are able to make individual housing choices, the informal economy could truly convert into formal economy, and long-term financial sustainability could be achieved.
- **Architectural:** It is recommended prioritizing community space and spaces for micro-entrepreneurship within building design to increase social and business opportunities.

o Through incorporating some existing areas of social interaction in informal settlements, as well as past approaches to public housing and slum redevelopment, we need to maintain the social, semi-public, entrepreneurial atmosphere of the streets in newly developed dense vertical redevelopments.

Sabki Yojana, Sabka Vikas

Recently, the central government launched a campaign, Sabki Yojana, Sabka Vikas on October 2.

About Sabki Yojana Sabka Vikas campaign
- The campaign will involve people at the grassroots while preparing structured **gram panchayat development plans.**
- It will also involve **thorough audit** of the works done in the last few years.
- Under the campaign, which will conclude in December this year, gram panchayats will have to **publicly display all sources of funds** collected and their annual spending, along with future development initiatives.
- This would help in making the exercise of formulating Gram panchayat development plans more structured which has been largely unorganized till now.

About Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP):
- It is an annual plan of each panchayat where the villagers would decide where the money should be spent.
- The Gram Panchayat Development Plan aims to strengthen the role of 31 lakh elected Panchayat leaders and 2.5 crore SHG Women under DAY-NRLM in effective gram sabha.

Significance of GPDP
- **Stakeholder involvement**: Judicious planning with involvement of all stakeholders is critical for success of any activity. Community involvement leads to quality works and acceptance by local inhabitants
- **Consolidation of all financial resources at Gram Panchayat (GP) level**: Pooling of resources helps in optimum outcomes.
- **Development works:** They are undertaken in prioritized manner through collective visioning. It also helps to reach marginalized sections and achieve specific development goals within a specified time-frame.
- **Responsive government**: It activates PRI level bureaucracy and also strengthens bond between government, GP & local inhabitants leading to responsive government.

Some concerns about existing GPDP process
- Lack of awareness and Inadequate people's -participation in the gram sabhas.
- Over-emphasis on investment in infrastructure.
- Inadequate public service delivery and e- enablement of panchayats.
- Review of GPDP at Block/ District/ State levels non- existent.
- Lack of integration in Plans at block and district levels.
- GPDP being prepared as a wishlist owing to lack of technical support to GPs for GPDP preparation.

Sub-Ordinate Courts

Supreme Court expresses concern over the high level of vacancy in subordinate courts.

Background

- Subordinate courts perform the most critical judicial functions that affect the life of the common man: **conducting trials**, **settling civil disputes**, and implementing the bare bones of the law.
- But there are various issues faced by the lower judiciary. Many of these emerge from the problem of high level of vacancy for the posts of judges. For example, there are **5,133 judges posts vacant** in the subordinate judiciary against a sanctioned strength of 22,677 across the country.

Other Issues faced by Subordinate Courts

- **Issues in recruitment**: There is tardiness in the
- process of calling for applications, holding recruitment examinations and declaring the results.
  - Apart from that, according to a recent study, the **recruitment cycle** in most States far exceeded the time limit prescribed by the Supreme Court.

- **Pendency of cases:** Due to laxity in recruitment process there has been an increasing pendency in lower courts with 22. 57 lakh cases pending for more than 10 years, some as old as two or three decades.
- **Lack of uniformity in frequency of hearings** among the subordinate courts in the country. Higher frequency shows that more cases are being heard in shorter time span. This may affect the overall quality of justice delivered.
- **Delays in evidence collection and examination of witnesses** which impacts the overall process of the court.
- **Lack of Infrastructure:** Any failure to allocate the required human and financial resources may lead to the crippling of judicial work in the subordinate courts. It majorly has two components-
  - Firstly, there is a lack of legal and para-legal staff and a dearth of well-trained investigating staff.
  - Secondly, lack of funds to support various processes like recruitment and support the needs of the recruited staff, is another issue.

Recruitment Process District Courts

- The appointment, posting and promotion of district judges in a state are made by the governor of the state in consultation with the high court. A person to be appointed as district judge should have the following qualifications:
  - He should not already be in the service of the Central or the state government.
  - He should have been an advocate or a pleader for seven years.
  - He should be recommended by the high court for appointment.
- Appointment of other Judges (other than district judges) to the judicial service of a state are made by the governor of the state after consultation with the State Public Service Commission and the high court.

Way Forward

- A smooth and time-bound process of making appointments would, require **close coordination** between the High Courts and the State Public Service Commissions.
- The situation demands a **massive infusion of both manpower and resources**.
  - Strengthening of court infrastructure requires "immediate attention" in the form of planning, enhanced budgeting and structured

implementation.

- o **Proportionate recruitment of legal and paralegal staff** too has to be addressed along with the need for **well-trained staff** responsible for preliminary investigation such as evidence collection and examination of witnesses.

- Create an **All-India Judicial Service (AIJS)** along the lines of the All India Services (AIS). It will create a cadre of judges who can be appointed at the district courts level across the country and ensure a transparent and efficient method of recruitment to attract the best talent in India's legal profession.

- Utilizing Information Communication Technology to improve the judicial and administrative process in courts and also scaling up E-courts projects to provide efficient & time-bound citizen centric services delivery has a potential to go a long way.

Demand For Gorkhaland

Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) meets Union government on the issue of Gorkhaland.

Gorkhaland Movement:

- The Gorkhaland movement is a long-standing quest for a **separate State of Gorkhaland** within India for **Nepali-speaking Indian citizens** (often known as 'Gorkhas').
- With roots dating back over a century, Gorkhaland is a classic **sub-nationalist movement,** not unlike those that have produced other States, most recently Telangana, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand etc.
- The movement is **neither separatist nor anti-nationalist** rather by demanding Gorkhaland, the people of Darjeeling-Kalimpong are **opting out of West Bengal's domination,** and opting in to the democratic frameworks of India writ large.

About Gorkhas

- Gorkhas (or Gurkhas) are **Nepali-origin people** who take their name from the 8th-century **Hindu warrior-saint Guru Gorakhnath** and from the Nepal hill town of Gorkha. In India, the word is sometimes used to make a distinction between Indian Gorkhas, who are citizens of India, and Nepali citizens who are living in India.
- In a notification issued on August 23, 1988, the Home Ministry clarified that 'Gorkhas domiciled in India at the time of commencement of the Constitution, and those born in India, or born to one or both parents born in India, are citizens of India'.

History of Gorkhaland movement:

- In 1780, the Gorkhas captured Sikkim and most part of North Eastern states including Darjeeling in 1780. After 35 years of rule, the Gorkhas surrendered the territory to British in the **Treaty of Segoulee** in 1816, after they lost the **Anglo-Nepal war.**
- However, though British handed over Darjeeling to Sikkim, it was taken back for political reasons in 1835. Before 1905, when Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon directed the partition of Bengal, Darjeeling was a part of Rajshahi division, which now falls in Bangladesh. For a short period from 1905-1912, it was even a part of Bhagalpur division. Darjeeling was merged with West Bengal after the partition of 1947.
- **All India Gorkha League** began a movement for a separate state in 1949.

Why demand for Gorkhaland?

- **Ethnic differences:** The people belonging to this area hardly have any connection with the Bengali community and are **different in ethnicity, culture and language.**
- **Aspiration of Indian Gorkha Identity:** Due to racial discrimination, when they seek education and work in big cities like Bangalore, Delhi, etc., they are treated as foreigners. Therefore they seek a separate identity within the Indian dominion.
- **Economic deprivation**: Gorkhas remain pegged to **the lowest levels of employment**, while outsiders own the tea industry, meaning its profits flow out of the hills.
- **Cultural impositions:** The **imposition of Bengali language** by the state government is seen as extension of histories of domination and a **threat to their identity**.
- **Other reasons** include linguistic chauvinism, resource extraction, unilateral territorial claims, denial of self-governance, political suppression; and an unwillingness to respect the 'native point of view'.

Responses to Gorkhaland

- **Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC):** Following the agitation that began in 1986, a tripartite agreement was reached between Centre, Government of West Bengal, and Gorkha National

Liberation Front in July 1988. Under this, an autonomous Hill Council (DGHC) under a State Act was set up for "the social, economic, educational, and cultural advancement of the people residing in the Hill areas of Darjeeling District".

Problems:

- o The Council was given limited executive powers but in the absence of legislative powers the aspirations of the people of the region could not be addressed.
- o The non-inclusion of the Dooars region in the Council became a major reason of discontent.
- **Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA):** created in 2012 through a tripartite agreement signed by governments of centre and state and Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM), replaced the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council. It is a **semi-autonomous administrative body**. It has administrative, executive and financial powers but **no legislative powers**.

Problems:

- o Lack of legislative powers means that the people of the region have no control over laws to govern themselves by.
- o Dooars again has been left out and instead a verification team has been set to identify "Gorkha majority" areas in the Dooars.

Arguments in favour of new State of Gorkhaland:

- Various states have been created on **linguistic grounds** or, more recently, for **socio-economic reasons.** Recent States such as Uttarakhand, Chattisgarh and Telangana have been created on the latter basis.
- Gorkhaland fits the bill on both counts — it is linguistically and culturally distinct from the plains of Bengal and can justifiably perceive Statehood as the answer to its socio-economic concerns.
- The **experiments with incremental autonomy were not successful** including the GTA's first five-year term till 2017. These were only experiments with interim arrangements. The only permanent solution lies in creation of Gorkhaland.

Arguments against

- **Small geographical area:** Darjeeling had been **too small** to be constituted as a state. According to official records Darjeeling district has a geographical area of about 3,149 sq km with three Assembly seats and only a part of a Lok Sabha seat.
- **Security Issues:** It shares a complex relationship with unstable Nepal which has a history of using China as a trump card against India. The Maoist uprising in Nepal and Naxalite movement originated in the foothills of Darjeeling bolsters such fears.
- **Triger for other such demands:** Once we recognize such a demand, a Pandora's Box shall be opened. It not only **jeopardizes the plural character** of our society, but also opens the flood-gates for similar such demands from vested interests in different parts of the country.
- **Administrative Feasibility:** Firstly not all Nepali speaking people are demanding Gorkhaland. Secondly, they are very unevenly distributed throughout the region and it is very difficult to chalk out boundaries of the new state without administrative difficulties, as also observed by the **Justice Shyamal Sen Commission** (constituted to explore the feasibility of such inclusions).

Way forward

- To start with there is an urgent need to make efforts both by the government and the community to make Gorkhas feel included both socially as well as economically. The Government needs to be more sensitive towards needs and aspirations of Gorkhas. E.g. Instead of

imposing Bengali, it could have been made optional.

- The state government and the Centre need to put in enough time and money to build civic amenities, culture and agency so that Gorkha communities can reset their connection with the state.

- Discussions should be held to further delegate legislative powers as well.

- Further, second State Reorganisation Commission can be set up to study and address the demands of statehood in various parts of India.

Independence Vs Accountability Of RBI

Why in news?

Recently Deputy Governor of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Viral Acharya warned the government against curbing **the independence of the central bank.**

Background

- RBI had been favouring for more autonomy as governor after governor has raised this issue**.**
- The government might invoke so far never-used **Section 7 of the RBI Act 1934**, in which it will issue an order to the RBI to take into account the government instructions in the public interest which might **impact autonomy of RBI.**

Why Independence of RBI is important?

- **Implementing policies:** The RBI has multiple policy objectives that serve the public interest from price stability, growth, development to financial stability that also have political consequences. The central bank has to have a clear mandate and simultaneously the necessary operational freedom to fulfil its mandate.
- **Free from Political interferences:** There had been numerous cases of interference by the political class in the RBI's appointments and administration and in its credit authorization policies to the benefit of large business houses. Direct intervention and interference by the government in the operational mandate of the central bank negates its functional autonomy.
- **Regulation:** It is also important that RBI is statutorily limited in undertaking the full scope of actions against public sector banks (PSBs) as also in case of PNB fraud which eroded credibility of RBI.
- **Separate institute:** The central bank is set up as an institution separate from the government. It is not a department of the executive function of the government. Its powers are enshrined as being separate through relevant legislation.
- **Ensuring Sustainable Economic Growth:** Central bank autonomy fosters price and financial sector stability that are conducive to sustainable economic growth.

Why Accountability of RBI is important?

- **Democracy:** In a democracy, sovereignty lies with the people. And government, not the central bank, is answerable to the people. If the Reserve Bank, for instance, fails to keep inflation low, it is the government that pays the price, not RBI.
- **Answerable in failures:** The flip side of autonomy is accountability and the RBI should be answerable if it fails to achieve these goals. The progressive widening and deepening of the activities of the RBI in different sectors of the economy affect the lives of millions. Hence any type of failure should be answerable by RBI.
- **More transparency:** The central bank can also make mistakes, and is generally held publicly accountable through parliamentary scrutiny and transparency norms. This ensure more transparency in the system with clearly defined roles.
- **Accountable through Government:** The RBI is autonomous but within the framework of the RBI Act**.** Hence Central bank cannot claim absolute autonomy. It is autonomy within the limits set by the government and its extent depends on the subject and the context.

Way forward

- There is need to pay due regard to both autonomy and accountability. There has to be a forum within our democratic structure where the RBI is obligated to explain and defend its position.
- Institutional autonomy of RBI has to be respected and all institutions will have to

work together to achieve the common goal. All the institutions should integrate the objective of the overall governance.

- However, the quality of governance is of utmost significance which is provided to the people, by public institutions. That does not get resolved by merely looking at institutional autonomy. In the theory and practice of good governance, autonomy must be counter-balanced by with robust instruments of transparency and accountability.

- Transparency provides an essential basis for accountability and democratic legitimacy by enabling effective legislative oversight.

- There should be a balance between autonomy and accountability. For example - we have an inflation targeting model now and the central bank is accountable for its inflation targeting. Similarly, there can be such autonomy and accountability for financial sector regulation by creating some desirable objectives.

- FSLRC sought to modernize governance and make regulators more independent as well as more accountable. For example, it proposed to do away with the government's power to give directions, while it sought to make boards of regulators more accountable and transparent with agenda and minutes of board meetings to be public, and with boards having the responsibility of approving all regulations after due process.

- Since the goals of the government and the RBI coincide, both have to respect each other's operational space. While economic growth is impossible without adequate credit, the RBI needs to ensure that its policies do not hamper the growth of credit and investment.

- If regulatory powers need a review, Parliament should make law accordingly. There should be clarity on the regulatory powers of RBI as well as Government.

Experiencing North East Festival

- *Context:* The 'Experiencing North East' festival is being held. It depicts the uniqueness of North Eastern culture.

'Experiencing North East' Festival:
- The event which is *a part of 'Destination North East' series* aims at showcasing the diverse culture and heritage of North East all under one roof.
  - The festival is being organised by *North Eastern Council (NEC)*, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) in collaboration with India International Centre.
  - The festival will showcase the vibrant strengths of North East India and display its art, handicraft, handlooms, tourism, food, culture etc.
  - There will be special performances daily by eminent cultural troupes, bands and artistes from North East, including Nise Meruno, classical pianist and vocalist.

About 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.

Recent amendments:
- 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 has also approved that Minister of State (Independent Charge), Ministry of DoNER would serve as Vice Chairman of the Council.
- Under the new arrangement, Home Minister shall be the Chairman and Minister of DoNER as Vice Chairman, NEC and all the Governors and Chief Ministers of North Eastern States will be Members.

Background:
- *Destination North East event* is one of the steps taken by Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region to bring North East closer and help assimilate the diverse cultural heritage of India while encouraging investment in priority sectors like Tourism, Handloom, Handicrafts, Food Processing etc.
- Other steps taken by Ministry of DoNER towards assimilation of North Eastern Region, are funding Business Summits, Seminars, Buyers & Sellers meets to attract investors in North Eastern Region and supporting participation of weavers/artisans of NER in Craft Bazaars and exhibitions all over India to promote their Handloom and Handicrafts and give them exposure to the National Market.

Karnataka Good Samaritan Bill

- *Context:* The president has given his asset to the Karnataka Good Samaritan and Medical Professional (Protection and Regulation during Emergency Situations) Bill, 2016.

About the Bill:
- The legislation aims to give protection to good samaritans and ensure immediate medical assistance for road accident victims within the 'golden hour' and encourage people to offer first aid to victims without fear of harassment in the hands of police and investigations.
- Under the new law, the Karnataka government will provide financial help to good samaritans who help victims in a timely manner, they will be exempted from repeated attendance in courts and police stations, in case attendance is mandatory, expenses of such "running around to courts and police stations" will be taken care through the proposed 'Good Samaritan Fund'.
- After admitting the accident victim to the hospital, the good samaritan can leave immediately, all government as well as private hospitals are bound to give first aid to the accident victims.

Significance:
- With this, Karnataka has become the first state to give legal protection to good samaritans through a legislation amidst the rising incidents of accidental deaths in India, which saw 1,50,785 people getting killed in road accidents in 2016.
- In medical terms, the 'golden hour' is the first hour after a traumatic injury when emergency treatment is very crucial.

Need for legal protection:
- There were 4,80,652 road accidents in the country in 2016 in which 1,50,785 people were killed. In 2015, there were 5,01,423 road accidents in the country in which 1,46,133 people were killed.
- There is no central law to protect the good samaritans. However, the Union Surface Transport Ministry had issued a set of guidelines in 2015 following a Supreme Court order to protect the good samaritans.
- There have been many instances when people get busy in clicking photos or making videos of the victims, instead of providing the accident victims medical help. With the new law, there will be clear message that good samaritans will not be harassed in any manner.
- Karnataka is one of the top five states which saw a large number of people getting killed in road accidents in 2016 and 2015.

National Policy On Electronics 2018

- *Context:* Union Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has issued draft 'National Policy on Electronics 2018' (NPE 2018) for Electronics System Design and Manufacturing (ESDM) Sector of India.

Highlights of the policy:

- *Aim:* To promote domestic manufacturing in entire value-chain of ESDM sector for spur economic development in the country. It also aims to double the target of mobile phone production from 500 million units in 2019 to 1 billion by 2025 to meet objective.

- *Target:* Create $400 billion electronics manufacturing industry by 2025, with mobile phone devices segment accounting for three-fourths of production. It also includes targeted production of 1 billion mobile handsets by 2025, valued at $190 billion (approximately Rs. 13 lakh crore) and also 600 million mobile handsets valued at $110 billion (approximately Rs. 7 lakh crore) for export.

- *Incentives:* It replaces existing incentive schemes like Modified Special Incentive Package Scheme (M-SIPS), with schemes that are easier to implement such as interest subsidy and credit default guarantee etc. It also takes into consideration interest subsidy and credit default guarantee in order to encourage new units and in expansion of existing units in electronics manufacturing sector.

- *It also proposes to push development of core competencies* in all sub-sectors of electronics including electronic components and semiconductors, automotive electronics, defence electronics, industrial electronics, strategic electronics etc. It also proposes to set up 20 greenfield and three brownfield electronic manufacturing cluster projects have been sanctioned with project outlay of Rs 3,898 crore, including Rs 1,577 crore from Central Government.

- *Tax benefits:* It proposes suitable direct tax benefits, including inter-alia investment-linked deduction under Income Tax (IT) Act for electronics manufacturing sector, for setting up of new manufacturing unit or expansion of an existing unit. The proposal includes increasing tax benefits on expenditure incurred on R&D, enhancing rate of duty drawback for electronics sector, reimbursement of state levies and other levies for which input tax credit is not available, allowing duty free import of second-hand capital goods for electronics hardware manufacturing etc. It also proposes cess on select electronic goods resources to promote certain critical sub-sectors of electronic manufacturing such as semiconductor wafer fabrication and display fabrication units.

Strategic Petroleum Reserves

- *Context:* India is planning to forge partnerships with private players to build out its strategic petroleum reserves within the coming year.
- It is seeking $1.5 billion of investments from global oil producers and traders to build additional emergency crude reserves that will act as a buffer against volatility in oil prices. The plan is to build underground caverns that can hold a combined 6.5 million tons of crude at two locations.

Background:

- India has built 5.33 million tons of underground reserves in three locations, including Padur, under an earlier phase that can meet 9.5 days of the country's oil needs. The government purchased crude to fill the caverns in Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh and half of another facility in Mangalore in Karnataka, while leasing out the other half to Abu Dhabi National Oil Co.
- Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves, which was formed in 2006, is scouting investors to fill the caverns at Padur. It will hold roadshows in New Delhi, Singapore and London this month to draw investors for the new caverns as well as filling the Padur facility.

About SPR programme:

- To ensure energy security, the Government of India had decided to set up 5 million metric tons (MMT) of strategic crude oil storages at three locations namely, Visakhapatnam, Mangalore and Padur (near Udupi). These strategic storages would be in addition to the existing storages of crude oil and petroleum products with the oil companies and would serve as

a cushion during any external supply disruptions.

  o In the 2017-18 budget, it was announced that two more such caverns will be set up Chandikhole in Jajpur district of Odisha and Bikaner in Rajasthan as part of the second phase.
  o The construction of the Strategic Crude Oil Storage facilities is being managed by Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited (ISPRL), a Special Purpose Vehicle, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Oil Industry Development Board (OIDB) under the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas.

Need for strategic oil reserves:

- In 1990, as the Gulf war engulfed West Asia, India was in the throes of a major energy crisis. By all accounts India's oil reserves at the time were adequate for only three days. While India managed to avert the crisis then, the threat of energy disruption continues to present a real danger even today.
- It is unlikely that India's energy needs will dramatically move away from fossil fuels in the near future. Over 80% of these fuels come from imports, a majority of which is sourced from West Asia. This is a major strategic risk and poses a massive financial drain for an embattled economy and its growing current account deficit.
- To address energy insecurity, the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government mooted the concept of strategic petroleum reserves in 1998. Today, with India consuming upwards of four million barrels of crude every day (January 2015 figures), the case for creating such reserves grows stronger.

Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay Sanrakshan Abhiyan

- *Context:* A recent analysis by agricultural experts has revealed that Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay Sanrakshan Abhiyan will make no difference to the plight of farmers on the ground this season, and will not improve their chances of getting MSP for their crops.

Why?
- Only Madhya Pradesh has opted for the cash payment component. No other state has readied the IT infrastructure needed to implement it.
- With regard to the private stockists scheme, guidelines were issued to states last week. It will probably take states and private players about six months. And there may not be any takers in the current season.

Background:
- Giving a major boost to the pro-farmer initiatives of the Government and in keeping with its commitment and dedication for the Annadata, the Union Cabinet approved, in September 2018, a new Umbrella Scheme "Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay SanraksHan Abhiyan' (PM-AASHA).
- The Scheme is aimed at ensuring remunerative prices to the farmers for their produce as announced in the Union Budget for 2018.

The umbrella scheme 'PM-AASHA' comprises three sub-schemes:
1. Price Support Scheme (PSS).
2. Price Deficiency Payment Scheme (PDPS).
3. Pilot of Private Procurement & Stockist Scheme (PPPS).

Price Support Scheme (PSS):
- Under the scheme, the physical procurement of pulses, oilseeds and Copra will be done by Central Nodal Agencies with the proactive role of the state governments.
  - Further, in addition to NAFED, the Food Cooperation of India (FCI) will take up PSS operations in states and districts.
  - The procurement expenditure and losses due to procurement will be borne by the Union Government as per norms.

Price Deficiency Payment Scheme this scheme (PDPS):
- Under the scheme, it is proposed to cover all oilseeds for which minimum support price (MSP) is notified.
- In this, direct payment of the difference between the MSP and the selling/modal price will be made to pre- registered farmers selling his produce in the notified market yard through a transparent auction process. All payments will be done directly into the registered bank account of the farmer.
- This scheme does not involve any physical procurement of crops as farmers are paid the difference between the MSP price and sale or modal price on disposal in the notified market. The support of the central government for PDPS will be given as per norms.

Pilot of Private Procurement & Stockist Scheme (PPPS):
- For oilseeds, the states will have the option to roll out Private Procurement Stockist Scheme (PPSS) on pilot basis in selected districts and Agricultural Produce Market Committee's (APMC) of district involving the

participation of private stockiest.

- The pilot district and selected APMC(s) will cover one or more crop of oilseeds for which MSP is notified.
- Since this is similar to the PSS scheme, as it involves physical procurement of the notified commodity, the scheme shall substitute PSS/PDPS in the pilot districts.
- The selected private agency shall procure the commodity at MSP in the notified markets during the notified period from the registered farmers in accordance with the PPSS Guidelines, whenever the prices in the market fall below the notified MSP and whenever authorised by the state or UT government to enter the market. The maximum service charges up to 15% of the notified MSP will be payable.

Background:

Increasing MSP is not adequate and it is more important that farmers should get the full benefit of the announced MSP. For the same, it is essential that if the price of the agriculture produce market is less than MSP, then in that case state governments and the central government should purchase either at MSP or work in a manner to provide MSP for the farmers through some other mechanism.

Assam To Launch Wage Compensation Scheme For Pregnant Women In Tea Gardens

- *Context*: Assam Government has become the first Indian state to offer a Wage Compensation Scheme for pregnant women working in the tea gardens of the state.
- *Aim:* The scheme is aimed at providing better health and nutrition supplements to the pregnant women. It stresses on providing proper healthcare facilities to the pregnant women working in the tea gardens of the state.

Key facts:

- Under the scheme, an amount of Rs 12,000 will be given to the pregnant women so that they can take care of themselves and the unborn baby without compromising the livelihood of their family.
- The compensation of wages to pregnant women will be given in 4 instalments – Rs 2,000 in the first trimester, Rs 4,000 in the second trimester, Rs 3,000 for institutional delivery and Rs 3,000 for registration of the child's birth.
- The women would also be given a maternity leave. They will not be engaged in work from the third trimester of pregnancy to three months after delivery.
- In addition, they will get assistance for ante-natal care and the first cycle of immunization of the child.

Significance:

- The scheme is likely to benefit over 60,000 women in the state. It is expected to reduce maternal and neonatal mortality in the tea areas.

Background:

- The maternal mortality rate of women working in the tea plantations of Assam is unusually high. In the Annual Health Survey of 2012-13, Assam recorded one of the highest maternal mortality rates in India, with over 300 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. The MMR in the state's tea gardens was even higher, as it was recorded to be 404. The national average during 2014-16 was 130.
- Also, almost 50% of the pregnant women aged between 15 and 49 years in the state were recorded to be anaemic, which is a leading contributor to maternal mortality. The bulk of the workforce in Assam's tea gardens is women.

Task Force For Closing Skills Gap In India

- *Context:* The government has launched a task force for closing the skills gap in India, in collaboration with the World Economic Forum.
- The Task Force is the second country-led public-private collaboration of the World Economic Forum's Closing the Skills Gap Project after South Africa.

About Closing the skills gap task force:
- The task force will bring together leaders from business, government, civil society and the education and training sectors to accelerate the future-proofing of education and training systems in the country.
- The goal of the Task Force is to develop an action plan to address skills gaps in India and make the Indian workforce ready for jobs of future.

Significance:
- With more than half of our population in the working age, skills development will be critical to sustaining inclusive growth and development in India.'
- The "Closing the Skills Gap" task force will be a significant step to accelerate the impact on skills development already achieved by bringing together relevant stakeholders to act collectively.

Closing the Skills Gap Project by WEF:
- The Closing the Skills Gap Project aims to create global and national platforms to address current skills gaps and to reshape education and training for the future. It works at three levels:
  1. *Country implementation deep-dives:* At the national level, the Closing the Skills Gap Task Forces provides a platform for multi-stakeholder collaboration to close the skills gap and prepare for the future of work. Each Closing the Skills Gap Task Force brings together leaders from business, government, civil society, and education and training sectors to accelerate reskilling and upskilling efforts in the current workforce and the future-proofing of national education and training systems.
  2. *Global and regional knowledge exchange:* At the global level, an informal Global Alliance for Closing the Skills Gap provides an exclusive global platform for leaders and experts from business, government, civil society, and the education and training sectors to build consensus, share ideas, and identify preferred models and best practices.
  3. *Global business commitments:* With skilling, reskilling and upskilling becoming a clear "no-regret" move for addressing the flux in labour markets, there is a rapid movement of multinational businesses towards such efforts for their employees, communities and wider audience. Managed strategically, this can be impactful and a win-win for companies and workers alike. As a first step, the Forum is consolidating global business commitments with the goal to reach 10 million people by January 2020.

National Council For Vocational Education And Training (NCVET)

- *Context:* The Union Cabinet has approved the merger of the existing regulatory institutions in the skills space – National Council for Vocational Training (NCVT) and the National Skill Development Agency (NSDA) into the National Council for Vocational Education and Training (NCVET).

Functions:

- NCVET will regulate the functioning of entities engaged in vocational education and training, both long-term and short-term and establish minimum standards for the functioning of such entities. The primary functions of NCVET will include:
  o Recognition and regulation of awarding bodies, assessment bodies and skill related information providers.
  o Approval of qualifications developed by awarding bodies and Sector Skill Councils (SSCs).
  o Indirect regulation of vocational training institutes through awarding bodies and assessment agencies.
  o Research and information dissemination.
  o Grievance redressal.

Composition:

- The Council would be headed by a Chairperson and will have Executive and Non-Executive Members.

Benefits:

- This institutional reform will lead to *improvement in quality and market relevance* of skill development programs lending credibility to vocational education and training

encouraging greater private investment and employer participation in the skills space.

- This in turn will help *achieve the twin objectives of enhancing aspirational value of vocational education and of increasing skilled manpower* furthering the Prime Minister's agenda of making India the skill capital of the world.

- Being a regulator of India's skill ecosystem, NCVET will have *a positive impact on each individual who is a part of vocational education and training in the country*. The idea of skill-based education will be seen in a more inspirational manner which would further encourage students to apply for skill-based educational courses.

- This is also expected to *facilitate the ease of doing business* by providing a steady supply of skilled workforce to the industry and services.

Need:

- A need was felt for an overarching regulatory authority which could tend to all aspects of short-term and long-term skill-based training. In view of this, NCVET is envisaged as an institution which will perform the regulatory functions so far vested in NCVT and NSDA.

- Regulatory functions currently being carried out by the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) through the Sector Skill Councils (SSCs) will also be housed in the NCVET.

'MAIN NAHIN HUM' PORTAL

- *Context:* The government has launched 'Main Nahin Hum' portal for IT professionals.

About 'Main Nahin Hum' portal and its significance:
- The portal, which works on the theme 'Self4Society', will enable IT professionals and organisations to bring together their efforts towards social causes on one platform. The platform has been developed by MyGov.
- The portal will also help the employees in identifying the volunteering opportunities for social causes and they can also collaborate with other employees on such projects.
- In doing so, the portal is expected to help catalyse greater collaboration towards the service of the weaker sections of society, especially by leveraging the benefits of technology.
- It is also expected to generate wider participation of interested people who are motivated to work for the benefit of society.

Way ahead:
- Since India has already become the third largest in terms of the start-up, social start-ups should become an intrinsic part of the ecosystem.
- Some of areas which require participation are saving natural resources such as water, agriculture, climate change etc.

Impress Scheme

- *Context:* Union HRD Ministry has launched the web portal of IMPRESS scheme with an aim to build a research ecosystem in educational institutions.

IMPRESS Scheme:
- The *objective* of Impactful Policy Research in Social Sciences (IMPRESS) is to identify and fund research proposals in social sciences with maximum impact on the governance and society.
  - It will provide an opportunity for social science researchers in any institution in the country which includes all universities (central and state) and also a few private institutions meeting the requirement.
  - The scheme will focus on broad thematic areas such as state and democracy, urban transformation; media, culture and society; employment, skills and rural transformation; governance; innovation and public policy; macro-trade and economic policy and social media and technology.
  - Under IMPRESS, 1,500 research projects will be awarded for two years to support social science research in the higher educational institutions.
  - *The Indian Council of Social Science and Research (ICSSR) will be the project implementing agency*.
  - The scheme will be implemented till March, 2021.

Government E-Payments Adoption Ranking (GEAR)

- *Context:* The 2018 **Government E-Payments Adoption Ranking (GEAR) study** has been released by *VISA*, a global leader in payments technology. This is the third edition of the study after those in 2007 and 2011.
- The 2018 GEAR, an Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) global Index and benchmarking study commissioned by Visa, ranks governments by quantifying their e-payment capabilities based on various indicators.
- The ranking is based on seven parameters viz. Government-to-Citizen (G2C), Citizen-to-Government (C2G), Business-to-Government (B2G), Government-to-Business (G2B) transactions, infrastructure, socio-economic and policy environment.

Performance of India across various categories:

In the latest study, India is ranked 28th among 73 countries. This is up from 36th rank in 2011.

- *B2C category:* India leads the Business to Government category, along with Australia, Singapore and South Korea. The category refers to the ease with which businesses can calculate and make their tax payments, register and renew their registrations online and digitally calculate their pension fund contributions, thereby making those payments on a periodic basis.
- *G2B category:* At the same time, by simplifying refund and loan application processes, wherein businesses can track status digitally, coupled with dedicated digital portals to submit proposals for government procurement services, India leads the Government to Business category as well.
- The *C2G category* evaluates the extent to which citizens can complete various transactions electronically by assessing six indicators, including online one-stop shops, income tax payments, and obtaining an ID card. India ranks third in this category, along with four other countries, while France and the UAE top the list.
- The *G2C category* captures the extent to which various government transfers like tax refunds, pension and welfare benefits and unemployment benefits can be accessed electronically. In India, while everything pertaining to tax filing and pension and welfare benefits has smoothly migrated to digital, the unemployment benefits system continues to be driven by paper processes, as a result of which the country still lags behind, in 25th place.
- The *infrastructure and socio-economic categories* examine the supportive infrastructure for e-payments and their acceptance in society at large. With respect to infrastructure, while India has witnessed an increase in Internet penetration over recent years, substantial pockets of communities continue to lack reliable access, leaving country ranked 58th.
- In *the socio-economic category*, India is ranked 60th out of 73 countries, highlighting an urgent need to focus efforts on enhancing educational levels, as well as improving citizens' and businesses' engagement with Internet-enabled services.
- The *policy category* assesses the policy environment and examines how it spurs e-payments adoption.

Though India ranks at a low 40th owing to a few inhibiting policy decisions, the government's efforts to strengthen Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) with an objective to foster innovation and protect country's traditional knowledge could motivate innovation and act as a catalyst businesses to grow. Incentives to consumers and merchants to adopt digital payments are also restricted to selected e-payment methods, potentially limiting the effectiveness of these measures.

DIGI YATRA

- *Context:* Union Ministry of Civil Aviation has released policy on biometric based digital processing of passengers at airports called Digi Yatra. With this initiative, ticket booking, airport entry and boarding pass security check-in will be made digital.

Digi Yatra:
- The initiative seeks to promote paperless and hassle-free air travel. It will be operational by end of February, 2019 at Bengaluru and Hyderabad airports. In later phase, Airports Authority of India (AAI) will roll out this initiative at Kolkata, Varanasi, Pune and Vijayawada airports by April 2019.
- Under it, there will be one-time verification at departure airport while travelling for first time using ID. After successful verification, facial recognition biometric will be captured and stored in Digi Yatra ID.
- For this system, passengers will be registered through centralized system and will be given Digi Travel ID. This ID will include details such as names

of passengers, their e-mail id, mobile number and any other identity card in case of non-basis. Travelers can also use this ID when booking tickets.

Significance:
This initiative will bring benefits to passengers and all stakeholders involved in process including airport operator who will be having travel information in advance for better resource planning and real-time data of passengers within terminal. This will enable the operator to take proactive action to avoid congestion.

Youth Road Safety Learners Licence Programme

- *Context:* The government has launched the Youth Road Safety Learners Licence programme.

About the youth road safety learners licence programme:
- It is a PPP initiative to be run in collaboration with Diageo India and the Institute of Road Traffic Education (IRTE).
- It attempts to bring a formal and structured training program for the young, first-time drivers as they apply for learner's license.
- It covers varied aspects of responsible driving including defensive driving, ill effects of driving under the influence of alcohol, speeding and wearing of helmets spread over two days.
- In the first year, the programme will cover 20 universities with a total of 400 programmes across the country.

Significance:
- The programme is a part of the Union Government's efforts to emphasise on the importance of road safety, as recent times have seen an alarming rise in road fatalities especially among the youth.
- The programme will help the government achieve its target of reducing road accidents by 50 percent by 2020. It will help improve road safety awareness amongst the young adults by inculcating behavioural change and creating awareness about responsible driving habits.

Background:
- India accounts for 12.5 per cent (over 1.45 lakh fatalities a year) of global road accidents, with one road accident occurring every four minutes. Alarmingly, 72 per cent victims involved in such road mishaps are between the age groups of 15-44 years with speeding, reckless and drunk driving being the top reason accounting for 1.5 per cent of road traffic accidents and 4.6 per cent of fatalities.
- Some of the major factors resulting in high road accidents include rash driving, drunken driving and the lack of adequate safety measures like not wearing helmets.

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Mou Amongst Brics Nations Regarding Cooperation In The Social And Labour Sphere

- *Context:* The Union Cabinet has given its ex-post facto approval for the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) among Brazil, Russian Federation, India, China, South Africa, regarding Cooperation in the Social and Labour Sphere. The MoU was signed on 3rd August, 2018 during BRICS Labour and Employment Ministers (LEM) Meeting.

As per the MoU:

- The parties including India have agreed to cooperate and hold mutual events in the prominent areas viz. labour legislation and enforcement, protection of workers' rights with focus on vulnerable groups, Employment and labour market policies, Professional education, skills and training and Social protection.
- The member countries may utilize the BRICS Network of Labour Research Institutes and BRICS Social Security Cooperation Framework for cooperation on Social Security and other labour issues.
- However, the Memorandum is not an International Treaty and does not create rights and obligations for the parties governed by international law.

Significance and major Impacts:

- The MoU provides a mechanism for cooperation, collaboration and maximum synergy amongst BRICS member countries with the common objective of inclusive growth and shared prosperity in the new industrial revolution.
- This would facilitate member countries to share knowledge and also implement joint programmes on

matter of Labour and Employment, Social Security and Social dialogue.

- This would also ensure networking of international Training Centre of International Labour Organisation (ILO) with the BRICS Network of Labour Institutes which includes V.V. Giri National Labour Institute of India. This network would specifically focus on the theme of youth employment and research on new forms of employment. This network will also explore new learning technologies, including virtual network to deepen cooperation, exchange of information and capacity building.
- The BRICS Social Security cooperation framework will deepen social security cooperation among BRICS nations and would facilitate cooperation for improvement of social security systems and social security agreements among member countries.

What is BRICS?

- BRICS is an acronym for the grouping of the world's leading emerging economies, namely Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.
- *Summits:* The BRICS Leaders' Summit is convened annually with discussions representing spheres of political and socio-economic coordination, in which member countries have identified several business opportunities, economic complementarities and areas of cooperation.
- *Chairship:* The Chairship of the forum is rotated annually among the members, in accordance with the acronym B-R-I-C-S. Over and above the summit, BRICS cooperation in the

past decade has expanded to include an annual programme of over 100 sectoral meetings. Cooperation among members is predicated on three levels or "tracks" of interaction, namely:

Track I: Formal diplomatic engagement between the national governments.

Track II: Engagement through government-affiliated institutions, e.g. state-owned enterprises and business councils.

Track III: Civil society and "people-to-people" engagement.

Facts for Prelims:
- The First BRIC Summit was held in June 2009 in Yekaterinburg, Russia.
- The Ninth BRICS Summit was held in Xiamen, China under the theme "BRICS: Stronger Partnership for a Brighter Future". The leaders built on achievements already made with a share vision for future development of BRICS, discussed international and regional issues of common concern and adopted the Xiamen Declaration.

Currency Swap Agreement Between India And Japan

- *Context:* Japan and India have entered into a $75-billion currency swap arrangement that will bolster the country's firepower as it battles a steep drop in the rupee's value. An agreement to this effect was signed during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ongoing visit to Japan.

Key facts:

- The Agreement shall aid in bringing greater stability to foreign exchange & capital markets in India. The facility will serve as a second line of defence for the rupee after the $393.5 billion of foreign exchange reserves that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has at its disposal.
- Under the arrangement, India can acquire dollars from Japan in exchange for rupees. Conversely, Japan can also seek dollars from India in exchange for yen.
- The arrangement will be used only when required, and will help meet short-term liquidity mismatches.

Significance of the agreement:

- The currency swap agreement is an important measure in improving the confidence in the Indian market and it would not only enable the agreed amount of capital being available to India, but it will also bring down the cost of capital for Indian entities while accessing the foreign capital market.
- The swap arrangement should aid in bringing greater stability to foreign exchange and capital markets in India. With this arrangement in place, prospects of India would further improve in tapping foreign capital for country's developmental needs. This facility will enable the agreed amount of foreign capital being available to India for use as and when the need arises.

What is this Currency Swap Arrangement (CSA)?

- This is an arrangement, between two friendly countries, which have regular, substantial or increasing trade, to basically involve in trading in their own local currencies, where both pay for import and export trade, at the pre-determined rates of exchange, without bringing in third country currency like the US Dollar.
- In such arrangements no third country currency is involved, thereby eliminating the need to worry about exchange variations.

Deal Replacing NAFTA Signed

- *Context:* Canada has agreed to sign a trade deal with the United States and Mexico, revamping the North American Free Trade Agreement after almost a year of negotiations. The new deal has been named the *United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA)*.
- The trilateral pact is expected to be signed by the three North American countries before the end of November, after which it would be submitted to Congress.

About United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA):
It's basically NAFTA 2.0, with major changes on cars and new policies on labor and environmental standards, intellectual property protections, and some digital trade provisions. The changes include:

- *Country of origin rules:* Automobiles must have 75% of their components manufactured in Mexico, the US, or Canada to qualify for zero tariffs (up from 62.5 percent under NAFTA).
- *Labor provisions:* 40 to 45 percent of automobile parts have to be made by workers who earn at least $16 an hour by 2023. Mexico has also agreed to pass laws giving workers the right to union representation, extend labor protections to migrant workers, and protect women from discrimination. The countries can also sanction one another for labor violations.
- *US farmers get more access to the Canadian dairy market:* The US got Canada to open up its dairy market to US farmers, which was a big issue for Trump.
- *Intellectual property and digital trade:* The deal extends the terms of copyright to 70 years beyond the life of the author (up from 50). It also extends the period that a pharmaceutical drug can be protected from generic competition.
- *It also includes new provisions to deal with the digital economy*, including prohibiting duties on things like music and e-books, and protections for internet companies so they're not liable for content their users produce.
- *Sunset clause:* The agreement puts in a 16-year "sunset" clause — meaning the terms of the agreement expire, or "sunset," after a set period of time. The deal is also subject to a review every six years, at which point the US, Mexico, and Canada can decide to extend USMCA.

What is NAFTA?

- NAFTA is the initialism for the North American Free Trade Agreement, an agreement signed by Canada, Mexico, and the United States that reduced or eliminated trade barriers in North America. (Since the U.S. and Canada already had a free trade agreement (signed in 1988), NAFTA merely brought Mexico into the trade bloc.)
- Negotiations for the trade agreement began in 1990 under the administration of George H.W. Bush and were finalized under Bill Clinton's presidency in 1993. The agreement went into effect on January 1, 1994.

What was the purpose of NAFTA?

- In 1993 the European Union (EU) created a "single market"—one territory without any internal borders or other regulatory obstacles to the free movement of goods and services. This allowed every country and business in the EU to have access to more than 500 million consumers.

- NAFTA, which was approved that same year, was designed to have a similar effect, providing a way to allow the exchange of goods and services to flow more freely across national borders without the artificial restrictions.
- NAFTA provided for progressive elimination of all tariffs on any goods qualifying as North American. The deal also sought to protect intellectual property, establish dispute-resolution mechanisms, and, through corollary agreements, implement labor and environmental safeguards.

Why is NAFTA controversial?

- NAFTA was controversial when first proposed, mostly because it was the first [free trade agreement] involving two wealthy, developed countries and a developing country. Some people felt that allowing free trade with a developing country provides an incentive for U.S-based business to move their operations to that country.
- Since its implementation NAFTA has remained a prime target of trade protectionists (those who advocate taking measures such as taxing imports to "protect" domestic industries from foreign competition).

IORA- DELHI DECLARATION

- *Context:* 21 countries in the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) recently adopted the Delhi Declaration on Renewable Energy in the Indian Ocean Region. The declaration was the outcome of the 2nd IORA Renewable Energy Ministerial Meeting.

The Delhi declaration on Renewable Energy in the Indian Ocean Region:

- It calls for collaboration among IORA member states in meeting the growing demand for renewable energy in the Indian Ocean littorals, development of a common renewable energy agenda for the Indian Ocean region and promote regional capacity building.
- The declaration also calls for promotion of technology development and transfer, strengthening of public private partnerships in renewable energy and collaboration among IORA member states and the member nations of the International Solar Alliance (ISA).
- IORA member countries resolved to collaborate with the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA). As per the declaration adopted, IORA member nations will also collaborate with the ISA member nations to exchange knowledge and share views and potential interests in the renewable energy sector.
- Additionally, IORA member nations and IRENA will undertake the expansion of the Global Renewable Energy Atlas, the world's largest-ever joint renewable resource data project, coordinated by IRENA, thereby creating the Indian Ocean region's first and most comprehensive map and database which can then be used to tap the sizable renewable energy potential of the region.

About IORA:

- The Indian Ocean Rim Association was set up with the objective of strengthening regional cooperation and sustainable development within the Indian Ocean Region with 21 Member States and 7 Dialogue Partners.
- The IORA is a regional forum, tripartite in nature, bringing together representatives of Government, Business and Academia, for promoting co-operation and closer interaction among them.
- It is based on the principles of Open Regionalism for strengthening Economic Cooperation particularly on Trade Facilitation and Investment, Promotion as well as Social Development of the region.
- India, Australia, Iran IR, Indonesia Thailand, Malaysia, South Africa, Mozambique, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Bangladesh, Singapore, Mauritius, Madagascar, UAE, Yemen, Seychelles, Somalia, Comoros and Oman are members of IORA.

Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)

- *Context:* India and Russia have concluded the contract for five S-400 'Triumf' missile systems, one of the biggest defence deals in recent times.
- However, the U.S. has warned the deal would invoke sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) law.

What is CAATSA?

- CAATSA is a US federal law that imposed sanctions on Iran, North Korea and Russia. It includes sanctions against countries that engage in significant transactions with Russia's defence and intelligence sectors.
- However, any imposition of sanctions on India, which is now a major defence partner, could be disastrous for the bilateral relationship.

What is S-400?

- It is an air defence missile system that can take down enemies' aircraft in the sky from the surface itself.
- The S-400 is known as Russia's most advanced long-range surface-to-air missile defence system, capable of destroying destroying hostile strategic bombers, jets, missiles and drones at a range of 380-km.
- The S-400 is an upgraded version of the S-300 systems. The missile system, manufactured by Almaz-Antey, has been in service in Russia since 2007.

Why does India want S-400?

S-400 would be like a "booster shot" in the Indian Air Force's (IAF) arm. India needs to be well-equipped against neighboring threats. Pakistan has over 20 fighter squadrons, with upgraded F-16s, and inducting J-17 from China in large numbers. China has 1,700 fighters, including 800 4-Gen fighters.

Currency Monitoring List

- *Context:* In its latest report, the US has said that it could remove India from its currency monitoring list of major trading partners citing certain developments and steps taken by New Delhi, which address some of its major concerns.

Background:

- India was for the first time, in April, placed by the US in its currency monitoring list of countries with potentially questionable foreign exchange policies along with five other countries — China, Germany, Japan, South Korea and Switzerland.

Recent developments:

- India's circumstances have shifted markedly, as the central bank's net sales of foreign exchange over the first six months of 2018 led net purchases over the four quarters through June 2018 to fall to $4 billion, or 0.2% of GDP.

- This represented a notable change from 2017, when purchases over the first three quarters of the year pushed net purchases of foreign exchange above 2% of GDP. Recent sales came amid a turnaround in foreign portfolio inflows, as foreign investors pulled portfolio capital out of India (and many other emerging markets) over the first half of the year.

- The rupee depreciated by around 7% against the dollar and by more than 4% on a real effective basis in the first half of 2018. India has a significant bilateral goods trade surplus with the US, totalling $23 billion over the four quarters through June 2018, but India's current account is in deficit at 1.9% of GDP.

On what basis is a country named a 'currency manipulator'?

The three pre-conditions for being named currency manipulator are: a trade surplus of over $20 billion with the US, a current account deficit surplus of 3% of the GDP, and persistent foreign exchange purchases of 2% plus of the GDP over 12 months.

The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty

- *Context:* U.S. President Donald Trump has announced that he would "terminate" the INF Treaty in response to a long-running dispute over Russian noncompliance with the treaty.

What's the issue?

- The United States first alleged in its July 2014 Compliance Report that Russia is in violation of its INF Treaty obligations "not to possess, produce, or flight-test" a ground-launched cruise missile having a range of 500 to 5,500 kilometers or "to possess or produce launchers of such missiles."
- Subsequent State Department assessments in 2015, 2016, and 2017 repeated these allegations. Russia denies that it is in violation of the agreement. On December 8, 2017, the Trump administration released a strategy to counter alleged Russian violations of the Treaty.

About the Intermediate- Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty:

- The 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty required the United States and the Soviet Union to eliminate and permanently forswear all of their nuclear and conventional ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges of 500 to 5,500 kilometers.
  - The treaty marked the first time the superpowers had agreed to reduce their nuclear arsenals, eliminate an entire category of nuclear weapons, and utilize extensive on-site inspections for verification. As a result of the INF Treaty, the United States and the Soviet Union destroyed a total of 2,692 short-, medium-, and intermediate-range missiles by the treaty's implementation deadline of June 1, 1991.
  - Despite its name, the INF Treaty covers all types of ground-launched cruise and ballistic missiles — whether their payload is conventional or nuclear. Moscow and Washington are prohibited from deploying these missiles anywhere in the world, not just in Europe. However, the treaty applies only to ground-launched systems. Both sides are free to deploy air- and sea-launched missiles within the 500-to-5,500- kilometer range.

What are the military implications of withdrawal?

- It is unclear what INF-prohibited systems the United States could deploy to Europe or Asia in the near term. The U.S. military has not developed any land-based missiles within the prohibited ranges for decades and has only just started funding a new ground-launched cruise missile to match the 9M729.
  - Moscow is in a very different position and could rapidly expand deployment. The number of operational 9M729 missiles has been quite limited, but released from its official obligations under the treaty, Moscow could deploy more units rapidly.
  - Russia could also effectively reclassify the RS-26 Rubezh, an experimental system that has been tested just above the INF Treaty's 5,500-kilometer limit. To avoid violating the INF, Russian officials previously described the RS-26 as an intercontinental ballistic missile. However, it could form the basis for a missile

of a slightly shorter range if Moscow wished to boost its INF forces — without counting it under the U.S.- Russian New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or New START, governing longer-range systems.

What are the diplomatic implications of withdrawal?

- Withdrawal is likely to be controversial with U.S. allies in NATO, further splitting the alliance at a difficult time for transatlantic relations. Many Western European NATO states favor retaining the INF, in conjunction with previous U.S. policy designed to push Moscow back into compliance. This raises concerns that divisions within NATO may worsen when the United States officially withdraws from the INF.

- Withdrawal will probably not lead to a new INF deal. Given its heavy investment in intermediate-range systems, China will not take up Trump's offer of talks with the United States and Russia. Moscow seems to be in no mood for negotiations.

- Trump's move is also likely to undermine the 2010 New START treaty governing U.S. and Russian long-range nuclear systems. The INF Treaty's demise will undercut New START by reopening questions on the relationship between intermediate and strategic systems that have been resolved for 30 years by the elimination of ground-based, intermediate-range missiles.

Currency Manipulator Tag

What is currency manipulation and who determines it?

- The US Department of the Treasury publishes a semi-annual report in which the developments in global economic and exchange rate policies are reviewed.
- If a US trade partner meets three assessment criteria, the US labels it a currency manipulator. The US then tries to solve it via bilateral talks.

Implications:

- The October report of the Treasury says that it continues to press major trading partners that have maintained large, persistent external surpluses to support stronger and more balanced global growth by facilitating domestic demand growth as the primary engine for economic expansion.

How are countries identified for the currency manipulation list?

- The US Treasury has established thresholds for the three criteria.
- First, a significant bilateral trade surplus with the US is one that is at least $20 billion; second, a material current account surplus is one that is at least 3% of GDP; and third, persistent, one-sided intervention reflected in repeated net purchases of foreign currency and total at least 2% of an economy's GDP over a year.
- The Treasury's goal is to focus attention on those nations whose bilateral trade is most significant to the US economy and whose policies are the most material for the global economy.

How are currencies on the watch list faring in 2018?

- Such currencies have been falling

against the dollar. Japan's yen fell 0.13%, South Korea's won slipped 5.13%, Switzerland's Swiss Franc fell 2.3% and China's yuan dropped 6.3%.

Does India feature on the currency manipulation list?

- The US Treasury, in its report, said no major trading partner met the criteria to be designated as manipulating its currency. It has kept India, China, Japan, South Korea, Germany and Switzerland on the monitoring list.
- It said that India's circumstances have shifted markedly, as the central bank's net sales of forex over the first six months of 2018 led net purchases over the four quarters through June 2018 to fall to $4 billion, or 0.2% of GDP. The rupee has depreciated by 13.05% this fiscal.

Do policymakers in India need to worry?

- Economists say India doesn't need to worry as it only meets one of the three criteria. If this remains the case at the time of its next report, Treasury would remove India from the Monitoring List.
- India being on the watch list was not important. If we were to be labelled as manipulators, there would have been pressure on India to reduce tariffs.

Birthright Citizenship In US

- *Context:* President Trump recently said he was preparing an executive order that would nullify the long-accepted constitutional guarantee of birthright citizenship in the United States.
- To accomplish the idea, Mr. Trump would have to find a way around the 14th Amendment to the Constitution.

What is the 14th Amendment?

- The 14th Amendment, which grants citizenship to anyone born on U.S. soil, was ratified in 1868 after the Civil War so that recently-freed slaves could become citizens.
- The amendment reads, "*all person born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside.*"

What is birthright citizenship?

- Birthright citizenship, or jus soli, a legal term that means "right of the soil," is the right guaranteed by the 14th Amendment, and upheld by the Supreme Court, that says anyone born on U.S soil is automatically a citizen.

What's the main contention now?

- Some conservatives have long made the argument that the 14th Amendment was meant to apply only to citizens and legal permanent residents, not immigrants who are present in the country without authorization.
- They say, birthright citizenship was based on a misreading of the amendment, and of an 1898 Supreme Court ruling that they argue pertained only to the children of legal residents.

Background:

- The U.S. is one of more than 30 other countries that also grant citizenship to children born within their borders.
- Citizenship policies vary around the world, somewhat based on geography. Countries in Europe or Asia don't have similar policies, but countries further west, including Canada and most South American nations, do.

Implications:

Aside from being unconstitutional, such an executive order would exacerbate racial tensions, exploit fears and drive further polarization across the country at a moment that calls for the promotion of unity and inclusion.

International Conference On Status And Protection Of Coral Reefs (STAPCOR – 2018)

- *Context:* The International Conference on Status and Protection of Coral Reefs (STAPCOR – 2018) is being held at *Bangaram coral Island of Territory of Lakshadweep*.
- *Theme:* "Reef for Life"
- *Organizers:* It was jointly organized by Department of Environment and Forest, Union Territory of Lakshadweep Administration with the technical support of Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) and in association with Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Environmental Information System (ENVIS) in consonance with declaration of year 2018 as 3rd decadal International year of Reefs.

What is STAPCOR?

- The effect of climate change and global warming along with El-Nino on the corals has lead to heavy bleaching internationally during the year 1998.
- This led to the foundation of STAPCOR with a decision to have a international conference in every 10 years to review the status and progress of coral reefs all over the world.

The goals of the 3rd IYOR – 2018 are to:

- Strengthen awareness about ecological, economic, social and cultural value of coral reefs and associated ecosystems.
- Improve understanding of the critical threats to reefs and generate both practical and innovative solutions to reduce these threats.
- Generate urgent action to develop and implement effective management strategies for conservation and sustainable use of these ecosystems.

Background:

- The first IYOR was designated in 1997 in response to the increasing threats on coral reefs and associated ecosystems.
- The hope was to increase awareness of the value of and threats to coral reefs, and to promote conservation, research and management efforts on a global scale.

What are Corals?

- Corals are invertebrates belonging to a large group of colourful and fascinating animals called Cnidarians. Other animals in this group include jellyfish and sea anemones.
- Each individual coral animal is called a polyp, and most live in groups of hundreds to thousands of genetically identical polyps that form a 'colony'.
- The colony is created by a process called budding, where the original polyp literally grows copies of itself.

Hard and Soft Corals:

- Corals are generally classified as either "hard" or "soft". There are around 800 known species of hard coral, also known as 'reef building' or scleractinian corals. Soft corals, or octocorals, which include seas fans, sea feathers and sea whips, don't have the rock-like calcareous skeleton, instead they grow wood-like cores for support and fleshy rinds for protection.
- Soft corals also live in colonies, that often resemble brightly coloured plants or trees, and are easy to tell apart from hard corals as their polyps have tentacles that occur in multiples of 8, and have a distinctive feathery appearance. Soft corals are found in oceans from the equator to the north and south poles, generally in caves or on ledges. Here, they hang down in order to capture food floating by in the currents.

What are coral reefs?

- Coral reefs have evolved on earth over the past 200 to 300 million years, and have developed a unique and highly evolved form of symbiosis. Coral polyps have developed this relationship with tiny single-celled algae known as zooxanthellae. Inside the tissues of each coral polyp live these zooxanthellae, sharing space and nutrients.

- This symbiosis between plant and animal also contributes to the brilliant colors of coral that can be seen while diving on a reef. It is the importance of light that drives corals to compete for space on the sea floor, and so constantly pushes the limits of their physiological tolerances in a competitive environment among so many different species. However, it also makes corals highly susceptible to environmental stress.

IMF QUOTAS

- *Context:* India has called for quota reforms so that share of emerging nations increases in line with their growing economic position.
- Quota shares of Emerging Market & Developing Countries need increase in line with its growing relative economic position in the world.

What are IMF Quotas?

- The IMF is a quota-based institution. Quotas are the building blocks of the IMF's financial and governance structure. An individual member country's quota broadly reflects its relative position in the world economy.
- Quotas are denominated in Special Drawing Rights (SDRs), the IMF's unit of account.

Multiple roles of quotas:

- *Resource Contributions:* Quotas determine the maximum amount of financial resources a member is obliged to provide to the IMF.
- *Voting Power:* Quotas are a key determinant of the voting power in IMF decisions. Votes comprise one vote per SDR100,000 of quota plus basic votes (same for all members).
- *Access to Financing:* The maximum amount of financing a member can obtain from the IMF under normal access is based on its quota.
- *SDR Allocations:* Quotas determine a member's share in a general allocation of SDRs.

Quota reviews:

- The IMF's Board of Governors conducts general quota reviews at regular intervals (no more than five years). Any changes in quotas must be approved by an 85% majority of the total voting power, and a member's own quota cannot be changed without its consent.
- Two main issues addressed in a general quota review are the size of an overall quota increase and the distribution of the increase among the members.

About IMF:

- The IMF, along with the World Bank, was conceived in 1944 at a conference in Bretton Woods, in the US state of New Hampshire.
- It aims to preserve economic stability and to tackle – or ideally prevent – financial crises. Over time, its focus has switched to the developing world.
- The IMF is funded by a charge – known as a "quota" – paid by member nations – based on a country's wealth.
- The IMF also acts as a lender of last resort, disbursing its foreign exchange reserves for short periods to any member in difficulties.

International Court Of Arbitration

- *Context:* The **NITI Aayog** and **ICC International Court of Arbitration** had recently organised a Workshop on Best Practices in International Arbitration in New Delhi.
- The workshop is part of on-going efforts to institutionalize and streamline dispute resolution to make India a hub for doing business. It encourages and highlights the need for understanding and implementing arbitration across the spectrum of commercial contracts.

Efforts by Government of India in this regard- Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Bill, 2018:
- The Lok Sabha has passed the Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Bill, 2018. It will amend the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996.
- The Act contains provisions to deal with domestic and international arbitration, and defines the law for conducting conciliation proceedings.

What is Arbitration?
- Arbitration is a settlement of dispute between two parties to a contract by a neutral third party i.e. the arbitrator without resorting to court action. The process can be tailored to suit parties' particular needs.
- Arbitrators can be chosen for their expertise. It is confidential and can be speedier and cheaper than court. There are limited grounds of appeal. Arbitral awards are binding and enforceable through courts.

Way ahead:
- Moving towards a New India in 2022, ensuring legal reform is a key and critical priority. Complementing 'Make in India' vision with 'Resolve in India',

strong alternate dispute resolution mechanisms are important levers in encouraging the Ease of Doing Business and Ease of Living in India.

Facts for Prelims:
- *The International Court of Arbitration* is a branch of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and one of the world's leading institutions for providing international arbitration services. The International Court of Arbitration is known for resolving international commercial and business disputes, administering more than half of all arbitration disputes worldwide. The ICC seat is located in Paris.
- *The International Chamber of Commerce* is an international business organization with hundreds of thousands of member companies in over 130 countries spanning virtually every sector of private enterprise.

"FUTURE OF WORK IN INDIA" Survey By WEF

Context: "Future of Work in India" survey report has been released by the World Economic Forum (WEF).

- The "Future of Work in India" survey of of 770 companies conducted by the WEF (World Economic Forum) included various sectors such as textiles, banking & financial services, transport & logistics, and retail.

Highlights and findings of the report:

- *Major gender gap in Indian corporates:* Four out of five retail firms hire less than 10% women. Companies in India experiencing the highest growth prefer hiring men and technology-led job growth benefits men more than women. Notably, while one in three companies preferred hiring men, only one in 10 companies said they wanted to hire more women, accentuating the gender gap rampant in the country.

- *Statistics:* The report found that just 2.4% of these have half or more female employees, and as many as 71% have fewer than 10%. Out of this 71%, 30% companies have no female employees, and another 32% have less than 5%. The sector-wise breakup showed that 79% companies in retail, and 77% in transport & logistics, have less than 10% female employees, while banking & finance companies have 61% female participation and textiles 64%.

- *Global comparison:* India's female workforce participation is mere 27% and stands 23% points lower than global average. Jobs in India are experiencing highest growth and companies are hiring women at only 26%. Women in India are entering workforce at a slower rate than current female workforce participation.

- More than 33% of the total companies said that they prefer to hire men, as compared to just over one-tenth that said that they are looking to hire more women going forward. In the last five years, the surveyed companies stated that they hired just 26% female workers in the job roles that saw the most growth, which is less than India's already low female labour force participation of 27%.

About WEF:

The World Economic Forum is the International Organization for Public-Private Cooperation.

- The Forum engages the foremost political, business and other leaders of society to shape global, regional and industry agendas.

- It was established in 1971 as a not-for-profit foundation and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland. It is independent, impartial and not tied to any special interests. The Forum strives in all its efforts to demonstrate entrepreneurship in the global public interest while upholding the highest standards of governance. Moral and intellectual integrity is at the heart of everything it does.

Comprehensive Convention On International Terrorism (CCIT)

- *Context:* External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj reiterated India's demand for a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) at the UN General Assembly recently.

Background:

As a country affected by terrorism, long before the more powerful countries of the developed world began to take cognisance of the threat it poses to international peace and security, India has always condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations; stressed that tackling such behaviour required a holistic approach and collective action; and recommended that the scope of legal instruments must be expanded to bring the perpetrators of terrorism to justice.

India, therefore, has a vital stake in the formulation of counter-terrorist measures at the international level, including a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT). It is in this context that India had proposed a draft of a CCIT as far back as 1996.

CCIT:

What is it?

- The Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism is a proposed treaty which intends to criminalize all forms of international terrorism and deny terrorists, their financiers and supporters access to funds, arms, and safe havens. It is a draft proposed by India in 1996 that is yet to be adopted by the UNGA.

What does it call for?

- Universal definition of terrorism: no good terrorist or bad terrorist.
- Ban on all groups regardless of country of operation, cut off access to funds and safe havens.
- Prosecution of all groups including cross border groups.
- Amending domestic laws to make cross-border terror an extraditable offence.
- It also addresses, among other things, the issue of Pakistan's alleged support for cross-border terrorism in south Asia.

Concerns expressed by various countries:

- US + allies: concerns over definition of terrorism, including acts by US soldiers in international interventions without UN mandate.
- Latin American countries: concerns over international humanitarian laws being ignored.
- There are also concerns that convention will be used to target Pakistan and restrict rights of self-determination groups in Palestine, Kashmir etc.

GS-III

Schemes Related To Research

Why in News?

Recently, Government launched two schemes to promote higher education research in India.

IMPRESS — Impactful Policy Research in Social Sciences

- **Aim:** To identify and fund research proposals in social sciences with maximum impact on the governance and society.
- **Eligibility:** To provide opportunity for social science researchers in any institution in the country, including all Universities (Central and State), private institutions and ICSSR funded/recognised research institutes.
- **Implemneting Agency:** Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR).

Identified domains under IMPRESS are:

- State and Democracy
- Urban Transformation
- Media, Culture and Society
- Employment Skills and Rural Transformation
- Governance, Innovation and Public Policy
- Growth, Macro Trade and Economic Policy
- Agriculture and Rural Development
- Health and Environment
- Science and Education
- Social Media and Technology
- Politics, Law and Economics

SPARC — Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration

- **Aim:** To boost joint research with global universities from 28 countries and get international expertise to solve major national problems, train Indian students in the best laboratories, deepen academic engagement and improve the international ranking of Indian Institutes.
- **Eligibility:** All Indian institutions ranked in top 100 of National Institutional Ranking Framework will be eligible for this scheme that targets PhD and postdoctoral researchers. Foreign institutions in top 100 to top 200 of global academic rankings from the 28 target countries will be eligible.
- A set of **Nodal Institutions (NI), from India**, for each participating foreign country has been identified to help, handhold and coordinate with willing Participating Indian (PI) Institutions to forge alliance with the Institutions of concerned participating foreign country, for academic and research collaboration.
- **Implementing Agency:** IIT Kharagpur will be the National Coordinating (NC) Institution.

Thrust Areas under SPARC Scheme

- **Fundamental Research:** Those which attempt to provide new knowledge and understanding or address open unsolved problems of international importance.
- **Emergent Areas of Impact:** Those which look at new and emerging areas like Artificial & Machine Learning, Cognitive Science, Human Signal Processing, Digital Humanities, etc, that can potentially bring about a major impact cutting across disciplines and domains.
- **Convergence:** Those which bring together multiple disciplines of basic, engineering, economic, social science and humanities to solve critical problems of today in a holistic integrated manner.
- **Other areas like** Action Oriented Research, Innovation- Driven and other proposal of high potential.

NOBLE PRIZES 2018

NOBEL PRIZE IN PHYSIOLOGY OR MEDICINE

- It has been jointly awarded to **James P. Allison** and **Tasuku Honjo** for their **discovery of 'immune checkpoint therapy,'** a cancer treatment.
- Working: By stimulating the inherent ability of our immune system to attack tumor cells by releasing the brakes on immune cells.
- **James P. Allison** studied a known protein that functions as a **brake on the immune system**. He realized the potential of releasing the brake and thereby unleashing our immune cells to attack tumors. He then developed this concept into a brand new approach for treating patients.
- **Tasuku Honjo** discovered a protein on immune cells and, after careful exploration of its function, eventually revealed that it **also operates as a brake**, but with a different mechanism of action. Therapies based on his discovery proved to be strikingly effective in the fight against cancer.

HOW IMMUNOTHERAPY WORKS

Cancer immunotherapy is the method that helps cells of the immune system identify and attack cancer cells

1 T-Cells
Antigen receptor

T-Cells
T-cells are a type of white blood cell that can identify and kill infected, damaged or cancerous cells. Each T-cell has clawlike receptors on its surface that can recognise and lock onto **antigens,** which are foreign or abnormal protein fragments on the surface of infected or cancerous cells

2 Activated T-cell
Co-stimulator Antigen
Antigen Presenting Cell

Activating A T-cell
The T-cell must be activated before it can find & attack cancer cells. A specialised cell presents the T-cell with an antigen from a cancer cell, along with a **co-stimulator** protein. The T-cell begins to hunt down and kill any cells that are covered with the same antigen

3 Deactivated T-cell
Immune Checkpoint
Cancer Cell

Cancer and Checkpoints
Cancer cells can avoid destruction by taking advantage of a switch on the T-cell called an **immune checkpoint.** The checkpoint can shut down the T-cell and suppress the immune response, allowing the cancer to grow undisturbed

4 Activated T-cell
Checkpoint inhibitors
Cancer Cell

Checkpoint Inhibitors
Drugs known as **checkpoint inhibitors** can physically block the checkpoint, which frees the immune system to attack the cancer. A single T-cell can kill thousand of cancer cells. Four checkpoint inhibitors have been approved by the US Food and Drug Administration

NOBEL PRIZE I N PHYSICS

- Nobel Prize in Physics 2018 was awarded for groundbreaking **inventions in the field of laser physics** with one half to **Arthur Ashkin** for the **optical tweezers** and their application to biological systems, the other half jointly to **Gérard Mourou and Donna Strickland** for their method **of generating high-intensity, ultra-short optical pulses.** Donna Strickland is third women to win Physics Noble.

- **Application:**
    - **Optical Tweezers** are widely used to investigate the machinery of life.
    - **Chirped Pulse Amplification (CPA)** for subsequent high-intensity lasers. Its uses include the millions of corrective eye surgeries that are conducted every year using the sharpest of laser beams.

HOW IT WORKS: Optical tweezers

1

Small transparent spheres are set in motion when they are illuminated with laser light. Their speed is as Ashkin estimated it would be if radiation pressure was pushing them

Sphere — Laser Beam

2

The gradient force pushes the spheres towards the centre of the beam, where the light is most intense. This is because the intensity of the beam decreases outwards

Gradient Force

Centre, highest intensity

3

Askin makes the spheres levitate by pointing the laser beam upwards with radiation pressure counteracting gravity

Gravity

Levitating sphere

Radiation pressure

4

The laser beam is focused with a lens and can capture particles in these optical tweezers

Optical tweezers hold sphere in place

Lens

HOW IT WORKS:
Chirped pulse amplification (CPA)*

1 Short light pulse from a laser

GRATING PAIR, PULSE STRETCHER

Having more intense pulses makes it possible to see events that previously appeared to be instantaneous, like what happens between molecules and atoms in the microworld

2 The pulse is stretched, which reduces its peak power

AMPLIFIER

A laser's extremely high intensity also makes it useful for changing the properties of matter. Thus, electrical insulators can be converted to conductors, while ultra- sharp laser beams can cut or drill holes in various materials extremely precisely -even in living matter, paving the way for laser eye surgery

3 The stretched pulse is amplified

GRATING PAIR, PULSE COMPRESSOR

4 The pulse is compressed and its intensity increases dramatically

*In the CPA technique, instead of amplifying the light pulse directly, it is first stretched in time, reducing its peak power. The pulse is then amplified and next compressed, making the light pulse extremely intense. CPA does all this without destroying the amplifying material
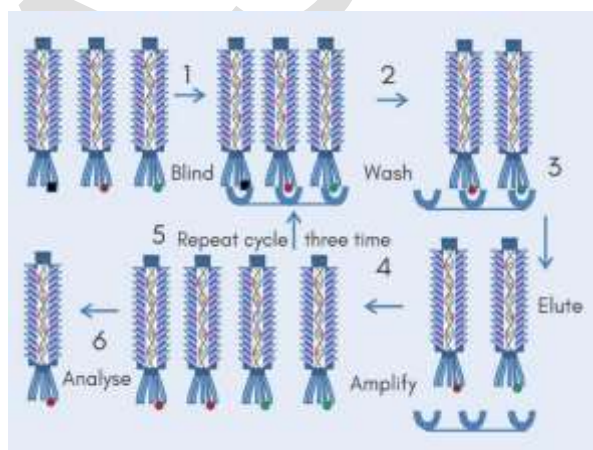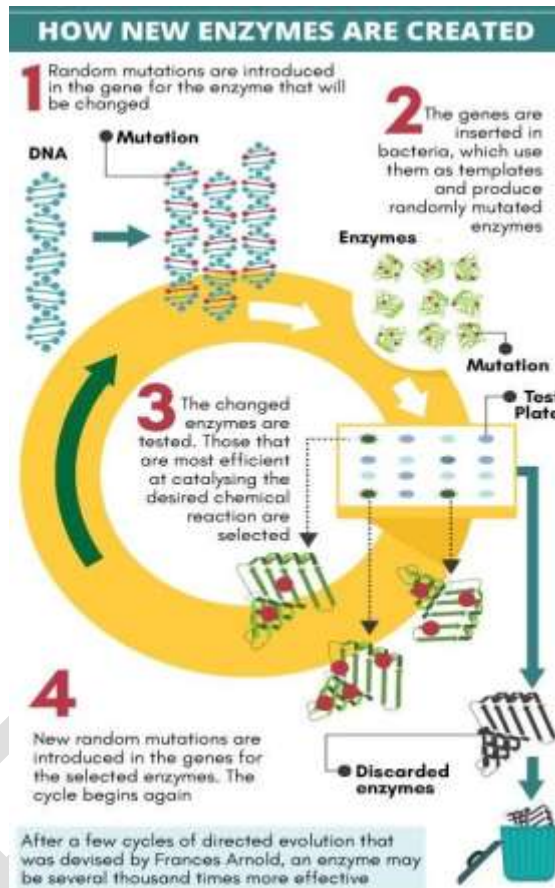
NOBEL PRIZE IN CHEMISTRY

The Nobel Prize in Chemistry 2018 was divided, one half awarded to **Frances H. Arnold for the directed evolution of enzymes,** the other half jointly to **George P. Smith and Sir Gregory P. Winter** for the **Phage Display** of peptides and antibodies. Ms. Arnold, only the fifth woman to win a chemistry Nobel.

Application:

- o **First directed evolution of enzymes**, which are proteins that catalyse chemical reactions, has been used in manufacturing of chemical substances, such as pharmaceuticals, and the production of renewable fuels for a greener transport sector.

- o **Phage Display,** where a **bacteriophage** – a virus that infects bacteria – can be used to evolve new proteins. It has produced anti-bodies that can neutralise toxins, counteract autoimmune diseases and cure metastatic cancer. **Adalimumab, a first protein evolved through phage display,** is used for rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis and inflammatory bowel diseases.

- **Phage display allows** scientists to study protein interactions on a large-scale and select proteins with the highest affinity for specific targets. It provides a means to identify target-binding proteins from a library of millions of different proteins without the need to screen each molecule individually.

BISPHENOL A (BPA)

Recently, Rice University researchers enhanced micron-sized titanium dioxide particles to trap and destroy bisphenol A (BPA).

More on news

- Scientists have created **tiny spheres of Titanium dioxide** that can catch and destroy BPA.
- The spheres provide plenty of surface area to anchor cyclodextrin — a benign sugar-based molecule which has a two-faced structure, with a **hydrophobic (water-avoiding) cavity and a hydrophilic (water-attracting) outer surface.**
- BPA being hydrophobic is attracted to the cavity where it is degraded into harmless chemicals.

About BPA

- Bisphenol A (BPA) is a chemical produced in large quantities for use primarily in the **production of polycarbonate plastics and epoxy resins.**
- Polycarbonate plastics have many applications including use in some food and drink packaging, e.g., water and infant bottles, compact discs, impact-resistant safety equipment, and medical devices.
- Epoxy resins are used as lacquers to coat metal products such as food cans, bottle tops, and water supply pipes. Some dental sealants and composites may also contribute to BPA exposure.
- Bisphenol A **can leach into food** from the protective internal epoxy resin coatings of canned foods and from consumer.
- The degree to which BPA leaches from polycarbonate bottles into liquid may depend more on the temperature of the liquid or bottle, than the age of the container.
- **BPA is an endocrine system disruptor** and it can interfere with the production,

and function of natural hormones. It also contributes to high blood pressure.

- **BPA can also be found in breast milk**. Its Prolonged exposure is suspected of affecting the health of children.

WHO TB Report And Roadmap

- Recently, World Health Organisation (WHO) released World TB Report 2018, with collaboration of UN's first high-level meeting (HLM) on TB.
- Additionally, WHO released a Roadmap toward Ending TB in Children and Adolescent.

Findings of the World TB report 2018
- TB is the 10th leading cause of death worldwide, and since 2011. It has been the leading cause of death from a single infectious agent, ranking above HIV/AIDS.
- Overall, TB deaths have decreased over the past year. However, underreporting and under-diagnosis of TB cases remains a major challenge.

Concept Notes from report
- **Triple-Billion Goals**: It is associated with WHO General Programme of Work 2019-2023 linked to SGDs health goals. This stressed the need of;
  - 1 billion more people are benefiting from Universal Health Coverage.
  - 1 billion more people are better protected from health emergencies,
  - 1 billion more people are enjoying better health and well-being.

Catastrophic total costs due to TB: It is TB-specific indicator incorporates not only direct medical payments for diagnosis and treatment, but also direct non-medicalpayments (e.g. for transportation and lodging) and indirect costs (e.g. lost income).

Observations in World TB Report 2018 for India
- India accounted for 27% of the total new infections of TB in 2017, which is the highest among the top 30 high TB burden countries in the world.

- India also led in cases of **Multi-Drug Resistant TB** (MDR-TB). Nearly a quarter of the world's MDR-TB cases are in India (24 per cent).

Roadmap toward ending TB in Children and Adolescent

It is systematic pathway which will guide the stakeholders to contains the prevalence of Child and Adolescent.

Observations in Roadmap
- Young children are at increased risk of developing severe forms of TB disease (e.g. disseminated TB, TB meningitis) with increased risk of death (especially children <2 years).
- Adolescent (10-19 years) TB patients faces unique challenges due to peer-pressure and fear of stigma, increasing prevalence of co-morbidities such as HIV, and risk behaviours such as alcohol, substance and tobacco use.
- Many of the policies and tools needed to break down the continuous cycle of transmission of disease and policy action need to be prioritised, strengthened and fully implemented to move us closer to ending TB.

Polio Virus

Why in news?
Recently, the Union Health Ministry has ordered an inquiry into the type-2 polio virus contamination detected in the vials used for immunisation in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Telangana,

What is polio

- **Poliomyelitis (polio)** is a highly infectious viral disease, mainly affecting children
- According to WHO, the virus is transmitted from person-to-person, mainly through the **faecal-oral route**
- There is no cure for polio, it can only be prevented by **immunization**.

Strains

- There are three types of polio virus strains- P1, P2 and P3
- In **September 2015**, WPV type 2 was officially declared **eradicated**.
- **India** attained a **polio free** status in 2014 after successfully eliminating the wild P1 and P3 strains

Implication of the contamination

In India the type-2 containing poliovirus vaccine (ToPV) was phased out in April 2016. Children born after April 2016 in India have no immunity to type-2 polio virus.

India runs one of the world's largest immunization programmes. The entry of a dangerous vaccine into the immunization basket can jeopardize thousands of lives.

Type of Polio vaccine

Inactivated polio vaccine (IPV): is produced from wild-type poliovirus strains that have been inactivated (killed) with formalin. As an injectable vaccine, it can be administered alone or in combination with other vaccines.
IPV provides serum immunity to all three types of poliovirus, resulting in protection against paralytic poliomyelitis.

Oral polio vaccine (OPV): contains an attenuated (weakened) vaccine-virus, activating an immune response in the body. When a child is immunized with OPV, the weakened vaccine-virus replicates in the intestine for a limited period, thereby developing immunity by building up antibodies. The vaccine is very safe and interrupts person-to-person spread of polio. However, on rare occasions, in under-immunised populations, the live weakened virus originally contained in OPV can mutate into circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus (cVDPV).

Eurasian Otter

Recently scientist confirmed the presence of Eurasian otter in Western Ghats.

About Otter

- They are carnivorous mammals and adapt to a variety of habitats ranging from marine to freshwater environments.
- India is home to 3 of the 13 species of otters found worldwide. These are
  - **Eurasian Otter (Lutra lutra):** IUCN: Near Threatened; CITES Appendix I; Wildlife (Protection) Act Schedule II.
  - **Smooth-coated Otter (Lutra perspicillata):** IUCN: Vulnerable; CITES Appendix II; Wildlife (Protection) Act Schedule II.
  - **Small-clawed otter (Aonyx cinereus):** IUCN: Vulnerable; CITES Appendix II; Wildlife (Protection) Act Schedule II.
- Though the Eurasian otter has been recorded historically from the Western Ghats (Coorg in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu's Nilgiri and Palani hill ranges), this is the first photographic and genetic confirmation of its presence here.

Banni Grassland

Nomadic tribes (Maldhari) are leaving their villages in Banni region due to water scarcity.

About Banni grassland

☐ The Banni grassland of Gujarat (near Rann of Kutch) is the largest natural grassland in the Indian subcontinent known for its **scarce ainfall and semi-drought conditions**.

- The land of Banni is formed out of **ocean clay**, so it includes an element of salt from very beginning. This land is formed out of alluvial and clayey sand..
- **Migratory pastoralism** has been followed here from centuries with a broader geographical landscape that included Sindh in Pakistan and even extended into parts of Baluchistan and Afghanistan.
- Now, Banni is divided into eastern and western parts separated by National Highway 341, which leads to the India-Pakistan International Border.
- There are 22 ethnic communities living in the area called **Maldhari pastoralists** ('mal' means animal stock and 'dhari' means keeper).
- A huge freshwater lake locally known as **Chhari-Dhand** is a prominent feature of the Banni grassland.
- It has been identified as one of the best area for reintroduction of Cheetah by Wild Life Institute of India as the area includes Kala Dungar or Black hills where large number of jackals are present.

Chhari Dhand
- 'Chhari' means salt affected and 'dhand' means shallow wetland.
- Chhari-Dhand is a **legally protected** wetland conservation reserve.
- The Banni Grasslands and Chhari- Dhand form one of the most important bird areas in the desert ecosystems of India.

Earmarking Eco-Sensitive Area

Centre has released a draft notification for earmarking Eco-Sensitive Area (ESA) in Western Ghats.

Background information

- In 2010, the Central government began the process of declaring ESAs by constituting the **Madhav Gadgil committee**. The recommendations were not implemented after protest from all states, especially Kerala, saying that it hampered development and large habitations.
- Subsequently, a **High-Level Working Group (HLWG)** under former ISRO chairman K Kasturirangan gave a report in 2013 recommending 37 per cent (about 60,000 sq km) of the Western Ghats as ecologically sensitive areas. However, the states were still at loggerhead.
- Centre has issued **3 draft ESA notifications for consultation with states since 2014**. This is the 4th such draft proposing 56,825 sq km of Western Ghats as 'no go' zone which covers nearly 37% of Western Ghats and is in line with Kasturirangan Committee recommendations.
- The process to notify ESA delayed when Karnataka, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu raised their objections on recommendation of the HLWG, leaving the ecologically fragile region in Western Ghats open for further exploitation.
- The NGT on August 24, 2018 directed the ministry to finalise the notification within a period of six months without making any alteration in the draft of February last year. So, the **Centre will now have to finalise it by February next year**.

Eco Sensitive Zones (ESZ)/ Eco-Sensitive Area (ESA)

- ESZs are ecologically important areas notified under the Environment Protection Act to be protected from industrial pollution and unregulated development. According to the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, the government can prohibit industrial operations such as mining, sand quarrying and building thermal power plants in sensitive areas.
- To categorise an area as ecologically sensitive, the government looks at topography, climate and rainfall, land use and land cover, roads and settlements, human population, biodiversity corridors and data of plants and animal species.
- As per orders of the Supreme Court, no project can be allowed within 10 km of the boundary of national parks and sanctuaries without the approval of the National Board of Wildlife (NBWL), the highest body on wildlife regulatory issues, unless a site-specific Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) is notified around that park or sanctuary.
- **Purpose for declaring ESZ** around National Parks and Sanctuaries is to create some kind of "shock absorber" for the protected areas.
  - o They would also act as transition zone from areas of high protection to areas involving lesser protection.
  - o The activities in the ESZ would be of a regulatory nature rather than prohibitive nature, unless and otherwise so required.
- **Extent of ESZ:** The width of the ESZ and type of regulations would differ from one protected area (PA) to other. However, as a general principle the width of the ESZ could go up to 10 kms around a PA (may not be uniform all around it) as provided in the Wildlife Conservation Strategy-2002.
  - o In case where sensitive corridors, connectivity and ecologically important patches, crucial for landscape linkages, are even beyond 10 kms width, these should be included in the ESZ.

- **Nature of Activities in ESZ:** While some of the activities could be allowed in all the ESAs, others will need to be regulated/ prohibited. However, which activity can be regulated or prohibited and to what extent, would have to be PA specific. There are 3 categories of activities-
  - **Prohibited-** commercial mining, polluting industries, major hydroelectric projects etc.
  - **Restricted with safeguards (Regulated) -** Felling of trees, Establishment of hotels and resorts, Drastic change of agriculture system, widening of roads, introduction of exotic species etc.
  - **Permissible-** Rain Water Harvesting, Organic farming, Ongoing Agricultural Practices etc.

Problems associated with ESZ

- States like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand and Goa etc. kept the mining areas out of ESZs, irrespective of their ecological value. Besides, **no ground investigation** has been done in most proposals. The areas are randomly marked on topographic sheets.
- Most proposals **do not follow ecological aspects** of the objective of this exercise. In most of the proposals, distance from the PA boundary is made the only criterion for defining ESZ and factors such as habitat connectivity and ecological integrity of the region are rarely considered for identifying the zones.
- States hesitate to finalize ESZ as it might **hamper their finances** due to closure of industries and tourism activities.
- There are **no quantifiable criteria** defined for including or excluding an area in the ESZ, leaving it to the forest officials to arbitrarily take decisions.
- People who are living in biodiversity rich areas are **mostly excluded from the consultation process** to identify the ESZ.

However, they are the one who will be directly affected by regulated or restricted activities.
- Though ESZ does not affect the ownership rights of people on land resources, it **restricts land-use change**. The tribal people who mostly reside in these areas are affected as their livelihood mostly depend on forest products.

Way Forward

- As the experts are attributing the recent catastrophic floods in Kerala to the exploitative activities in Western Ghats, the issue of ESZ gains prominence. There needs to be a balance between the development and biodiversity conservation.
- Centre should take all the states on board along with due representation from the local population in deciding the ESZ.
- The declaration of ESZ should be in line with the rights given to tribal population under Forest Rights Act-2006 and The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996(PESA-1996).

Industrial Disasters In India

Recently, 9 people died in blast and fire in the gas pipeline during maintenance work in SAIL's Bhilai plant.

Industrial Disasters- A background

- The ever-growing mechanisation, electrification, chemicalisation and sophistication have made industrial jobs more and more complex and intricate leading to increased dangers to human life in industries through accidents and injuries.

- India has continued to witness a series of industrial disasters during the last 3 decades after the Bhopal gas tragedy, including a chlorine gas leak in Vadodara (2002) that affected 250 people, a toluene fire at Mohali (2003), a chlorine gas leak at Jamshedpur (2008), and more recently, boiler furnace explosion at the NTPC Unchahar power plant (2017) which killed 43, affecting more than 80 people.
- A study by the British Safety Council based on ILO data found that 48,000 people on average die in the country per annum due to work-related hazards. It observed that as many as 38 fatal accidents take place every day in the construction sector in the country.
- As per NCRB data, Electrical faults seem to be the major reason for 8% of the deaths in industries.

Reasons for Industrial disasters On part of Industries

- **Low awareness:** Most companies are not aware of the safe practices in terms of what is a safe machinery, or what environment it will be used in.
- **Unsafe practices:** For eg- quarrying leading to roof collapse in coal mines, workers working without masks in areas prone to poisonous gas leakage, contract workers **not given adequate personal protection equipment (PPE)** etc.

- **Lack of regulations**: Storing and handling hazardous chemicals by factories in unorganized sector poses serious and complex risks to people, property and the environment.
- **Poor management systems:** Due to poorer reporting systems, many accidents and deaths go unreported.
- **Unawareness about disaster management**: Industries do not regularly inform the larger public about the disaster management plan in case an accident occurs.

On part of Government

- **Lack of centre-state coordination**: Labor falls in the concurrent list, so the Centre frames the laws while the states have the responsibility of implementing them. But the multiplicity of legislations and changing regulations from state to state often pose compliance problems.
- **Relaxation of Industrial Regulations:** Industrial regulation has, unfortunately, come to be viewed as a barrier to ease of doing business in India. This is a result of inefficiency and corruption.
- **Safety audits:** Owing to poorly staffed labour departments, safety audits of hazardous manufacturing units still remain a distant dream although the Factories Act prescribes a mandatory annual examination.
- **Capacity building at state level:** The inability of states to strengthen their labour bureaus and environment protection units caused unsafe factories to mushroom to meet the growing demand for industrialization.

On part of workers and public

- **Lax attitude of workers:** Even if workers are provided with PPEs they are generally reluctant to use them as they feel it hinder their comfort while on work. Also, most of the workers are inattentive

while safety trainings.

- **Lack of Public awareness:** Public outside the premises are unaware of the nature of industry and the hazards it poses to health and life. They are also not aware of what to do when an accident occurs around.

Government/Judicial Actions taken to tackle Industrial Disasters

- **Environment Impact Assessment**: It introduced the concept of environmental appraisal of all projects and incorporating ecological and safety conditions while approving new ventures. Also, it has provisions for management of hazardous waste.
- **Extended Risk scope:** In 1987, the Factories Act, 1948, was amended to extend the scope of risk from hazardous industries. What used to be a narrowly defined scope covering only workers and the premises of the factory was extended to the general public in the vicinity of the factory. The changes also provided for appraisal when hazardous industries were being set up or expanded.
- **Handling hazardous chemicals & wastes:**
  - o Manufacture, Storage and Import of Hazardous Substances Rules, 1989, details and catalogues chemicals deemed "hazardous" entering the country, the port of entry and the quantity imported.
  - o The Hazardous Wastes (Management, Handling and Transboundary Movement) Rules, 2008, provide for means of safe storage and disposal of "hazardous waste" with the help of central and state pollution control boards.

- **Addressing chemical disasters**
  - o The Chemical Accidents (Emergency Planning, Preparedness, and Response) Rules, 1996, addresses gas leaks and similar events.

  - o The **National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA) guideline on chemical disasters** was published in 2007 for a "proactive, participatory, well-structured, failsafe, multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral approach" to tackle chemical disasters.
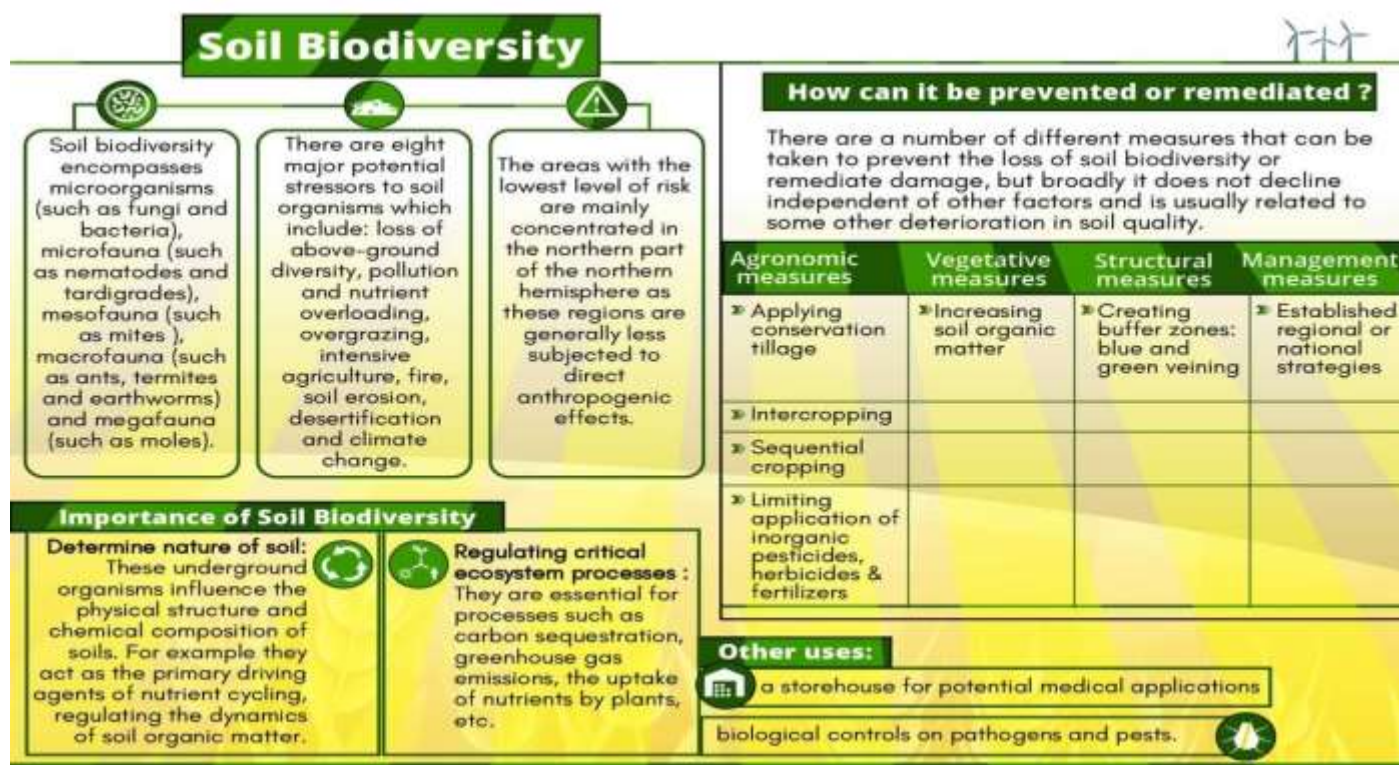
- **Compensation liability**
  - o **Concept of Absolute Liability:** As defined by the Supreme Court in 1986, the enterprise owes an absolute and non-delegable duty to the community to ensure that no harm results to anyone on account of hazardous or inherently dangerous nature of the activity which it has undertaken. Compensation needs to have a "deterrent effect" and must reflect the "magnitude and capacity of the enterprise".
  - o **Public Liability Insurance Act (1991):** It was supposed to provide for immediate and interim relief to disaster victims till their claims of compensation were finally decided. Owners of industries dealing in hazardous substances are required to take out insurance policies under this Act.
  - o The NGT Act provides for the **"principle of no-fault liability"**, which means that the company can be held liable even if it had done everything in its power to prevent the accident.
  - o **The Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010,** is the most recent law that has provision for compensation of more than Rs.100 crore, which could reach up to Rs.1,500 crore, depending on severity.

- **For worker safety:** ILO's Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006, ratified by India in 2017, aims at promoting a preventative safety and health culture and

progressively achieving a safe and healthy working environment.

Way Forward

- **Creation of Buffer zone:** It is essential for government to ensure an adequate buffer zone and not permit people to stay around in that zone or allow any business shops or constructions therein. Sufficient space must be kept in the buffer zone so that if something goes wrong or an accident occurs, the people are not affected.
- **Location of Industry:** The EIA regulations mandated under Environment Protection Act must be strictly enforced. Local authorities especially Gram Sabha must be given adequate weightage for their inputs in regards to EIA assessment.
- **Disaster Management Plan:** Industries should have disaster management plans that local authorities—which include hospitals, fire stations and the like—will know and should communicate to the local people what they are supposed to do in the event of a disaster. These plans are also needed to be updated regularly.
- **Consolidation of rules and laws:** India should formulate and implement a comprehensive safety legislative framework in accordance with the current industry best practice and community expectations.
- **Enhance monitoring standards**: India needs a single national authority to monitor workplace standards and increasing inspection as recommended by a Labour Working Group constituted by the Government back in 2008-09.
- **Safety Audit reforms:** At present, safety audits are primarily focused on occupational safety and health issues and lack sufficient technical rigour. The audit scope and methodology should be expanded to include auditing of major incident event scenarios and controls identified and assessed for each scenario. The audits should seek evidence on performance assurance of safety controls.

- **Institutional capacity building:** Investigative and technical rigour should be enhanced in the inspections that are being undertaken by the inspectorate.
  o There should be a **national capacity building programme** for inspectors in process safety, incident investigation, and auditing and inspections.
  o Universities and professional institutions should contribute to the **long-term skill development** of inspectorates.
  o There should be **international cooperation** in research and training programmes related to safety and health inspections.
- **Identification of common safety incidents**: Within the premises of the industries, the 5 most common causes of safety incidents and preventative measures have been identified as follows:
  o **Moving machinery** – Isolate, lock or pin all energy sources before any machinery is accessed.
  o **Falling from height** – Provide regular training, appropriate harnessing equipment and ensure checks are in place when working at height.
  o **Falling objects** – Ensure regular checks are in place to remove or secure objects in risk areas.
  o **On-site traffic** – Ensure all traffic on the site is operated safely, including road, rail and pedestrians, and remove all unnecessary traffic.
  o **Process safety incidents** – Identify potential process safety hazards that could cause explosions or fires and take adequate precautions.
- **Strict implementation of safety norms**: Every factory management should set up a **statutory safety committee** responsible for ensuring the strict implementation of occupational safety norms.

Global Soil Biodiversity Atlas

Soil Biodiversity

Soil biodiversity encompasses microorganisms (such as fungi and bacteria), microfauna (such as nematodes and tardigrades), mesofauna (such as mites), macrofauna (such as ants, termites and earthworms) and megafauna (such as moles).

There are eight major potential stressors to soil organisms which include: loss of above-ground diversity, pollution and nutrient overloading, overgrazing, intensive agriculture, fire, soil erosion, desertification and climate change.

The areas with the lowest level of risk are mainly concentrated in the northern part of the northern hemisphere as these regions are generally less subjected to direct anthropogenic effects.

Importance of Soil Biodiversity

Determine nature of soil: These underground organisms influence the physical structure and chemical composition of soils. For example they act as the primary driving agents of nutrient cycling, regulating the dynamics of soil organic matter.

Regulating critical ecosystem processes : They are essential for processes such as carbon sequestration, greenhouse gas emissions, the uptake of nutrients by plants, etc.

How can it be prevented or remediated ?

There are a number of different measures that can be taken to prevent the loss of soil biodiversity or remediate damage, but broadly it does not decline independent of other factors and is usually related to some other deterioration in soil quality.

Agronomic measures	Vegetative measures	Structural measures	Management measures
» Applying conservation tillage	» Increasing soil organic matter	» Creating buffer zones: blue and green veining	» Established regional or national strategies
» Intercropping			
» Sequential cropping			
» Limiting application of inorganic pesticides, herbicides & fertilizers			

Other uses:

a storehouse for potential medical applications

biological controls on pathogens and pests.

- Recently, the Global Soil biodiversity Atlas placed India among countries whose soil biodiversity faces the highest level of risk.
  - o It is **a joint venture of the Global Soil Biodiversity Initiative and the European Commission Joint Research Centre**.
  - o Its findings were published as part of the **Living Planet Report, 2018 (published by WWF every two years)**.
- Some of the important findings of the Living Planet Report, 2018 were:
  - o The current rate of species loss is 100 to 1,000 times higher than only a few hundred years ago. Ten thousand years ago that ratio was probably reversed.
  - o 60% of all animals with a backbone were wiped out due to human activity from 1970 to 2014. The report says that the Earth has entered the **sixth mass extinction event** in the last half-a-billion years.
  - o There has been a decline in mangroves by 30% to 50% over the past 50 years.
  - o Almost 50% of the globe's shallow-water reefs have declined in the last 30 years.

Terrorist Travel Initiative

Recently **Terrorist Travel Initiative under auspices of Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF),** was launched**.**

Terrorist Travel Initiative

- It will bring together national and local governments, law enforcement and border screening practitioners, and international organizations to share expertise on how **to develop and implement effective counterterrorism watch listing and screening tools.**
- The initiative will a develop set of good practices which will reinforce countries and organizations to use border security tools prescribed in **UNSC Resolution 2396 to stop terrorist travel**.

About Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF)

- Launched in 2011, the it is an **informal, apolitical, multilateral counterterrorism (CT) platform**.
- It develops good Practices and tools for policy-makers and practitioners to strengthen CT civilian capabilities, national strategies, action plans and training modules. The GCTF has 30 members. **India is a founding member of GCTF**.

National Security Council

Why in news?

The Strategic Policy Group (SPG) formed to assist the National Security Council (NSC) has been reconstituted with National Security Advisor Ajit Doval as its chief.

Strategic Policy Group (SPG)

- Was set up in 1999 by Vajpayee Government.
- First tier of National Security Council structure
- Mandated to publish National Defense Review- a draft of short term and long term security threats and defense matters for consideration of NSC.
- Was earlier headed by Cabinet Secretary.

Salient features of the new notification

- NSA replaces Cabinet Secretary as the Chairman on SPG
- The SPG shall be the principal mechanism for inter-ministerial coordination and integration of relevant inputs in the formulation of national security policies
- The other members of SPG are Vice Chairman of NITI Aayog, Cabinet Secretary, three services chiefs, RBI Governor, Secretaries of External Affairs, Home, Defense, Finance, Defense Production, Revenue, Atomic Energy, Space and National Security Council Secretariat besides Scientific Advisor to Defense Minister, Secretary (R) in Cabinet Secretariat and the Intelligence Bureau chief.
- The Cabinet Secretary will coordinate the implementation of SPG decisions by the Union Ministries and departments and State governments.

National Security Council

- It is the top executive body of India which advises the Prime Minister's Office on matters of national security and strategic interests.

- Established in November, 1998.
- A three tier Organizational Structure consisting of Strategic Policy Group (SPG), National Security Advisor Board (NSAB) and National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS).
- Main task of SPG is to make policy recommendations to the NSC.

Challenges

- It has shifted the formal and *de jure* authority of national security from Cabinet Secretariat to National Security Council Secretariat.
- While Cabinet Secretary, the top civil servant of the country, has more institutional sanctity, National Security Advisor is a political appointee. NSA chairing
- SPG meetings means a huge shift of power towards Prime Minister's Office.
- A formal centralization of power towards PMO while marginalizing transitional institutional structures might affect checks and balances of the system. It might raise the issues of accountability of decisions.
- Shift from a silo-driver approach to a more integrated, centralized and authoritative approach.

National Security Architecture of India

- Cabinet Committee on Security is the apex body for executive action on matters of national security.
- CCS is chaired by the PM and normally including the Ministers of Defence, External Affairs, Home and Finance.
- CCS is responsible for Political oversight and decision making on national security is exercised by the CCS, ensuring the democratic principle of civilian and political control of the apparatus.
- Both NSC and CCS have a common membership which helps in easier decision making and implementation.

- National Security Council, NSC and National Security Advisor, NSA advises the Prime Minister's Office on matters of National security.
- NTRO (National Technical Research Organization) is a technical intelligence agency under NSA.

Recent Reforms in National Security Architecture
- Three deputy National Security Advisors have been appointed instead of just one, while the post of military advisor has been revived
- A Defence Planning Committee, headed by the NSA, has been set up to align National security needs and defense resources into one decision making box.
- National Security Advisory Board has been revived with major appointments in recent months.

"Lone Wolf" Attacks

The Union Home Minister has said that threats posed by "lone wolf" attackers and "do it yourself' terrorists are a major challenge for the security agencies.

Lone Wolf Attacks
A "lone wolf" is a person who prepares and commits violent acts alone, outside of any command structure and without material assistance from any group.

Conventional terror attacks	Lone wolf terror attacks
Mostly multiple perpetrators	Mostly single perperator
A definite command structure	Lack of hierarchical command structure
Family member, social circle, etc. likely to be aware/involved.	Family members are not likely to be aware of the radicalisation of the individual.

- It is an efficient way of spreading terror in hard-to- access places for organised terrorist groups.
- Volunteers are likely to come from the middle class and educated families.
- Prominent recent examples across the globe include Boston marathon bombing of 2013, Sydney hostage crisis of 2014, recent attacks in New York and London where vehicles were used to run over and kill a number of people.

Causes of Lone wolf Attacks
- **Alienation of communities:** As communities get isolated and become less trustful of law, they become alienated. It then provides grievances for terrorists to exploit as individuals from such communities tend to easily be self-radicalized by accessing material online.
- **Mental and psychological disorders** can also often be a trigger for carrying out random attacks by individuals.
- **Lax gun control** (for example in USA) create a fertile ground for carrying out of Lone wolf attacks.

Challenges
- **Difficult to Apprehend:** Traditional terror groups with command and control "are easier for government to control. "Leaderless Resistance" like lone wolf attacks create an intelligence nightmare.
- **Use of Social Media by terror groups:**
  o Since the IS has been able to successfully recruit Indians via social media for the war in Syria it is a matter of time before they find recruits willing to employ violence in India itself.
  o The head of Al-Qaeda Indian Subcontinent called on Indian Muslims to follow the example of lone wolves in Europe and kill officers in India.
- **Possibilities of a complex Network:** Recent investigations have shown that often these attacks are not entirely independent and leaders operating remotely exercise various degrees of influence, acting as confidants and coaches and coaxing recruits to embrace violence.

Lone wolf attacks in India
- **Volatile neighbourhood of India acting as terror hotbeds, fast growing population** especially youth with access to mass media and social media, **heavy concentration of people in public areas** with limited security and **inadequate capacities of local police** increase India's vulnerability to lone wolf attacks.
- However various other factors tend to pose

challenges in growth of lone wolf attacks in India:

o Unlike in the US where sophisticated weapons can be easily bought by ordinary citizens, gaining access to such weaponry in India is difficult.

o Indians have not displayed the psychological willingness to undertake high risk attacks.

o The absence of past examples of lone wolf attacks in India inculcates the fear of the unknown in the minds of potential volunteers.

Some Steps Taken by India

- **Education and skilling -** Modernization of madrassas, Employment and skilling schemes for jobless youth like Nai Manzil, Himayat etc

- **Specific programmes** like 'Operation Chakravyuh' of the IB, where a dedicated set of officers monitor the web, tracing the activities of the youth who are in touch terror operatives.

- **NATGRID** is in the process of being scaled up.

- **National Cyber Coordination Centre(NCCC)** has been established as a cyber security and e-surveillance agency in India.

- **WHAM** (winning hearts and minds) strategy approach by security forces to prevent alienation.

- **Deployment of private security** at high value targets like malls, hotels and schools has been upgraded, which acts as a deterrent to an individual aiming to target them.

Way Forward

- **Monitoring of Online content –**
  o Better vigilance regarding online radicalization by terror groups is required to curb this challenge.
  o Big data analytics must be used to discern the level of radicalisation of potential recruits, their networks and sources of information, funding and leadership in order to help unravel the roots of radicalisation.

- **Enhancing Social capital:** Enhancing the "sense of belonging" among different groups rather creating division can be of great impact. For example, preventing polarisation along religious or ethnic lines through effective social integration is needed.

- **Influence of Family and Peer Groups:** must be utilised by the state to pre-empt any radicalisation of young individuals to any terror group's ideology.

- **Providing access to Mental Healthcare and counselling**.
  o Helplines by professional counsellors to counsel against radicalization once it is reported by some friend or family member.

- **Coordination:**
  o Coordination and intelligence sharing between agencies such as IB, NIA, State police, etc is a must to prevent such incidents.
  o The nature of threat that groups like the IS represent is transnational in nature. Therefore there is also a need to improve intelligence sharing, faster processing of information requests, countering the finance mechanisms, and facilitate easier extradition.

- **Providing training to police personnel:** State police forces should be trained to develop counter-terror capabilities as they are the "first responders" when an attack takes place.

Intergovernmental Panel On Climate Change Report

Why in news?
The IPCC has released its Special Report titled **"Global Warming of 1.5°C",** first in a series of Special Reports to be produced in the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Cycle**.**

What is the IPCC?
- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the UN body with 195 member states for assessing the science related to climate change.
- It was established by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) & the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) in 1988 to provide policymakers with regular scientific assessments concerning climate change, its implications and potential future risks, as well as to put forward adaptation and mitigation strategies.

Key findings of the Report
The report documents glaring evidence of the devastating impacts of climate change on the poor and on developing countries.
- **Present global warming status**: Human-induced global warming has in 2017 **already reached 1°C** above pre-industrial levels; the current climate efforts of countries will take the world to 1.5°C between 2030 and 2052.
  - o Since 2000, the estimated level of human-induced warming has been equal to the level of observed warming due to contributions from solar and volcanic activity over the historical period.
- **Impacts of global warming at 1.5°C**: Impacts at 1.5°C are far greater than anticipated and estimated earlier.
  - o Accordingly, the world would witness greater sea level rise, increased precipitation and higher frequency of droughts and floods, hotter days and heatwaves, more intense tropical cyclones, and increased ocean acidification and salinity.
  - o Warming greater than the global average has already been experienced in many regions and seasons, with average warming over land higher than over the ocean.
  - o Depending on the temperature dataset considered, 20-40% of the global human population live in regions that, by the decade 2006-2015, had already experienced warming of more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial in at least one season.
- **Impact of transition from 1.5°C to 2°C:** The report points out that the risk transition from 1.5°C to 2°C is very high and that the effects at 2°C will be more devastating than what IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report had indicated.
  - o Coastal nations and agricultural economies like India would be the worst affected.
  - o Decline in crop yields, unprecedented climate extremes and increased susceptibility could push poverty by several million by 2050.
- **Limited availability of Carbon Budget:** If global emissions continue as per the commitments made under Paris Agreement, the carbon budget (the amount of CO2 that the world can emit) for 1.5°C warming will be exhausted by 2030.
  - o In order **to limit warming at 1.5°C**, the world will have to reduce CO2 emissions by 45 per cent by 2030 from the 2010 levels and reach net-zero emissions by 2050.
- **Effect of limiting global warming to 1.5°C:** The report highlights a number of climate change impacts that could be avoided by limiting global warming to 1.5°C compared to 2°C, or more. For instance,

o By 2100, global sea level rise would be 10 cm lower with global warming of 1.5°C compared with 2°C.

o The likelihood of an Arctic Ocean free of sea ice in summer would be once per century with global warming of 1.5°C, compared with at least once per decade with 2°C.

o Coral reefs would decline by 70-90 percent with global warming of 1.5°C, whereas virtually all (> 99 percent) would be lost with 2°C.

What happens at 2°C that does not happen at 1.5°C?

- This could prevent around 3.3 million cases of dengue every year in Latin America and the Caribbean alone.
- A **World Bank report** on Climate Change and Health (2015) that an additional 150 million people could be at risk from malaria if the temperature was allowed to increase beyond 2°C.
- A study in the **journal Climate Change** in 2016 claimed that the world could have 25 million fewer undernourished people by the end of the century, if the 1.5°C goal was achieved.
- As per **Nature Climate Change (2018)**, 1.5°C could prevent 153 million premature deaths due to air pollution by 2100, as compared to the 2°C scenario.
- About 350 million additional people could be exposed to deadly heat waves if the warming increased to 2°C as compared to 1.5°C.
- A **UNDP report** in 2016 claimed that a 1.5°C strategy could create double the number of jobs in the energy sector by 2050. Thus, limiting global warming to 1.5°C should be targeted because
- It would **reduce challenging impacts** on ecosystems, human health and well-being, making it easier to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal.
- Allowing the global temperature to temporarily exceed or 'overshoot' 1.5°C would mean **a greater reliance on techniques** that remove CO_2 from the air to return global temperature to below

1.5°C by 2100. The **effectiveness of such techniques are unproven** at large scale and some may carry significant risks for sustainable development.

Way Forward
Keeping global warming within 1.5°C is very difficult but required: Keeping the focus on 2.0°C target would be disastrous for the poor and for developing countries. The following Pathways examined by the report to limit warming to 1.5°C can be considered:

o India must take the lead in forming a global coalition for a 1.5°C world to save its poor and vulnerable population.

o Investments in low-carbon energy technologies and energy efficiency would need to approximately double in the next 20 years and investment in fossil-fuel extraction and conversion decrease by about a quarter.

- **Require a UNFCCC-plus approach:** Climate efforts cannot be restrictive to the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement. The world needs to think and devise more forums and venues to address climate change.
- **Equity is essential and must be re-visited:** IPCC Report points out that "social justice and equity are core aspects of climate-resilient development pathways that aim to limit global warming to 1.5°C". The world, however, requires a new formulation of equity in which every country must act now and actively raise its level of ambition.

o The **developed countries** must take the lead by rapidly de-carbonising their economies as well as reducing consumption.

o **Developing countries** will have to pursue low-carbon pathways more vigorously and should limit addition of fossil fuel assets going ahead.

- **Enhancing sinks in natural ecosystem:** All pathways to reduce emissions, to keep the warming within 1.5°C require Carbon Dioxide Removal (CDR) in the

Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use (AFOLU) sector in varying degree. Sequestering CO_2 in AFOLU sector will require incentivising billions of farmers and forest- dwellers to pursue sustainable practices that enhance carbon sinks. The world must come together to devise a mechanism to do this.

- **Acting on all fossil fuels is must:** The IPCC report emphasises the need to reduce coal consumption rapidly, though it allows for the use of gas with carbon capture and storage. The world needs to act on all fossil fuels simultaneously.

Ocean Cleanup

Recently, the Ocean Cleanup project was started in the Pacific Ocean.

Background

- **Situation in India:** According **to Litterbase database**, seas near Mumbai, Kerala and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands are among the worst polluted in the world.
- **Global Scenario:** More than **8 million tonnes of plastic leaks into the ocean each year** – equal to dumping a garbage truck of plastic every minute.
- Every year Marine plastic gets trapped in the **gyres** (revolving water system in the world's oceans) which breaks down into **micro-plastic** and becomes harmful for marine as well as human life. The **Great Pacific Garbage Patch** is the largest collection of marine debris in the North Pacific Ocean gyre.
- **Financial cost:** US$13 billion a year is the cost of environmental damage as plastic wreaks havoc on fisheries, marine ecosystems and economies.
- **Composition:** About 60-90 per cent of marine litter is made up of plastic polymers, plastic bags, fishing gear and food and beverage containers.
- According to some estimates, at the rate we are dumping items such as plastic bottles, bags and cups after a single use, by 2050 oceans will carry more plastic than fish and an estimated 99 per cent of seabirds will have ingested plastic.

About Ocean Cleanup Project

- Ocean Cleanup is a non-profit organisation which is developing advanced technologies to rid the world's oceans of plastics.
- It is directed at cleaning The **Great Pacific Garbage Patch (GPGP)** which is a zone between Hawaii and California. About 1.8 Trillion pieces of plastic float the surface of the GPGP.

Impact of Increasing level of Plastics in Ocean

- **Bio-accumulation**: Many persistent organic pollutants (for example, pesticides, PCBs, DDT, and dioxins) float around the oceans at low concentrations, but their hydrophobic nature concentrates them on the surface of plastic particles. Marine animals mistakenly feed on the microplastics, and at the same time ingest the toxic pollutants. The chemicals accumulate in the animal tissues and then increase in concentration as the pollutants are transferred up the food chain.
- **Leaching of harmfull chemical**: As the plastics degrade and become brittle, they leach out monomers like Bisphenol A which can then be absorbed by marine life, with relatively little known consequences.
- **Threat to Biodiversity**: Beside the associated chemical loads, ingested plastic materials can be damaging for marine organisms, as they can lead to digestive blockage or internal damage from abrasion. There is still much research needed to properly evaluate this issue.
- **Source of vector borne diseases**: Being so numerous, microplastics provide abundant surfaces for small organisms to attach. This dramatic increase in colonization opportunities can have population-level consequences. In addition, these plastics are essentially rafts for organisms to travel further then they usually would, making them vectors for spreading invasive marine species.

Microplastic

- **Microplastics or Microbeads** are plastic pieces or fibre which is very small, generally measuring less than 1mm.
- They have a variety of use, most notably

being personal care products like toothpaste, body creams, clothing and industrial use.

- They have an ability to spread easily and provide silky texture and colours to the product. Thus, adding visual appeal of the cosmetic products.

Challenges in Tackling Plastics Debris

- **Ubiquitous Transboundary Movement of marine plastics and microplastics:** It is becoming a major concern as their property of durability makes their debris remain intact for long period of time throughout the ocean.
- **Ineffective Waste Collection**: Greatest burden of plastic waste entering the sea is likely to arise where waste collection systems are ineffective or even non-existent.
- **Lack of resources with less developed countries:** Less developed and developing countries in particular may face challenges in managing the rapidly growing volume of plastic waste.

Other Steps taken for tackling Plastic Debris

- **Blue Flag Beach Certificate Standards**
  o Certificate is given to environment-friendly and clean beaches, equipped with amenities of international standards for tourists. These standards were established by the Copenhagen-based Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) in 1985.
  o **Chandrabhaga beach on the Konark coast of Odisha** will be the first in Asia to get the Blue Flag certification
- **UN Environment launches #CleanSeas campaign**: Its objective is to eliminate major sources of marine litter, Microplastics in cosmetics and the excessive, wasteful usage of single-use plastic by the year 2022.
- **Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal:**

It aims at preventing and minimizing the generation of wastes including those ending up in the ocean. Much of the marine liter and microplastics found in the sea may be determined as 'waste' as defined under the Convention.

- **Stockholm Convention on POPs:** It aims to protect human health and the environment from POPs (organic chemicals that persist in the environment, bio accumulate in humans and wildlife, have harmful effects and have the potential for long-range environmental transport). Plastics can adsorb POPs such as PCB, DDT and dioxins and these are frequently detected in marine plastic liter.
- **The Honolulu Strategy:** It is a framework for a comprehensive and global collaborative effort to reduce the ecological, human health, and economic impacts of marine debris worldwide.

Minimum River Flow For Ganga

Recently National Mission for Clean Ganga has laid down the flow specifications for river Ganga to maintain a minimum river flow or ecological flow.

More on news

- **Central Water Commission** would be the designated authority to collect relevant data and submit reports on a quarterly basis to the NMCG.
- The compliance of minimum environmental flow is applicable to all existing, under-construction and future projects except the mini and micro projects which do not alter the flow characteristics of the river significantly.
- The existing projects would have to comply with the norms within a period of three years

About Minimum River Flow

- Minimum River Flow or Minimum Environmental Flow or E-flow is a regime of flow in a river that mimics the natural pattern. It refers to the water considered sufficient for protecting the structure and function of an ecosystem and its dependent species.
- It means enough water is to be released in the downstream of the river system after utilizing the water for the development projects in order to ensure downstream environmental, social and economic benefits.
- It is either defined in **terms of percentage of the average flow** (monthly average or average of any predefined number of days) or in **terms of cubic meters of water flow per second.**
- It will also ensure demand side management of water as it will help to reduce water withdrawal from the river by adopting scientific practices in irrigation, reusing and recycling of water and regulating groundwater withdrawals for

various purpose
- Uninterrupted flow of water in Ganga is also important to keep it clean through its natural ecological functions and processes.

Concerns

- **Inadequate minimum flow norms**: Under Draft Ganga Act, Justice Girdhar Malviya Panel suggested stricter provision than these specifications to increase accountability and responsibility for cleanliness and uninterrupted flow (Niarmalta and Aviralta).
- **Lack of guidelines for projects**: Along with minimum flow, guidelines also need to be laid out for the modifications that projects need to make.
- **No mention of aquatic biodiversity:** The very purpose of e-flow is to ensure free migration of these species. But the notification is completely silent on this aspect thus, seemingly defeating the purpose of this exercise.
- **Environmentalists view**: Some environmentalists are of the view that all the hydroelectric projects as well as mining in Haridwar-Kumbh region should be banned completely to endure natural flow of the river.

Draft River Basin Management Bill, 2018

Recently, Draft River Basin Management Bill, 2018 was released by government.

Background

- **Second Administrative Reform Commision (2008)** had recommended that **River Basin Organisations (RBOs)** should be set up for each inter-State river, as proposed by **National Commission for Integrated Water resources Development, 1999** by enacting a legislation to replace the River Boards Act, 1956.
- **River Basin:** A geographical area determined by the watershed limit of the system of waters, flowing into the ocean/sea either directly or through another sovereign nation or into a natural lake having no outlet.
  - It is considered as the basic hydrological unit for planning and development of water resources.
  - There are **13 Major river basins in India** and cover 80 per cent of the population and 85 per cent of total river discharge.
  - The major river basin is **the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna**, which is the largest with catchment area of about 11.0 lakh km2 (more than 43% of the catchment area of all the major rivers in the country).
- **Need:** A lack of integrated river basin management often results in decision-making dominated by powerful economic sectors such as navigation, dam construction and intensive agriculture.

Principle governing River Basin Development, Management and Regulation according to Draft.

- **Cooperation:** Basin States shall participate and cooperate in best interest of the nation, in the development, management and regulation of waters of inter-State river basin for the mutual benefit of the basin States and the Indian Union.
- **Equitable and Sustainable Utilisation of water**: Basin States shall in their respective territories develop, manage and regulate the waters of an inter-State river basin in an equitable and sustainable manner.
- **Water as a Common Pool Community Resource:** Water needs to be managed as a common pool community resource held, by the State, under public trust doctrine to achieve food security, support livelihood, and ensure equitable and sustainable development for all.
- **Demand Management:** The demand management of water needs to be given priority, especially through:
  - Evolving an agricultural system which economizes on water use and maximizes value from water.
  - Bringing in maximum efficiency in use of water and avoiding wastages.

Advantage of River Basin Management (RBM)

- **Economic Importance:** River Basin absorb and channel the run-off from snow-melt and rainfall, which can provide fresh drinking water as well as access to food, hydropower, building materials (e.g. reeds for thatching), medicines and recreational opportunities.
- **Control Water Pollution**: They are natural 'filters' and 'sponges', and play a vital role in water purification, water retention and regulation of flood peaks.
- **Ecosystem Service**: They act as a critical link between land and sea, providing transportation routes for people, and making it possible for fish to migrate between marine and freshwater systems.
- **Biodiversity Conservation**: RBM combine both terrestrial (e.g. forest and grassland) and aquatic (e.g. river, lake and

marsh) components, thereby providing a wide diversity of habitats for plants and animals.

Highlights of Bill

- **Objective:** It proposes optimum development of inter-State rivers by **facilitating inter-State coordination** ensuring scientific planning of land and water resources taking basin/sub-basin as unit with unified perspectives of water in all its forms (including soil moisture, ground and surface water) and ensuring comprehensive and balanced development of both catchment and command areas.

- **Repeal River Boards Act:** Bill seeks to repeal the River Boards Act, 1956, which was enacted with a declaration that centre should take control of regulation and development of Inter-state rivers and river valleys in public interest. However, not a single river board has been constituted so far.

- **River Basin Authorities (RBA):** It seeks to establish 13 RBAs for development, management, and regulation of waters of an inter-state river basin, consisting of a Governing Council and an Executive Board.
  - o **Executive Board:** It will comprise the Chairman and administrative secretaries of the concerned state governments to formulate a **River Basin Master Plan** for the inter-state river basin which analyze the river basin characteristics, environmental needs, assessment of the effects of existing legislation etc.
  - o **Governing Council**: It will consist of Chief Ministers of basin states, and will approve the River Basin Master Plan, resolve conflicts among states, Review and give clearance to new water resources projects etc.
  - o **RBA will be setup** for river basins of Ganga, Indus, Godavari, Mahanadi, Mahi, Narmada, Pennar, Cauvery, Krishna, Tapi, Subarnrekha,

Brahmani-Baitarini and Brahamaputra- Barak-inter-state rivers of north-east.

- **Binding Decision**: Recommendations of the authority will be binding on all states within the river basin, except those concerning sharing of inter-state river waters. The dispute between two or more states will go to the **Inter-State River Water Disputes Tribunal** only if governing council of the concerned authority fails to address it.

India's 1st Soil Moisture Map

India Meteorological Department (IMD), for the first time, has provided a country-wide soil moisture forecast.

Details of Soil Moisture Map
- This forecast is a joint exercise by IIT Gandhinagar and the India Meteorological Department (IMD) which provides soil moisture forecast at **seven and 30-day lead times.**
- The product, termed **'Experimental Forecasts Land Surface Products'** has been developed using the '**Variable Infiltration Capacity' model** that takes into **consideration soil, vegetation, land use and land cover among other parameters**.
- The countrywide forecast prepared at the end of the monsoon season suggests **deficit soil moisture conditions are likely in Gujarat, Bihar, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu and southern Andhra Pradesh.**
- It also indicates that soil moisture conditions in **western Uttar Pradesh, Bundelkhand, and Chhattisgarh are likely to be normal or surplus** at the start of the Rabi sowing season.

Advantages of having Soil moisture forecast
- **Irrigation requirements:** Soil moisture is crucial for agriculture since it directly affects crop growth and helps assess the irrigation requirement for the area. For e.g. Based on observed conditions parts of Andhra Pradesh are deficient in terms of soil moisture right now. This means that if there is not enough rainfall in one or two months, these are regions which will demand heavy irrigation whether that comes from groundwater or surface water storage.
- **Better planning**: Timely soil moisture forecasts will help target interventions, like in terms of seed varieties for better planning in agriculture. For e.g. the total

area sown under rabi crops is around 625 lakh hectares of which wheat takes up 300 lakh hectares. Timely forecasting will improve productivity and optimizing input cost for wheat.
- **Increase farmer's income**: In areas like Bundelkhand, Bihar, in low lying areas of Seemanchal and Kosi belt**,** where most farmers are dependent on rabi crop and keep their land fallow or just grow some fodder crop during the kharif season, the advance forecasting will help augment farmers' income and provide livelihood security.
- **Understanding crop pattern**: Essentially soil moisture gives us more information on what is needed for crop growth in different parts of the country such as crop pattern, type of crops to be grown etc.

Nobel Prize In Economics

American economists William Nordhaus and Paul Romer have been awarded the Nobel Prize for their work on understanding how economies can grow sustainably, by integrating innovation and climate with economic growth.

What is unique about this year's Nobel Prize winners?

This year's Nobel Prizes have been awarded to Economic theories with direct political and practical implications. Both the Laureates life work goes against the traditional model of growth and development. e.g. Growth model of Nobel Laureate Robert Solow which provides a relationship between growth of workforce and capital with long term economic growth.

Nobel Winners' Work

William Nordhaus

- Nordhaus believes that climate change can be addressed by ensuring correct pricing of polluting resources like fuel through government interventions e.g. higher taxes on petrol, diesel.
- His models that integrated population growth, fossil fuel use, income growth, and global warming became the basis for most calculations of the costs and benefits of various anti-global warming interventions.
- First person to create an "integrated assessment model", a quantitative model that describes the interplay between economy and climate.
- Putting a price on carbon is the main tool for alleviating climate change.

Paul Romer

- Technological innovation and skilling of workforce are the real sources of sustainable growth.
- Proposes the "endogenous growth model" where technological progress is seen as the outgrowth of businesses and other entities investing in research and development.

- A market led economy may undersupply technological innovations
- He recommended the use of subsidies, patents and other forms of government intervention to encourage economic growth through increased investment in technology.

Road Safety

Government data showed that there is a significant increase in road accidents and fatality rate of the pedestrian from 12,330 in 2014 to 20,457 in 2017 — a jump of nearly 66%.

Road Accidents in India

- Pedestrians, cyclists and two-wheeler occupants are the most vulnerable road users. Nearly 133 two-wheeler occupants and nearly 10 cyclists killed were killed daily in road accident in 2017.
- In 2017, approx. 1.47 lakh people died in road deaths which is equivalent to the population of many small cities in India.

Why road safety remains a challenging task?

- Pedestrians are the most vulnerable road users as they have **lesser protection in case of road accidents.** Adding to this motorist have little respect for the **rights of pedestrians.**
- Designated footpaths are routinely **encroached by parked vehicles** and shops especially in urban area, force the pedestrians to walk on roads.
- There is a lack of motivation for road safety **implementation measures** among enforcement agencies. Additionally, low number of prosecutions of lawbreakers on roads further increase the problems.
- There is a lack of **helping hand approach among people** at the time of accidents. This is due to consequential legal hearing and repeated appearances in the police station for investigation.
- It has pointed out that road infrastructure in India suffers from poor design quality, poor visibility and it overlooks road engineering which is inalienable part of road safety.
- Road Safety is a **State Subject,** this make difficult to meet the global road safety standards for instance **World Health Organisation (WHO)**, recommended countries to have a **national urban**

maximum speed limit of 50 km/hour. Some states like Uttar Pradesh fall below this bracket with a 40 km/hour limit while those in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra can go up to 65 km/hour.

Government steps for road safety

- **Draft National Action Plan** aimed at halving number of road accident deaths by 2020.
- **Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Sadak Yojana** launched with initial funding of about Rs 2,000 crore which will eliminate dangerous spot form highways.
- Recently government made it mandatory for two-wheeler from April 2019 onward to have **Anti-Break lock System** in order to improves control over the vehicle at the event of emergency braking.
- Government had signed the **Brasilia declaration in 2015,** committing to reduce road accident and fatality by half.
- **Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Bill, 2017**
  o Provisions for Non-Motorised Transport and pedestrian bicycle infrastructure.
  o It Sets up a National Road Safety Board that will advise the government on road design and motor vehicle safety.
  o It adds new provisions that allow the Centre to recall vehicles that pose a danger to users.
  o It has the provision of protection of Good Samaritan.

Impact of Road Accidents

- **Economics Cost:** Planning Commission of India, stated that over 3% of India's GDP is lost to road accidents annually, and this amounted to 3.8 lakh crore rupees in 2014.
- **Social Cost:** Loss of family member, especially earning member leads to poverty and social distress. Moreover, disabilities occurred in accident leads of loss of human productivity coupled with

stigma.

- **Administrative cost:** Traffic management, enforcement of law, resource costs (clearance of damage property), and insurance administration.

Suggestions to improve road safety

- **Pedestrian**
  o There is a dire need to segregate pedestrian road users from other vehicles to reduce conflict.
  o **Safe system approach** of World Health Organisation recognised that people role in road safety cannot be eliminated completely by penalisation methods, rather the policy approach should be shifted towards **education and awareness** for all the strata of society.

- **Road**
  o The various study highlighted that instead of expending or widening the roads, **application of scientific methods** such as construction of central barriers, road-side crash barriers can effectively minimise road accidents/fatality.
  o **Road Safety Action Plan** mooted by Asian Development Bank stressed the need of optimal mobility of traffic, promotion of traffic circulation, building the rush-hour lanes, and **self-explained roads.**

- **Vehicles**
  o **Voluntary fleet modernisation programme** is need of hour. Despite of its initial aim of reducing pollution, it will facilitate the minimisation of road accident due to lack of safety measures in old vehicles.
  o Additionally, launching **Bharat New Vehicle Safety Assessment Programme** on line of star labelling, can effectively minimise the accidents.

- **Government**
  o Recently, Karnataka Good Samaritan

and Medical Professional (Protection and Regulation during Emergency Situations) Bill, 2016, has been assented by The President, similar law should be enacted by other states. This legislation would give both legal and financial protection to good Samaritans and ensure immediate medical assistance for victims within the 'golden hour'.

o Providing more teeth to the traffic police infrastructure by hiring more personnel, installing cameras, and prosecuting lawbreakers can tame the menace of aggressive driving.

o Adopting **Vision Zero approach** in road safety governance. The Vision Zero approach pegs human life and health above all other transportation challenges.

Direct Tax Collection

Recently, government stated that, there has been significant improvement in direct tax collection in the last few years.

Trends of Direct Tax collection
- There has been a growth of more than 80% in the number of returns filed in the last four financial years and direct tax- GDP ratio rose to 5.98% in FY 2017-18, the highest it has been in the last 10 years.
- Further, the number of persons filing income tax returns also increased by about 65% during period from 2014-2018.
- Moreover, **Direct Tax-GDP ratio rose** to 5.98% in FY 2017- 18, which is highest in the last 10 years. This shows a sign of improvement of **Tax-Buoyancy (See Box)** in the economy.

Reasons for increase in Direct Tax collection
- **Growing Economy:** Countries' national income level has been improving over the next few years and its transition into middle-income economy has led to increase in Tax Base.
- **Demonetisation:** Demonetisation has removed the anonymity attached to cash deposit in banks. Thus giving rise to an inquiry, whether the amount deposited is in consonance with the depositor's income.
- **Goods and Service Tax:** Under the GST provisions business entities have to disclose their annual turnover, this makes direct tax evasion a difficult task.
- **Use of Digital platform:** The increase in the use of information being collected digitally by the tax department increased the efficiency in tax collection and helps in checking of tax evasion.
- **Hassle Free Refund**: Small and medium taxpayers are getting easy tax refunds. This has boosted the taxpayer confidence in taxation system of the country, thus resulting into higher tax collection.
- **Government Initiatives** had also contributed to sound rate of Direct Tax collection, these initiatives include;
  o **Income Declaration Scheme:** It offers an opportunity to tax defaulters to disclose their income under the Income Tax Act.
  o **Aaykar Setu:** It is an app to help users, to understand the various nuances of direct taxes, file income tax, apply for PAN, check TDS statement etc.
  o **Project Insight:** It will monitor high-value transactions with **use big data analytics to** find out any discrepancy between a taxpayer's income and expenses.
  o Increased surveillance from **linking Aadhar to Permanent Account Number (PAN)** and to bank accounts.
  o A task force has been constituted under **Arbind Modi** for drafting a new direct tax legislation.

Significance of Direct tax collection
- **High Tax buoyancy**: It is an important metric to know the expected level of government borrowings from the debt market. Higher tax buoyancy would mean the **government would borrow less** — keeping interest rates lower — **while giving room for corporates also to borrow at lower rates** thus reducing **crowding out effect** (See box) in the economy.
- **Fiscal Health:** High rate of direct tax collection increases spending capacity of government on social sectors such as education and health, without compromising the **fiscal prudence** in the economy.
- **Maintaining Inflationary Trends:** High rate of direct tax collection helps in

maintaining the optimum interest rate in the economy, which in turn assists in maintaining the inflationary pressure.

- **Lower Indirect tax:** Higher direct tax collections could lower the tax burden on the poor by creating fiscal space for a reduction in GST rates.

Direct Tax Collection

India's **insurance gap widens despite deeper penetration** according to report "**A world at risk- Closing the insurance gap**" by Lloyd's of London.

Insurance Sector in India

- The Indian Insurance Sector is basically divided into two categories – Life Insurance and Non-life Insurance.
- Both the Life Insurance and the Non-life Insurance is governed by the IRDAI (Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India).
- Among the life insurers, Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) is the sole public sector company. Apart from that, among the non-life insurers there are six public sector insurers. The Non-life Insurance sector is also termed as General Insurance.
- In India, **the insurance gap** has widened from $19.7 billion in 2012 to **$27 billion in 2018**, even though non-life **insurance penetration** has improved marginally from 0.7 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2012 to **0.9 per cent as of 2018**.
- The Indian insurance market is a huge business opportunity. India currently accounts for less than 1.5 per cent of the world's total insurance premiums and about 2 per cent of the world's life insurance premiums despite being the second most populous nation.
- India's life insurance sector is the biggest in the world with about 360 million policies which are expected to increase at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 12-15 per cent over the next five years. The insurance industry plans to hike penetration levels to five per cent by 2020.
- India had also increased FDI limit to 49 per cent from 26 per cent in insurance sector to increase the investments in insurance.

Role of Insurance

- **Provide safety and security**: Insurance provide financial support and reduce uncertainties in business and human life.
- **Generates financial resources**: It generate funds by collecting premium which are further invested in government securities and stock. It also helps in providing Employment opportunities leading to capital formation.
- **Promotes economic growth**: It generates significant impact on the economy by mobilizing domestic savings. It provides capital into productive investments especially for long-term investment needs. It enables to mitigate loss, financial stability and promotes trade and commerce activities those results into economic growth and development.
- **Spread of financial services in rural areas**: IRDA Regulations provide certain minimum business to be done in rural areas, in the socially weaker sections.
- **Spreading of risk:** Insurance facilitates spreading of risk from the insured to the insurer. A large number of persons get insurance policies and pay premium to the insurer. Whenever a loss occurs, it is compensated out of funds of the insurer.

Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA)

- Established in 1999 under the IRDA Act
- Responsible for regulating, promoting and ensuring orderly growth of the insurance and re-insurance business in India.

Govt's Initiatives for Insurance

- **National Health Protection Scheme** launched under Ayushman Bharat to provide coverage of up to Rs 500,000 to more than 100 million vulnerable families for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization.
- **Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima**

Yojana (PMJJBY) and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) to cover all poor households will bring the security of insurance benefits to the marginalised sections, giving basic economic protection in cases of death or injury through accidents of a family member.

- **Prime Minister Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY)** proposes to bring 60-crore basic accounts within its fold and providing services of micro insurance and unorganised sector pension schemes through these accounts, which will further bolster the economic security of lower income groups.
- **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)** provides crop insurance to farmers against any losses to their crops.

Challenges in Insurance Sector

- **Low Awareness:** A huge part of Indian population does not use health insurance to finance their medical expenditures. A large majority of people in India believe that health insurance is not a worthy investment and therefore, avoid buying such insurance products.
- **Poor Distribution:** Distribution outside large cities is poor. There are large parts of the country where access to general insurance is limited. The reason insurers and distributors do not build a presence in small towns is that it is unviable.
- **Fewer product innovations:** While many essential products to mitigate risk are available, there are gaps in the insurance product portfolio that leaves large risks uninsured.
- **Pricing:** Insurers have been focusing on growing sales even if that creates a distortion in pricing for individuals.
- **Perception by influencers**: Another major challenge is posed by the media and influencers. Often, the life insurance industry is portrayed in a negative manner and hence the consumers become skeptical of the life insurance industry. The result is that, they may not purchase

life insurance, even though a legitimate need exists.

Way forward

- **Promote Awareness**: It is necessary to promote more awareness among public about benefits of insurance. It can be raised through videos, social media, ads, organizing campaigns etc.
- **Multiple Channels of Distribution:** This is a key determinant of success for companies which creates larger database. Linking insurance with allied finance products like housing loan, mutual fund investment in companies, banks credit cards etc are the new channels for life insurance.
- **Huge Untapped Market**: Middle class people are having more awareness than the lower class and high class people. The demographics and macro-economic factors in India are diverse and insurance systems have to be aligned to other programmes in the country in order to target every section.
- **Better regulation**: Regulatory policies can be made to ensure that insurance companies focus more on insurance targets than profitability.
- **Use of Technology:** Stakeholders will have to leverage Internet and other technology options to provide single window service so as to cross-sell and retain customers. It will also be easier and cheaper for them to process requests, claims settlement process, complaints and payments online.

Draft Electronic Policy

With an aim to create a **$400-billion electronics manufacturing industry by 2025**, the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)** has come out with the draft **'National Policy on Electronics 2018' (NPE 2018)**.

ESDM Sector in India

- The ESDM sector in India consists of the following six segments –**Semiconductor design and manufacturing; Electronic components manufacturing; Information technology (IT) systems and hardware; Telecom products and equipment; Consumer electronics; and Strategic electronics.**
- India allows **100 percent FDI through the automatic route** in the ESDM sector.
- The Indian Government attaches high priority to electronics hardware manufacturing and it is one of the **important pillars of both "Make in India" and "Digital India"** programmes of Government of India.
- Besides the economic imperative, focus on electronics hardware manufacturing up to the **Chip level is required due to the growing security concerns.**
- Indian electronics hardware production has increased from INR 1,90,366 crore in 2014-15 to an estimated INR 3,87,525 crore (~USD 59 Billion) in 2017-18, registering a **Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 26.7%,** as against a growth rate of 5.5% in 2014-15.
- According to an ASSOCHAM report, **electronic imports** by India may touch $300bn by 2020.

Need for National Policy on Electronics

- The electronics hardware manufacturing sector faces lack of level playing field vis-à-vis competing nations on account of several disabilities which render domestic electronics hardware manufacturing uncompetitive.
- These inter-alia includes lack of adequate infrastructure, supply chain and logistics; high cost of finance; inadequate availability of quality power; inadequate components manufacturing base; limited focus on R&D by the industry and high degree of market access, leading to limited value addition.
- With the demand for electronics hardware expected to rise rapidly to about USD 400 Billion by 2023-24, India cannot afford to bear a huge foreign exchange outgo on import of electronics alone. Therefore, promoting domestic electronics hardware manufacturing, with high value addition is of critical importance.
- Implementation of the Schemes/ Programmes under the aegis of NPE 2012 has successfully consolidated the foundations for a competitive Indian ESDM value chain. The Government now seeks to build on that foundation to propel the growth of ESDM industry in the country.

Highlights of draft of the National Electronics Policy, 2018

- **Mobile Handsets:** The policy targets production of **one billion mobile handsets by 2025**, valued at $190 billion including export of 600 million mobile handsets valued at $110 billion and improving **ease of doing business for ESDM industry.**
- **Electronic Manufacturing Clusters: 20 Greenfield EMCs and three brownfield EMC projects** have been sanctioned with the project outlay of $550 million including $225 million from the government. It aims to facilitate cost effective loans for EMC.
- **Sub sector of Electronics:** The policy proposes to push

development of core competencies in all the sub-sectors of electronics including **electronic components and semiconductors, defence electronics, automotive electronics, industrial electronics, strategic electronics and fabless chip design.**

- **Tax Benefits:** The draft proposes suitable **direct tax benefits,** including inter-alia investment-linked deduction under Income Tax Act for electronics manufacturing sector.

- **Support:** It proposes to provide **support to skilled manpower in ESDM sector, export led growth, policy support and special package of incentives** for highly capital intensive projects.

- **Startup ecosystem:** The policy aims to also **push the startup ecosystem in emerging technology areas such as 5G, Internet of Things, artificial intelligence and machine learning,** and their applications in areas such as defence, agriculture, health, smart cities and automation.

- **Modified Special Incentive Package Scheme**: It also proposes **replacing the M-SIPS (Modified Special Incentive Package Scheme)** with schemes that are easier to implement such as interest subsidy and credit default guarantee, etc., in order to encourage new units and expansion of existing units in electronics manufacturing sector.

- **Environment**: It aims to promote research, innovation and support to industry **for green processes and sustainable e-Waste management**, including safe disposal of e-Waste in an environment friendly manner, development of e-Waste recycling industry and adoption of best practices in e-Waste management.

- **Global Presence:** It focuses to become a global leader in the Electronics Manufacturing Services (EMS) segment by promoting progressively higher value addition in manufacturing of electronic products.

- **Governance Structure:** Create specialized governance structures within the Government to cater to specific needs of the ESDM sector, in view of fast changes in technology and business models.

Bali Fintech Agenda

The **International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank** launched the **Bali Fintech Agenda.**

About Agenda

- The Bali Fintech Agenda is a set of **12 policy elements** established to help member **countries harness the benefits and opportunities of rapid advances in financial technology** (fintech), while at the same time also managing the risks that arise.
- The Agenda proposes a framework of **high-level issues that countries should consider in their own domestic policy discussions** and aims to guide staff from the two institutions in their own work and dialogue with national authorities.
- The 12 elements are distilled from members' own experiences and cover topics relating broadly to **enabling fintech, building the foundations of the digital economy, ensuring financial sector resilience, addressing risks, promoting international cooperation, improve cross-border payments and remittance transfer systems.**
- It provides a **framework to support the Sustainable Development Goals**, particularly in low-income countries, where access to financial services is low.

Fintech in India

- According to EY's Fintech Adoption Index 2017, India has the **second highest fintech adoption rate in the world.**
- With a range of options, including e-wallets, lending and insurance, the variety of services provided in this sector are immense and have changed the way consumers carry out their daily transactions.
- Fintech in India is especially advantageous, since the country boasts of an unrivalled youth demographic which is rapidly growing. Furthermore, smartphone penetration is likely to witness an upsurge - from 53% in 2014 to 64% by 2018.
- The financial services market in India is primarily untapped, with 40% of the population having no association with any bank and more than 80% of the transactions carried out through cash. This represents an opportunity for Fintech start-ups to massively spread their wings in different segments.

Challenges in India

- **Adoption of Fintech:** Adoption becomes complicated in an economy like India's which is dominated by micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Going digital for payments can be complicated.
- **Cost involved in Integration:** Integrating with Fintech doesn't come cheap. The cost can be prohibitive for MSMEs.
- **Regulatory framework:** Regulatory uncertainty in the fintech sector is posing a major challenge. This wouldrequire "the modification and adaptation of regulatory frameworks to contain risks of arbitrage, while recognizing that regulation should remain proportionate to the risks." The regulatory framework for entering in Indian market and performing as one is highly restrictive in nature.
- **Infrastructure:** Poor infrastructure in terms of Internet Connectivity, unbanked population and low financial literacy level are another hindrance.
- **Cash Dependency:** The conservative approach of users and merchants to deal in cash is really hard to change. Since it's not part of financial life but a way to their financial transactions.
- **Frauds**: Transaction can easily turn into fraud by tech people aware of glitches in software.
- **Lack of government support:** Lack of government support and some sort of

Incentives for protecting the Interest of Fintech in India is demoralizing the start and entrepreneurs at very basic level.

- **Lack of investors:** Fintech do not get the required seed capital and other required investment on time which make their operations and functioning really below the mark.

Way forward

- **Focusing on the end user:** QR codes have been viewed by fintech companies as a way to acquire merchants at a low cost. End customers are either unfamiliar with navigating the app, or the person sent to make the purchase does not have a smartphone, does not own and control a bank account, or both. Fintech providers have to consider this audience while developing a payment solution.

- **Ensure solution for better alternative:** The availability of small change, which is often refused by banks owing to high storage and transportation costs, inevitably finds its way to small merchants and households, and is used for low-value transactions. Fintech needs to tap the market by ensuring easy small transactions.

- **Identify and empower change agents:** Fintechs could offer business value to merchants for encouraging end customers to pay digitally. A dedicated helpline or interactive voice response service (IVRS) for merchants can help address ongoing issues with using the QR-UPI solution.

- **Establish clear business and customer value:** Many businesses, which operate in the low-income space, have low profit margins. However, digital financial solutions can lower costs or increase revenue at a marginal cost, driving business value. Hence understanding the need of market becomes really important.

- **Create an Enabling Policy Environment:** The creation of a 'regulatory sandbox' - a 'safe space' for businesses and startups to co-create innovative products, services and business models, without any immediate regulatory consequences and also providing cyber security becomes important.

- **Access to Risk Capital:** This is critical to fund innovative ideas and startups. It can be addressed by developing funding mechanisms, including the government setting up a fund of funds or by instituting a matching fund concept along with the private sector.

PILLARS OF A FINTECH ECOSYSTEMS

UNIVERSITIES AND RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS
Institutes support the fintech community by mentoring and assisting early stage companies and producing a more talented workforce

GOVERNMENT AND REGULATORS
They protect consumers through appropriate rules and provide supportive incentives to help fintech grow

FINTECH SOLUTION

INVESTORS
Angles, VCs and PE houses are all looking at fintech as a viable investment

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS
Banks are currently determining a suitable approach to engage with fintech companies and leverage their innovation

INCUBATORS, ACCELERATORS AND INNOVATION LABS
Incubators are offering a means for big business to engage & assist young companies meet their potential

TECH VENDORS
Technology vendors are exploring ways to embed fintech solutions in their solution stack

USERS
From cooperates to retail customers, many are considering how they would leverage fintech to improve their services or experience, respectively

STARTUPS
Nimble and innovative, startups are enabling many elements of traditional financial services

Fourth Industrial Revolution

World Economic Forum launches **Centre for Fourth Industrial Revolution** in India.

More on the news

- The centre would be based in **Maharashtra** and it has selected **drones**, **artificial intelligence** and **blockchain** as the first three projects.
- It will work in collaboration with the government on a national level to **co-design new policy frameworks and protocols for emerging technology** alongside leaders from business, academia, start-ups and international organizations.
- **NITI Aayog will coordinate the partnership** on behalf of the government and the work of the centre among multiple ministries.

Impacts of Fourth Industrial Revolution

It was coined by Klaus Schwab in 2016. It fuses physical, digital and biological spheres, and is transforming global production systems. Advanced technologies, such as the internet of things, artificial intelligence, blockchain, robotics and additive manufacturing, are changing the future of manufacturing. Its impacts include-

- If harnessed correctly, this technological change can bring about immense **economic opportunities** including new and better ways of doing business, the creation of new industries, new and better-quality jobs, higher GDP growth, and improved living standards.
- Workplaces and **organizations become "smarter"** and more **efficient** as machines, and humans start to work together, and the use of connected devices enhance supply chains and warehouses.
- There is also the capacity to **reduce costs** significantly, to reduce the necessity for businesses to have a physical presence, and to create opportunities for new, small-scale producers to enter the increasingly globalised markets.

- There is a **destruction effect** as technology-fuelled disruption and automation **substitute capital for labour**, forcing workers to become unemployed or to reallocate their skills elsewhere. It will be accompanied by a **capitalization effect** in which the demand for new goods and services increases and leads to the creation of new occupations, businesses and even industries.
  - o **A McKinsey report** estimates that, by the year 2030, at least one-third of the activities of 60% of all the occupations could be automated and globally, up to 375 million people may need to change jobs or learn new skills within the next 12 years.

Fourth Industrial Revolution and India Opportunities for India

- India can play a pivotal role in shaping the global fourth Industrial revolution due to the benefits of a better **demographic dividend** (By 2020, the median age in India will be just 28, compared to 37 in China and the US).
- India can reap maximum **benefits of its expansion** in telecommunication sector, huge increase in data usage and availability due to government initiatives like Digital India campaign, Start-up India and the Atal Innovation Mission etc.
- **Artificial intelligence** (AI) can be used effectively to reduce poverty, improve the lives of farmers and make the lives of the differently abled simpler. AI has vast applications across sectors – ranging from medicine to criminal justice, to manufacturing, to finance.
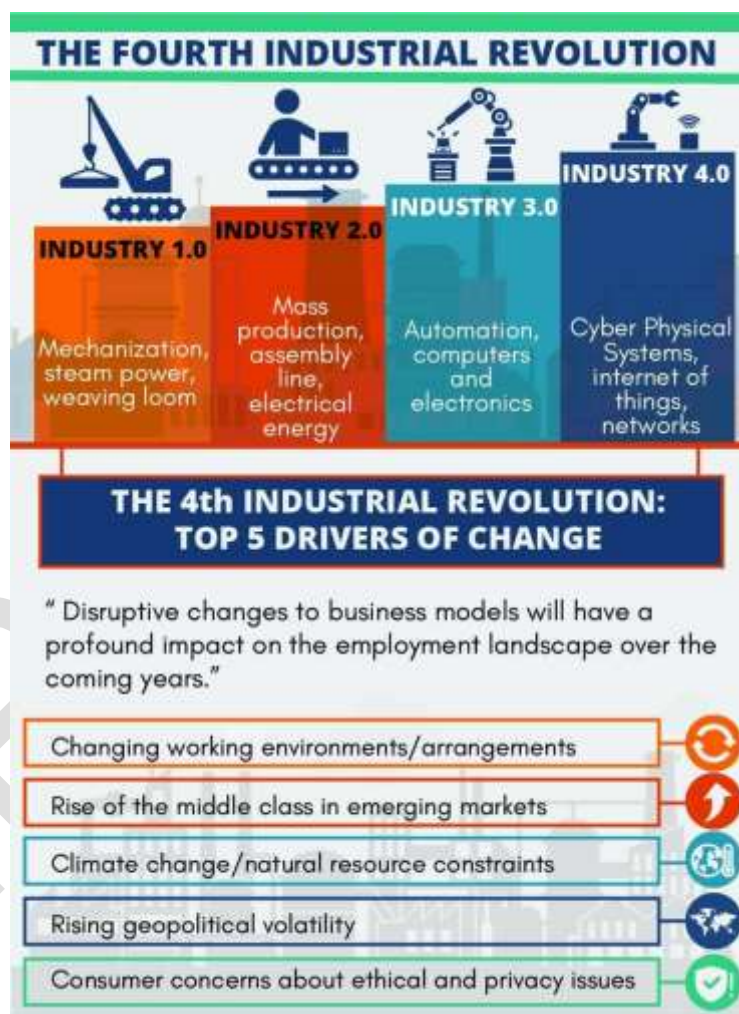- With the right mix of accelerators – including **regulatory frameworks**, **educational ecosystems** and **government incentives** – India can lead the Fourth Industrial Revolution while

simultaneously enhancing the quality, equity and sustainability of its own growth and development outcomes.

Challenges for India

- Apart from shrinking jobs, India's large number of **low skilled youth** will also face major challenges in big industries as well as MSMEs because **product cycles will become very short** and this will lead to a lot of **uncertainty** and **unpredictability**.
- Small scale manufacturing faces deep **infrastructural problems** as well as **inadequate access to credit** which will be a hinderance in benefiting from the changes**.**
- The highly educated and technically skilled people will command huge salaries in large manufacturing enterprises using robotics and artificial intelligence which will create a huge income gap between the skilled and the unskilled workforce.

Way forward

With the right mix of accelerators - including **regulatory frameworks, educational ecosystems and government incentives** - India can lead the fourth industrial revolution, while simultaneously enhancing the quality, equity and sustainability of its own growth and development outcomes. Among various steps required, following are some important ones-

- Companies should **invest in their technical infrastructure and data analysing capabilities**. All businesses must be making a move to be smart, connected organizations or they will soon fall behind the competition.
- **Education and training systems** need to adapt to better prepare people for the flexibility and critical thinking skills they will need in the future workplace.
- India needs to strike the right balance between vocational and **new digital industrial skills**, boosting **education in data science and coding** but also providing greater training in **traditional**

manufacturing skills.

- India must take a pragmatic approach to quickly **boost traditional manufacturing** while **adopting new digital industrial technologies** that will secure long-term competitiveness.

THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

INDUSTRY 1.0 — Mechanization, steam power, weaving loom

INDUSTRY 2.0 — Mass production, assembly line, electrical energy

INDUSTRY 3.0 — Automation, computers and electronics

INDUSTRY 4.0 — Cyber Physical Systems, internet of things, networks

THE 4th INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION: TOP 5 DRIVERS OF CHANGE

" Disruptive changes to business models will have a profound impact on the employment landscape over the coming years."

- Changing working environments/arrangements
- Rise of the middle class in emerging markets
- Climate change/natural resource constraints
- Rising geopolitical volatility
- Consumer concerns about ethical and privacy issues

Draft Policy On Mariculture

A **draft national policy on Mariculture** has been formulated to ensure **sustainable farmed seafood production** for the benefit of food and nutritional security of the nation.

About Mariculture

Mariculture is a specialised branch of aquaculture involving the **cultivation of economically important marine plants and animals** in the sea or any other water body having **tidal influence** and includes onshore facilities like hatcheries, nursery rearing and grow out systems using seawater. It is generally practiced in the sea up to 12 nm from the coast and also in water bodies which have a salinity regime close to seawater.

Status and Opportunities of Mariculture in India

- In India, the marine capture fisheries is characterised by increased and excessive fishing effort, overexploitation of certain resources from the inshore fishing grounds and increased conflicts among different stakeholders in the sector.
- Further, India needs to produce about 18 million tonnes of fish by 2030 as compared to the 10 million tonnes that we produce through capture and culture today. This would necessitate increasing our aquaculture production from about 4.9 million tonnes now to 12 million tonnes.
- Hence, steps for the emergence of a mariculture production sector is the only option for meeting the demand for fish in the coming years. Considering this it is stated in the National Policy on Marine Fisheries 2017 that "Mariculture if carried out can play an important role in increasing fish production from the coastal waters."
- Also, development of a mariculture sector also **strengthens** the **Blue Revolution policy of GOI.**

Related Facts

- Globally, aquaculture has emerged as the **fastest growing food production sector** with an annual growth rate of >6% in the last two decades. Mariculture is the **fastest growing subsector** of aquaculture and has very high growth potential.
- In 2016, mariculture contributed around 28.7 million tonnes of food fish which formed about **35.8% of the global food fish aquaculture production**.

Key features of the Policy:
• Mariculture Area Development: It has mooted mariculture zones by demarcating special areas in the sea.
Satellite remote sensing data and GIS will be used to identify potential zones.
•Mariculture Systems and Species: The policy allows farming exotic and genetically modified species in closed mariculture systems after stringent risk assessment and monitoring.
•Seed and Feed: In order to address the seed and feed scarcity, innovative schemes will be developed.
•It seeks to provide additional livelihood options to the coastal communities.
•Leasing Policy: Referring to the security of the mariculture enterprises in the open sea waters, the policy has made provisions for leasing the water bodies and regulating the activities.

Fisheries & Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs chaired by the Prime Minister has given its approval for creation of special Fisheries and Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund (FIDF).

Features of FIDF
- **Funding:** The approval entails an **estimated fund size** of Rs.7,522 crore, comprising Rs.5,266.40 crore to be raised by the Nodal Loaning Entities (NLEs), Rs. 1,316.6 crore beneficiaries contribution and Rs.939.48 crore budgetary support from the Government of India.
- **Nodal Loaning Entities:** National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), National Cooperatives Development Corporation (NCDC) and all scheduled Banks shall be the Nodal Loaning Entities.
- **Financing investment activities:** FIDF would provide concessional finance to State Governments/UTs and State entities, cooperatives, individuals and entrepreneurs etc., for taking up of the identified investment activities of fisheries development.

Fisheries Sector in India
- India has **vast potential** for fisheries considering long coastline of about 8118 km, and an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 2.02 million sq Km apart from the inland water resources.
- India is the s**econd largest producer** of fish and fresh water fish in the world.
- **Fish production** in India is estimated at 11.4 million tonnes, out of which 68% is registered from inland fisheries sector and the remaining 32% from marine sector.
- Constituting about 6.3% of the global fish production, the sector contributes to 1.1% of the GDP and 5.15% of the agricultural GDP.
- The fisheries sector is a source of **livelihood for over 14.49 million people** engaged fully, partially or in subsidiary activities pertaining to the sector. Besides, an equal number are engaged in ancillary activities in fisheries and aquaculture.
- **Blue Revolution:** Integrated Development and Management of Fisheries approved by the Government provides for a focused development and management of the fisheries sector to increase both fish production and fish productivity from aquaculture and fisheries resources of the inland and marine fisheries sector including deep sea fishing.

Benefits of FIDF
- **Rise in production:** To augment fish production to achieve its target of 15 million tonne (MT) by 2020 set under **the Blue Revolution**; and to achieve a sustainable growth of 8% -9% thereafter to reach the fish production to the level of about 20 MT by 2022-23.
- **Employment opportunities:** It will give employment to over 9.40 lakh fishers/fishermen/fisher folk and other entrepreneurs in fishing and allied activities.
- **Rise in Investment:** The credit facilities will help attract investment in creation and management of fisheries infrastructure facilities.
- **Innovation**: Facilitate adoption of **new technologies** such as Open sea cage farming.

Rural Haats In Gram Scheme

The Centre has identified 1,878 rural haats for modernisation and development of infrastructure through MGNREGA till March 2019 under Gramin Agriculture Markets (GrAM) programme in the first phase.

More on News

- In total, infrastructure in around 22,000 rural haats is to be upgraded and modernised with a corpus of almost Rs 20 billion spread over 2-3 years.
- Of this in the first phase, Centre has identified around 1,878 rural haats, which includes, the maximum around 564 haats in Andhra Pradesh, followed by 188 in Gujarat, 186 in Rajasthan, 182 in Tamil Nadu and 176 in Telangana**.**

Rural Haats Existing in the Country

- **Ownership:** These are owned by Local Bodies (Panchayats/councils), Agricultural/ Horticultural Departments of State Governments, Cooperatives Marketing Boards/APMCs and Private Sector.
- **Quantity:** As per information provided by State Agricultural Marketing Boards/State Governments, there are 22941 Rural Haats
  - o Under local Bodies including Councils- 11811
  - o Under Marketing Board/APMCs- 1274
  - o Under Private sector (Trust, individuals, etc.)- 9856

However, State Marketing Boards provided only numbers
without other information like location, etc on village haats under local bodies and under private sector.

Functioning of Rural Markets

- The rural markets which are **multi commodity in nature** are first contact point of market where farmer – producers sell their surplus to local consumers.

- In some of these markets **livestock is also assembled for sale** in bigger markets. Also non farm products for daily needs are sold.
- In Rural Markets, trade is characterized by **direct sales of small quantities of produce** by producers to village traders and by retail sales to rural consumers.
- Besides goods, that are not produced locally, are brought by smaller; occasional traders to retail to local population.

Why Upgrade Rural Markets into GrAMs?

- As per the **recommendations of Ashok Dalwai Report on doubling farmers' income**, the rural periodic markets need to be upgraded into a function that enables aggregation and transportation from village level to wholesale market.
- It has been advised to **build on the available infrastructure** to establish large number of primary rural agricultural markets to provide the **following two services**:
  - o Direct marketing between producers and consumers
  - o Aggregation platforms for the small lots of farmers
- These markets, through their interconnections, are a farmer's main connection point with the **inter and intra regional marketing system**. Under GrAMs, infrastructure and business linkages with markets will get a boost. This will also **ensure participation of small and marginal farmers** to markets especially eNAM.
- **Lower Prices:** The ruling prices in these primary markets are invariably much lower. Price variations are attributed to **lack of infrastructure** such as storage, transport, etc.
- Due to lack of infrastructure, many times the **farmer is forced to sell** at harvest

time, at low prices, only to buy back in off season at higher prices.

- There is an **increasing awareness** amongst the rural population about advantages of selling their produce at market points to secure competitive prices.

- **Rising Production:** Awareness, coupled with increase in Agricultural & Horticultural production, will generate larger arrivals in Rural Markets. Handling of larger turnovers will necessitate providing appropriate infrastructure facilities at these markets.

Issues in developing GrAMs:
- **Parallel Acts:** The issue in developing Rural periodic markets are the parallel acts i.e. which administer the ownership and operation of these markets. For example- multiplicity of regulatory Acts- Agricultural Produce market act 1972, Panchayat Act and Municipal Act etc. acting in parallel has resulted in absence of unidirectional development.

- **Role of Private sector:** The upgradation of rural markets will require greater role of public and private sector in providing enabling environment for growth, enhancing market facilities and market information. A **PPP model** for developing these markets needs to be developed.

- **Capacity building and awareness creation:** Capacity building and awareness building of farmers and traders about marketing is required to be in place. Empowering farmers with information, services and linkages through training will help in bringing the desired change in rural markets faster.

Agriculture Census

The 10th Agriculture Census 2015-16 was released by the Agriculture Ministry.

Key Findings of Provisional Agriculture Census 2015-16 vis-à-vis 2010-11 Agri-Census

Description	2015-16	2010-11	Remarks
Total number of operational holdings	146 million	138 million	Increase of 5.33%. (Share of SC- 11.91%, ST-8.72%)
Total operated area	157.14 million HA	159.59 million ha	Decrease of 1.53%.
Average size of operational Holding	1.08 hectares ha	1.15 ha	Declining average land holding size
Share of female operational holders	13.87 %	12.79 %	Rise in female participation
Small and Marginal holdings (0-2 ha)	86.21 %	84.97 %	Increasing fragmentation of land holdings leading to farmer distress among other farming issues
Semi-medium and medium operational holdings (2-10 ha)	13.22 %	14.29%	
Large holdings (10.00 ha & above)	0.57%	0.71%	
Share in Operated Area			
Small and Marginal holdings (0-2 ha)	47.34%	44.31%	• Share of larger land holdings in total cultivated area is declining while smaller holdings on rise.
Semi-medium and medium operational holdings (2-10 ha)	43.61%	44.82%	• As per Social groups, share of SC- 8.61%, ST-11.4%
Large holdings (10.00 ha & above)	9.04%	10.59%	• Female share in land holding is rising
Females	11.57%	10.36%	which is a positive sign

Other Details of report

- The individual, joint and institutional holdings have shown a growth of 5.04 per cent, 7.07 per cent and 10.88 per cent, respectively.
- Out of 36 States/UTs in the country, it was found that 14 States viz. Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamilnadu, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal account for about 91.03% in terms of number of operational holdings and about 88.08% in terms of area operated in the country.
- In a total of 146 million operational holdings in the country, the highest number of operational holders belonged to Uttar Pradesh (23.82 million) followed by Bihar (16.41 million) and Maharashtra (14.71 million).
- At all India level, percentage increase in number of operational holdings in 2015-16 as compared to Agriculture Census 2010-11 worked out to 5.33% among states, the highest variation was found in the case of Madhya Pradesh (12.74%) followed by Andhra Pradesh (11.85%), Rajasthan (11.12%), Kerala (11.02%) etc.
- Some states also showed decline in number of operational holdings. The sharpest fall has been in Goa (28.17%) and lowest in Manipur (0.09%). However, **operated area has shown**

declining trends in most of the states.
- [ ] With an average size of 5ha, Nagaland is home to India's largest farms.

Analysis of the Agri-Census data

- While farms got more fragmented between 2010-11 and 2015-16, **holdings continue to be inequitably distributed**.
- The increase in farm land holdings, a consistent trend since the 1970s, has been slowing down in the past 20 years. In a positive development, there is a **rise in the number of female land holders**, a possible indicator of higher involvement in farm activities. The trend may reflect **migration of men to cities for non-agricultural activities** and also explain slowing down of land division as rural people seek alternate livelihoods.
- The figures show **landholdings have doubled in past 45 years** (from 71 million in 1970-71 to 146 million in 2015-16), resulting in decline in average size of farms by more than 50% — a real worry for policy-makers as this makes agriculture unremunerative for farmers.
- Similarly, there is decrease in the operated area from 159.59 million hectares in 2010-11 to 157.14 million hectares in 2015-16, showing a decrease of 1.53% - it means **diversion of farm land for non-agriculture activities** during the period.
- The number of small holdings in the country has grown in five years, due to fragmentation of land, while that of medium and large holdings have gone down.

Reasons for land fragmentation

- Natural population growth
- Inadequate growth in off-farm employment opportunities to absorb the surplus workforce.
- Rise of nuclear families leading to division of family landholdings High indebtedness which leads to selling of a patch of land while repayment

Problems associated with fragmentation of Land holdings

- **Small scale of production:** It inhibits the ability of farmers to reap economies of scale in agricultural operations and invest in mechanisation. It further leads to decline in productivity and thus declining land capability.
- **Low Prices:** Further the small and marginal farmers have low bargaining power, since they have very little marketable surplus and are price takers in the market.
- **Low income:** As per NSSO Survey (2012-13) the median agricultural incomes were about Rs. 19,250 or about Rs 1600 per month in 2012-13.
- **Indebtedness:** As per Economic Survey-2016-17, there is an **inverse relationship** between indebtedness and the size of land holding. In Bihar and West Bengal, more than 80% of agricultural households with marginal landholdings are indebted.
- The existence of a large number of small and marginal farmers, close to 126 million according to the Agri-Census, means it is **challenging for the government's extension arms** to reach them with new technology and farm support schemes.
- Further, these 126 million farmers together owned about 74.4 million hectares of land — or an average holding of just 0.6 hectares each—**not enough to produce surpluses** which can financially sustain their families, explaining the rising distress in Indian agriculture.
- Overall it makes farmers **prone to all sort of agricultural risks** including Production risks, Climatic risks, Price risks, Credit risks, Market risks, and Policy risks.

What is Agriculture Census?

- Agriculture Census in India is **conducted at five-year intervals** to collect data on structural aspects of farm holdings. The basic statistical unit for data collection is 'Operational Holding'.

- The first census was conducted with reference year 1970-71. So far, nine censuses have been done and this is the 10th in series.
- It is **carried in three phases**: In the first phase of the census, data on primary characteristics like number of operational holdings and area operated by different size classes (marginal, small, semi-medium, medium and large), social groups, (SC and ST and others), gender (male/female), types of holding etc. is collected.
- In the **second phase** of the census, detailed data on characteristics of operational holdings such as land use, irrigation status, tenancy particulars are collected based on samples from 20% of villages in each tehsil.
- While in the **third and final phase**, data on the pattern of input use by operational holdings is collected. This is also known as Input Survey.

Operational holding has been defined as all land used wholly or partly for agricultural production and is operated as one technical unit by one person alone or with others without regard to the title, legal form, size or location.

Total operated area, which includes both cultivated and uncultivated area provided part of it is put to farm production during the reference period.

Way Forward

- **Scale-up the farms:** There are various ways such as land pooling, land leasing and contract farming etc. All this should be done within proper legal mechanism.
- **Model Land Leasing Law:** NITI Aayog has formulated a Model Agricultural Land Leasing Act, 2016 to both recognize the rights of the tenant and safeguard interest of landowners. A dedicated cell for land reforms was also set up in NITI Aayog.
- **Diversify Agriculture:** Horticulture products must also be included along with traditional wheat and rice farming. Schemes like Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH) and Operation Greens would help farmers in this regard.
- **Sustainable prices**: Schemes like GrAM (Gramin Agriculture Markets) and eNAM would be bringing a competitive price discovery model for smallest of the farmers.
- **Development of manufacturing sector:** This will ensure the surplus workforce to be absorbed into the productive work and will reduce the pressure on agricultural land. Development of MSMEs should be a part of this as they employ most of the non-farm workers. India is currently in the process of formulating a new Industrial Policy aimed at making India a manufacturing hub by promoting 'Make in India'.
- **Development of Rural sector:** a comprehensive rural development strategy that focuses on rural infrastructure to create off-farm rural employment opportunities, reduce labour mobility costs, increase education and skills in combination with measures regarding land consolidation and better land management, and finally improve the functioning of land markets, in particular the rental markets, may be the best means to address the problem of land fragmentation. Such a cross-sectoral approach would be more likely to contribute successfully to farm consolidation and farm development and, in general, to an improvement in rural household welfare.

Agriculture Census

The Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) has launched a national level entrepreneurship awareness campaign 'Udyam Abhilasha'**.**

About Udyam Abhilasha

- The campaign is to promote entrepreneurship in the 115 aspirational districts identified by NITI Aayog. It would create and strengthen cadre of more than 800 trainers to provide **entrepreneurship training to the aspiring youths** across these districts thus encouraging them to enter the admired segment of entrepreneurs.
- SIDBI has partnered with Common service centres**, e-Governance Services India Limited**, a Special Purpose Vehicle, set up by the Ministry of Electronics and IT for implementing the campaign.
- Its **objectives** include:-

o   To inspire rural youth in aspirational districts to be entrepreneurs by assisting them to set up their own enterprise.
   o   To impart **trainings through digital medium** across the country.
   o   **To Create business opportunities** for CSC VLEs.
   o   To focus on women aspirants in these aspirational districts to **encourage women entrepreneurship.**
   o   To assist participants to become bankable and **avail credit facility** from banks to set up their own enterprise.
- **CSC Village Level entrepreneurs (VLEs)** would play the role of catalyst for these aspiring entrepreneurs. It would provide training, support to the aspirants to establish new units by assisting them in availing loans and make them aware about various initiatives of Government of India like **Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana** and educate the youths in these districts on **business literacy.**

About the Aspirational Districts Programme

- The '**Transformation of Aspirational Districts**' programme aims to quickly and effectively transform the chosen 115 districts, with at least one from 28 states (excluding Goa).
- The broad contours of the programme are **Convergence** (of Central & State Schemes), **Collaboration** (of Central, State level 'Prabhari' Officers & District Collectors), and **Competition** among districts driven by a mass Movement.
- With States as the main drivers, this program will **focus on the strength of each district, identify low-hanging fruits** for immediate improvement, measure progress, and rank districts.
- One of the main elements of the strategy is to **identify selected Key Performance Indicators** (KPIs), **monitor the progress** made in these indicators and carry out annual ranking on the incremental progress made. The KPIs chosen are to be district specific.
- For this purpose, 5 sectors have been identified -Health & Nutrition, Education, Agriculture and Water Resources, Basic Infrastructure and Financial Inclusion and Skill Formation.

About SIDBI

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

National Council For Vocational Education & Training

The Cabinet approved the merger of National Council of Vocational Training (NCVT) and National Skill Development Agency (NSDA) into National Council for Vocational Education and Training (NCVET) for improving the outcome of the Skill India mission.

About NCVET

- It will **regulate functions** of entities engaged in vocational education and training and establish minimum standards for functions of such entities.
- The various **functions of NCVET** includes
  - **Recognition and regulation** of awarding bodies, assessment bodies and skill related information providers.
  - **Approval of qualifications** developed by awarding bodies and Sector Skill Councils (SSCs).
  - **Indirect regulation of vocational training institutes** through awarding bodies and assessment agencies.
  - Research and information dissemination.
  - Grievance redressal.

Benefits

- This institutional reform will lead to **improvement in quality and market relevance of skill development programs** lending credibility to vocational education and training encouraging greater private investment and employer participation in the skills space.
- This in turn will help **achieve the twin objectives** of enhancing aspirational value of vocational education and of increasing skilled manpower furthering the Prime Minister's agenda of making India the skill capital of the world.
- This is also expected to **facilitate the ease of doing business** by providing a steady supply of skilled workforce to the industry and services.

Other recent government initiatives for Skill development

- **Indian Institute of Skills:** The Union Cabinet has approved the setting up of Indian Institute of Skills (IISs) at different locations across the country in Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode.
- **Global Skills Park:** It is an international skilling institute to provide students with international training methods in world class machinery, tools & equipment. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a $150 million loan to establish the first Global Skills Park in Madhya Pradesh.

Fixed-Term Employment Rules

The Union Ministry of Labour has urged States to issue orders permitting fixed-term employment (FTE) across all industries.

Background

- As per the Industrial Employment (Standing Order) Act 1946, Fixed-term employment was initially made available only to **apparel manufacturing sector** in 2016 and then to **Footwear manufacturing sector** in 2017 through amendments**.**
- Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Central (Amendment) Rules, 2018 in March notification allowed all industries to hire workers on contract with a fixed tenure.
- But under the Industrial Employment Act, 1946, the central government can frame rules for industries belonging to the central sphere only i.e. for central PSUs and Private sector units in the civil aviation, banking and finance, telecommunications, insurance, ports, dock, and mines sectors only.
- Also, Labour is a Concurrent List subject and without a Parliamentary ratification, States are not really obliged to follow these orders.
- This created confusion in private sector firms which do not belong to central sphere and prevented them from taking the benefits of this reform.
- In order to plug this gap, the Central Government has asked the states to issue separate notifications for the same.

What is fixed term employment?

- FTE is a contract in which a company hires an employee for a specific period of time.
- The employee is not on the payroll of the company.
- Their payment is fixed in advance and is not altered till the term expires.
- Such contracts are given out for temporary jobs and not for routine jobs. It cannot be used to replace existing employees who are on a long leave.
- Such workers are entitled to all statutory benefits (work hours, wages etc.) available to a permanent worker in the same establishment. However, other benefits such as Provident Fund is not available to them.
- The employers can terminate the contract on certain grounds (fraud, non-performance, etc.) even before the due date. The temporary worker having completed 3 months in service shall get 2 weeks' notice before termination.

Benefits of Fixed-Term Employment:

- **Fixed wages and work conditions:** The workers are ensured to have a fixed wage and work conditions from before. This provides them livelihood security for the given period.
- **Accountability:** The workers are entitled to have statutory benefits. Therefore, they gain greater sense of accountability from the principal employer.
- **Forecast labour costs:** The fixed term contract enables the business to forecast their labour costs. It also provides relief against protests related to salary hikes etc.
- **Short term Employment shortage:** During peak seasons, industries face shortage of workers. Fixed-term employment will help them to hire and remove workers according to their requirements without extra legislative burdens. FTEs are particularly useful in executing specific projects, such as in the infrastructure sector, apparel, footwear and sections of the media.
- **Commercial Competitiveness**: Due to in-built flexibility in hiring and firing the workers, the business will

be able to safeguard its commercial competitiveness through finding suitable employees.

- **Work Environment:** It will become better as workers working conditions would be better in terms of working hours, wages etc.
- **Middle men:** The role of middle men in providing labour will be minimised henceforth.
- **Job Creation:** FTE is expected to boost job creation, provided the cost of capital does not remain so low as to deter labour use
- **Labour Reform:** It can be considered a major labour law reform and a positive step towards ease of doing business as it removes restriction on firing.

Criticism against the move

- **Hire-and-fire:** All central trade unions are protesting against the government's policy of hire-and-fire. Trade unions will go unrecognised by the move.
- **Removal of Safety nets:** The government has enabled the employers to sidestep even the minimum protection offered by the Factories Act 1948, Industrial Disputes Act 1947 and Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act 1970.
- **Undermines Job Regularisation:** Collective bargaining talks for wage increase will not be possible. Business will have no incentive to regularise the jobs.
- **Against the earlier judgments of Supreme court:** The courts have allowed FTE only in seasonal activities. The Supreme Court has ruled earlier that a fixed-term contract worker who had worked for 7 years should be regularised.
- **Industries will be converted into Sweatshops:** The major reason of conflict of workers with management (e.g. in Maruti-Suzuki incident) is common issues of non-recognition of trade unions, temporary workers far outnumbering regular workers and paying

them very low wages. The move will encourage the same.

What needs to be done?

- The FTE conditions need to be defined clearly to make them acceptable to both employers and employees.
  - o The present rules are silent about the minimum or maximum term of an FTE and the maximum permissible number of consecutive FTEs.
  - o In China, a worker employed without an FTE for a year is deemed to be on an open-ended contract. She is considered a permanent employee after two successive renewals.
- The norms should be arrived at in a transparent, consensual manner. Labour reforms will not be politically acceptable in the absence of a better social safety net.
- Countries with flexible labour markets have superior and state-funded health and education facilities.
- Since labour comes under Concurrent list, a suitable and well discussed legislation for FTE should come through Parliament.

Poverty And Shared Prosperity 2018

World Bank has released its report on global poverty **'Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2018: Piecing Together the Poverty Puzzle'.**

Notable Observations

- The percentage of people living in extreme poverty (less than $1.90 a day) globally fell to a new low. In the 25 years from 1990 to 2015, the extreme poverty rate dropped an average of a percentage point per year – from nearly 36% to 10%. But the rate dropped only one percentage point in the two years from 11% in 2013 to 10% in 2015.
- More recently, **South Asia** has made impressive inroads against extreme poverty, helping to reduce the global rate further. The number of poor in South Asia dropped to 216 million people in 2015, compared to half a billion in 1990. Between 1990 and 2015, the world experienced a 25-percentage point drop in extreme poverty against a 35 percentage-point drop in South Asia. This decline in extreme poverty is much faster than in the rest of the world.
- **Extreme poverty is becoming more concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa** because of the region's slower rates of growth, problems caused by conflict and weak institutions, and a lack of success in channeling growth into poverty reduction.
- **About half of the world's countries now have poverty rates below 3 percent**, but the report finds that the world as a whole is not on track to achieve the target of less than 3 percent of the world living in extreme poverty by 2030.
- These contrasting regional poverty trends have two important implications:
  o First, the primary focus of the international community's efforts to eliminate the worst forms of deprivation must remain firmly in Africa and those few other countries elsewhere with very high poverty rates.
  o Also, the plight of billions of people living above US$1.90, who are still very poor by the standards of their own societies, should be taken care of.

New Measures of Poverty

To expand the understanding of poverty as a complex, multifaceted problem and identify pockets of people who are impoverished but have remained unnoticed, the World Bank introduces **new measures of poverty**. The new measures can enhance policy dialogue, particularly in middle-income countries, where extreme poverty is less prevalent, but where the higher poverty lines and the new multidimensional poverty measure reveal there is still much work to be done.

1. **A new multidimensional poverty measure:** Similar to Global Multidimensional Poverty Index, it recognizes that access to education, health, electricity, water, sanitation, and physical and environmental security are critical for well-being.
   o It provides a global picture using comparable data across 119 countries for 2013 (representing 45 percent of the world's population) combining **consumption or income** with measures of **education** and access to **basic infrastructure services**.
   o China and India are not a part of this exercise because of data availability.
2. **New Poverty lines of US$3.20 and US$5.50 per person per day**, expressed in 2011 PPP. The value of these lines is derived from the typical poverty line in lower- and upper-middle-income countries, respectively.
   o **Why higher set of Poverty Lines?** Majority of people and most of the world's poor now live in middle-income countries. To reflect this shift and the rise in what may constitute basic needs for many people new

measures are introduced. These higher-valued poverty lines reflect social assessments of what defines minimum basic needs in countries at these income levels.

o **Poverty estimates on new sets of Poverty Lines**- Nearly half the world (46 percent) lives on less than US$5.50 per day. Sub-Saharan Africa leads with 84.5% of its population living under $5.5 a day followed by South Asia (81.4%).

3. **The Societal Poverty Line (SPL)** reflecting how monetary definitions of poverty at the national level vary with the overall income in a society.

o **What is Societal Poverty Line?** The SPL is a **combination of the absolute IPL and a poverty line that is relative to the median income level** of each country. Specifically, it is equal in value to either the IPL or US$1.00 plus half of daily median consumption in the country, whichever is greater.

o **Features of SPL**
   i. The value of the **SPL will never be less than the IPL**. But, after a certain point as countries get richer, the value of the SPL will increase as the consumption level of the median individual in that country increases.
   ii. Although the SPL can change in real terms over time, it is constant in value across countries that are at the same level of median consumption or income. Because the SPL is constructed to reflect, on average, national poverty lines at different levels of median consumption or income, it provides a useful measure of global poverty that aligns well with national assessments of poverty.
   iii. The proposed SPL is also **relevant to SDG target 10.2** aimed at the social, economic, and political inclusion of all.

o **Poverty on the basis of SPL**
   i. **Present level of SPL Poverty:** Number of people who are poor stood at 2.1 billion **(28 percent)** as of 2015, **almost three times more than those living under the US$1.90 level (10%)**.
   ii. **Trend:** The percentage of societal poor in the global population has fallen steadily since 1990, but still at a much slower rate than the decline of extreme poverty. In 1990, the rate of societal poverty (45 percent) was about one-fourth greater than the rate of extreme poverty (36 percent).

4. **Individual Level of poverty** looking into intra-household inequality among various age-groups and gender.

   • **Why to measure individual level of poverty?** The common approach assigns all individuals within a household to the same poverty status as the household. However, this masks potential differences in poverty among household members. Ignoring these decreases the effectiveness of common approaches to targeting poverty reduction interventions and the take-up of these interventions because they do not address the needs and constraints of the poorest individuals.

   o In the absence of poverty data on individuals, perceptions about differences in poverty by sex and age are rarely supported by evidence.

   o More reliable poverty estimates on individuals would facilitate a better understanding of the characteristics of poverty and its intergenerational transmission, the interventions appropriate for different types of individuals, and the more effective targeting of social protection and broader development programs. Such programs often rely on

approaches targeted to households but may fail to reach potentially poor beneficiaries if many of these live in households not identified as poor.

o Household composition, particularly the presence of dependents and the type of earners, influences gender differences in poverty over the life cycle.

o Intrahousehold differences in consumption and poverty are widespread. In most cases, women and children are allocated a smaller share of the households' resources than men.

o The multidimensional poverty measure is de facto only partially individualized; only 30 percent of deprivations are measured among individuals. Multidimensional poverty is more prevalent among women than among men in all countries, with the largest gender gap in Iraq (54 percent versus 38 percent). **A significant gender gap in multidimensional poverty is also found in India.**

- **Major observations on Individual level of Poverty**
  o Women and children are often disproportionately affected by poverty, but with considerable variation across countries. Worldwide, 104 women live in poor households for every 100 men. However, in South Asia, 109 women live in poor households for every 100 men.

  o Women in poorer countries often withdraw from the labor force and lose their earning potential when they reach reproductive age. **The gender gap in poverty rates is largest during the reproductive years** when care and domestic responsibilities, which are socially assigned to women, overlap and conflict with productive activities. It is well documented that female labor force participation declines during women's reproductive years, particularly if they have young children.

  o **Resources are not shared equally within poor households**, especially when it comes to more prized consumption items. Evidence also shows complex dynamics at work within households that go beyond gender and age divides. For example, a woman's poverty level may be related to her position as mother versus wife of the household head.

  o Nearly **one child in five lives in a poor household**. Children are twice as likely as adults to live in poor households.

GS - IV

Gandhian Ethics

Gandhi and Morality

- The "highest form of morality" in Gandhi's ethical system is the practice of altruism (self-sacrificing behaviour performed for the benefit of others). For Gandhiji "true morality" disregards loss or gain, life or death, and is ever ready to sacrifice the self for an ideal.
- His religiosity was also unique, for he was a rationalist among believers and a believer amid rationalists. He says that 'the true sign of man's nobility is the fact that, instead of being driven about like a cloud before the wind, he stands firm and does what he deems proper'. He exerted that "morality should be observed as a religion".
- For Gandhiji, the substance of truth is morality, and non-violence is its essential part. Both need to be practiced because Truth finds expression through non-violence.

Gandhi on Violence

Most philosophers equate Violence with hatred, and non-violence with love. But, Gandhi focuses on the **violence of the status quo**: economic violence, cultural violence, psychological violence, and so forth. For Gandhi, if X is accumulating wealth and power, and his neighbour is in great need, and X does nothing to help alleviate the suffering of the other, then X contributes to and is complicit in the violence of the status quo.

Gandhi on Self-Realisation (Realisation of ultimate truth):

- He considers self-realisation as the summum bonum (ultimate purpose and goal) of life. For him,
  - Self-realisation presupposes a search for truth.
  - Himsa (Violence) makes complete self-realisation impossible.
  - Himsa against another is himsa against the self

- **Happiness** in Gandhi's metaphysics is expressed as "an enlightened realisation of dignity and a craving for human liberty which prizes itself above mere selfish satisfaction of personal comforts and material wants", while the meaning of life is based on striving to actualise what he calls the law of love in action (the scheme of the universe).

Gandhi on western pattern of production and consumption:

- He considered the manner of industrialisation in West as unsustainable and a chaos if adopted by populous countries like India and China.
- He believed in meeting needs rather than multiplying wants and meeting them in a ceaseless race.
- He proposed a humane economy which could develop human personality in a holistic way (instead of focusing on material possession), promote human creativity, and help in the realization of human potential.
- He advocated production by the masses, in place of mass production, to the extent that some industries and services would have to be on large scale, they would be run on no-profit basis by the state or a philanthropic minded private enterprise.

Gandhi's ethics of interconnectedness and mutuality:

- Gandhi believed in looking within oneself, change oneself and then change the world. For him, cultures and nations were not isolated entities, because they all played a special role in the making of human history.

- He believed in **'enlarged Pluralism'** that every culture should learn from others. This was a way for him to open up the world to a harmonic exchange and a transformative dialogue among nations.

- For him, a spirit of genuine reciprocity and solidarity was not only a moral requirement, but also a geopolitical necessity.
- He said that Non-violent organizations of the world should help in bringing peace and interconnectedness among cultures and civilizations.
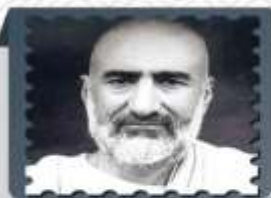
Global Influence:
- Satyagraha has been used globally as an instrument of non-violent dissent against authoritarianism and a pragmatic tool of the powerless against the powerful.
- Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, Lech Walesa, Vaclav Havel, Benigno Aquino, Jr. and many others successfully used it in their countries for political and social integration.
- In many countries, organized civic pressure and a principled commitment not to resort to violence has been used to fight colonialism and foreign occupation, advance women's and minority rights, and improve transparency and good governance.

He adapted and changed his views throughout his life. He started movements, called them off, he was always willing to negotiate and begin discussions. His boycotts, too, were based on principles, never against individuals. He shunned British goods but not British people. He used the ideas of Christianity, Islam, Jainism, and Buddhism and remained a devout Hindu.

His life is a message regarding how to lead a public life as no security men were posted outside his Ashram, he was reachable to all, and his experiments were minutely dissected and criticised as well. There are scarcely few people in world who lived what they preached, and lived to such rightness, in spite of being engrossed so much in politics as Mahatma Gandhi did. He however followed a simple ideology that "it is not enough for thought to be based on truth, the life must express it'.

GANDHI'S GLOBAL FOOTPRINT

The Indian Independence movement may have witnessed the heyday of Gandhian non-violent action, but the ripples it left behind touched many other nations and influenced varied ideoligies. Here's a snapshot of Gandhi's global impact.

Gandhian non-violence was already invoked during his lifetime by **Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan**, also known as the "Frontier Gandhi". Few People know about Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan as a Muslim Proponent of non-violence, Who stressed the compatibility of Islam and Satyagraha.

Often labelled as the "American Gandhi", **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.** recognized the value of Gandhi's legacy of non-violence and used it to strenghten his own campaigns in areas ranging from racial integration to voting rights.

Effective non-violent actions led by **Nelson Mandela** played a crucial role in crippling the brutal and racist apartheid regime in South Africa, helping establish a legitimate, democratically elected black majority government.

The non-violent **Arab Spring** awakenings in West Asia from 2009 to 2012 demonstrated that Gandhian non-violence could help to provide the disobedient space that is needed.

PT POINTERS

INS TARANGINI

- *Context*: The sail training ship of Indian Navy, INS Tarangini based at Kochi, has returned after a seven month long sailing across the world to a grand reception at naval base, Kochi.
- The Voyage named *"Lokayan 18"* was flagged off on 10 Apr 18 from Kochi. During the voyage, the ship travelled across 15 ports in 13 countries.
- The ship sailed across the Arabian Sea, Red Sea, Suez Canal, Mediterranean Sea, Strait of Gibraltar, North Atlantic Ocean, Bay of Biscay, English Channel and North Sea, right up to Norway.

INDIA'S LARGEST DRY DOCK AT COCHIN SHIPYARD

- **Context**: India's largest Dry Dock will be built at Cochin Shipyard. With this Cochin Shipyard will be able to build specialized and technologically advanced large vessels.
- *Significance*: The Dry Dock will give an impetus to "Make in India" initiative under Sagarmala and raise India's share in global shipbuilding to 2%. India currently occupies 0.66% share in global shipbuilding market.

MAHILA MALL

Context: Mahila Mall, *the first mall in the country with an all-women crew*, is coming up in Kozhikode. The mall, a venture of Unity Group under the Kozhikode Corporation Kudumbashree CDS, houses business establishments run by around 75 women entrepreneurs or groups.

UN HUMAN RIGHTS PRIZE

- *Context*: UN names Human Rights Prize winners for 2018. Asma Jahangir, Rebeca Gyumi, Joenia Wapichana and Front Line Defenders are honoured by the UN for promoting human rights.

About UN Human Rights Prize:

- The **United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights** is an honorary award given for outstanding achievement in human rights.
- Prize was established by the **UN General Assembly in 1966** and was awarded for the first time on December 10, 1968, on the twentieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- The Prize is an opportunity not only to give public recognition to the achievements of the recipients themselves, but also to send a clear message to human rights defenders the world over that the international community is grateful for, and supports, their tireless efforts to promote all human rights for all.
- The 2018 award ceremony will take place on December 10 on World Human Rights Day in New York.

INDIA BUILDING WORLD'S HIGHEST RAILWAY LINE

- *Context:* India railways is planning to link New Delhi and Ladakh by means of a railway line that will run along the India-China Border.
- *Significance:* The proposed *Bilaspur-Manali- Leh Line will be the world's highest at 5,360 metres* above mean sea level which is comparable to China's Quinghai-Tibet Railway Line at 2,000 metres.

IMC-2018

- *Context:* India Mobile Congress is being held in New Delhi.
- *Theme:* "NEW DIGITAL

HORIZONS: Connect. Create. Innovate."

- *About IMC:* The India Mobile Congress 2018, hosted by the Department of telecommunications and the Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI), is an excellent platform for policy makers, industry and regulators to engage in meaningful deliberations to drive the future direction of this important sector.

TAGORE AWARD FOR CULTURAL HARMONY

- *Context*: The Tagore Award for Cultural Harmony for the years 2014, 2015 & 2016 is being conferred on the doyen of Manipuri dance Sh. Rajkumar Singhajit Singh; Chhayanaut (a cultural organization of Bangladesh) and on one of India's greatest sculptors, Sh. Ram Vanji Sutar, respectively.

About the Tagore award:

- The annual award was instituted by the Government of India during the commemoration of 150th Birth Anniversary of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore.
- The first Tagore Award was conferred on Pt. Ravi Shankar, the Indian Sitar Maestro in 2012 and second was conferred on Shri Zubin Mehta in 2013.
- The award carries an amount of Rs. 1 crore, a citation in a scroll, a plaque as well as an exquisite traditional handicraft/ handloom item.
- The award is open to all persons regardless of nationality, race, language, caste, creed or sex.
- Awardees are selected by a jury headed by the Prime Minister of India.

IRON MAGIC 19

What is it? It is joint military exercise between

United Arab Emirates (UAE) and United States (US). The latest edition is being held in Dubai.

DRUZHBA-III

- *What is it?* It is a joint bilateral military exercise between Pakistan and Russian special forces. The 2018 edition is being held in Pakistan.
- **Background**: Druzhba military exercise between Russia and Pakistan was started in 2016. "Druzba" is Russian word, which means "friendship".

SEOUL PEACE PRIZE

- *Context:* Seoul Peace Prize Committee has decided to confer 2018 Seoul Peace Prize on Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- PM Modi has been selected for award in recognition of his dedication for improving international cooperation, raising global economic growth, accelerating Human Development of people in India by fostering economic growth and furthering development of democracy through anti-corruption and social integration efforts.

About Seoul Peace Prize:

- It was established in 1990 to commemorate success of the 24th Olympic Games held in Seoul, South Korea.
- It was established to crystallize Korean people's yearning for peace on Korean Peninsula and in the rest of the world.

It is awarded biennially to those individuals who have made their mark through contributions to harmony of mankind, reconciliation between nations and world peace.

WORLD'S LONGEST SEA CROSSING: HONG KONG-ZHUHAI BRIDGE

- Chinese President Xi Jinping has officially opened the world's longest sea crossing bridge, nine years after construction first began.
- Including its access roads, the bridge spans 55km (34 miles) and connects Hong Kong to Macau and the mainland Chinese city of Zhuhai.
- The bridge has cost about $20bn (£15.3bn) and seen several delays. The bridge, designed to withstand earthquakes and typhoons, was built using 400,000 tonnes of steel, enough to build 60 Eiffel Towers.
- About 30km of its total length crosses the sea of the Pearl River delta. To allow ships through, a 6.7km section in the middle dips into an undersea tunnel that runs between two artificial islands.

MIGINGO ISLAND

Where is Migingo Island Located?
Compared to half the size of a football pitch, Migingo is a small rock Island, located in Lake Victoria which is the largest lake in Africa and the largest Tropical Lake in the whole world.
Why in News?

For over a decade, Migingo has been a source of tension between Uganda and Kenya, who have been unable to decide to whom it really belongs.

GAMING GARAGE

- *Context*: Andhra Pradesh government has proposed to set up a 'Gaming Garage' to generate employment and encourage entrepreneurs and game developers in view of its growing importance. The 'Gaming Garage' will be launched in Vijayawada very soon.

Key facts:
- Companies such as the Unity Technologies, Denmark/San Francisco would provide the software. The Kajaani University of Applied Sciences (KAMK) of Finland would be knowledge/operational partner.
- Any creative thinker could walk into the Garage to develop a game of choice. The government would provide them with "the necessary software and infrastructure free of cost". It would also encourage them in commercialising their product.
- *Background:* The gaming became an industry with crores of rupees turnover with the rapid development of computers and smartphone technologies. The Cabinet in April gave its nod to animations and visual effects, gaming and comics policy to attract the best from the sector and an investment of about ₹6,400 crore by 2020.

COPE INDIA AIR EXERCISE

- *Context*: India and US have agreed to elevate their bilateral **'Cope India' air exercise** to trilateral format by including Japan. The next edition of

this exercise is scheduled to be held in December 2018.

About Cope India:

- It is series of international Air Force exercises between Indian Air Force (IAF) and United States Air Force conducted on and over Indian soil.

- The first such exercise was conducted at IAF air force station in Gwalior from February 2004.

INDIA'S LONGEST RIVER BRIDGE

- *Context*: India's longest river bridge with total length of 19.3 kilometers will be built on Brahmaputra river in Assam.

Key facts:

- This bridge will connect Dhubri of Assam to Fulbarani of Meghalaya. This bridge will reduce the distance between these two places by 203 kms. At present, India's largest river bridge is Dhola-Sadia bridge, its length is 9.15 kilometers.
- Japanese Finance Agency (JICA) has approved the loan for this project as part of road infrastructure improvement package in the north-east after assessing the economic benefit of the big project.
- Two northeastern states of Assam and Meghalaya will be connected by NH127B with the help of this bridge.

SHAKTI BHATT FIRST BOOK PRIZE

Context: US-based writer Sujatha Gidla has won 2018 Shakti Bhatt First Book Prize for her debut book "Ants Among Elephants: An Untouchable Family and the Making of Modern India".

About Shakti Bhatt First Book Prize:

- The Shakti Bhatt First Book Prize is funded by the Shakti Bhatt Foundation. It was set up in 2008 in memory of young writer and editor Shakti Bhatti.
- It honours first-time writers from Indian sub- continent for their outstanding work of fiction or non-fiction. It carries cash prize of Rs. 2 lakh.

CARNOT PRIZE

- *Context*: Minister of Railways and Coal will receive the University of Pennsylvania's top prize in energy policy for his leadership in reforming India's power sector through various initiatives.

Carnot Prize:

- The Carnot Prize is intended to honour those leading revolutions in energy policy to further progress and prosperity.
- The ministry is being recognised for directing a fast-track effort to electrify 18,000 villages in remote parts of India, helping bridge the country's vast energy divide.
- The Carnot Prize is named in memory of French scientist Sadi Carnot, who in 1824 published Reflections on the Motive Power of Fire, which is recognised as the first statement of what, is now known as the second law of thermodynamics.
- Carnot recognised that the power of the steam engine would produce a great revolution in human development.

INDIA'S FIRST RAILWAY STATION INSIDE TUNNEL TO COME UP IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

- *Context*: For the first time in India, a railway station will be built inside a tunnel at a height of 3,000 metres, on the strategic Bilaspur- Manali-Leh line close to the China-India border.
- The station will be at a height of around 3,000 metres and will be inside a 27-km-long tunnel.
- Keylong is the administrative centre of Lahaul and Spiti district, 26 km north of Manali and 120 km from the India-Tibet border.

DHARMA GUARDIAN

- *What is it?* It is a joint military exercise between India and Japan.
- **Why in News?** The first edition of this joint military exercise will be held in Mizoram.
- **Aim**: The exercise is aimed at developing mutual understanding and respect between militaries of both countries, as also facilitate in tracking worldwide phenomenon of terrorism.

MAN BOOKER PRIZE

- **Context**: Northern Irish writer- Anna Burns has won the 2018 Man Booker Prize for her third full-length novel- "Milkman".

About Man Booker Prize:
- The leading literary award in English, The Man Booker Prize was launched in 1969. It aims to promote the 'finest in fiction' and is awarded each year to the book adjudged as the best novel of the year written in English and published in the United Kingdom.
- The winner of The Man Booker Prize receives
- £50,000. Sponsored by Man Group,

the foundation also awards £2,500 and a designer bound copy of their book to each of the six shortlisted authors. The winner and shortlisted authors are also guaranteed a worldwide readership as well as a dramatic spike in book sales.
- The judges of The Man Booker Prize are chosen from a wide range of disciplines including critics, writers, academics, poets, politicians, actors and 'all with a passion for quality fiction'. Subject to widespread speculation before the official announcement, the prize usually brings the winner a huge boost in sales and profile.

UP CABINET APPROVES CHANGING NAME OF ALLAHABAD TO 'PRAYAGRAJ'

- The Uttar Pradesh Cabinet has approved the proposal of the state government to rename the city of 'Allahabad' as 'Prayagraj'. The decision has been vehemently opposed by the opposition parties.

Background:
- The city of Allahabad was originally known as Prayag in ancient times. Between 1574 and 1583, the 16th-century Mughal emperor Akbar founded a fort near the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna, known as Sangam, as he was impressed with its strategic position.
- Hence, Akbar named the fort and its neighbourhood as Ilahabad, which meant the "Abode of God", inspired by the religion he had founded, Din-i-Illahi. In the later years, Akbar's grandson Shah Jahan renamed the entire city as Allahabad. However, the area near the Sangam, which is the site of the Kumbh Mela, continued to be called Prayag.

LHOTSHAMPA

- *Who are they?* They are a heterogeneous Bhutanese people of Nepalese descent. The Lhotshampa people are native to southern Bhutan. The Nepali-speaking Lhotshampa were branded as immigrants and stripped of citizenship rights when the then-king introduced a "One Nation, One People" policy in 1985. The edict made following the customs of the Buddhist majority mandatory, including wearing their traditional dress, and speaking Nepali was banned.
- *Why in News?* Bhutan is holding elections this week. But the Lhotshampa people, brutally driven out of the small kingdom in the 1990s, won't be voting. Bhutan still describes the Lhotshampa as immigrants, justifying its nationalistic laws as essential for cultural identity and political stability.

INDIAN SILK EXPORT PROMOTION COUNCIL (ISEPC)

- **Context**: 6th India International Silk Fair (IISF), organized by Indian Silk Export Promotion Council, is being held in New Delhi. The fair will give a platform to exporters to display their products and to overseas buyers an opportunity to place orders and source their merchandise.
- **Background**: India is the second largest producer of silk in the world. The country's silk industry is agriculture based and labour intensive and provides gainful employment to around eight million artisans and weavers in rural areas.

About The Indian Silk Export Promotion Council:

- The Indian Silk Export Promotion Council (ISEPC) was set up in 1983 as a company not for profit under Companies Act duly sponsored by the Government of India in the Ministry of Textiles.
- ISEPC works closely with the Government of India on policy formulation concerning silk sector and provides specialized services to the entrepreneurs enlarging global business opportunities for the silk industry in India.

CHIEF MINISTER'S URBAN LEADERS FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME

- *Context*: Delhi government has launched Chief Minister's Urban Leaders Fellowship Programme that seeks to attract young leaders across the country to work with it on addressing some of the most pressing urban challenges.

About Chief Minister's Urban Leaders Fellowship Programme:

- It aims to provide unique opportunity to young leaders across India to work within the Delhi government to address some of the most pressing urban challenges in India.
- It also seeks to attract youth who are passionate about public service and are willing to work for two years.
- Fellows selected under this programme will be assigned to work with ministers or senior officials across various departments Delhi government such as health, education, water, transport, art and culture.
- They will be paid remuneration of Rs 1.25 lakh per month and Rs 75,000 per month to Associate Fellows.

EINSTEIN PRIZE

- *Context*: Indian American Professor Abhay Ashtekar has been conferred with prestigious Einstein Prize for numerous and seminal contributions to general relativity, including the theory of black holes, canonical quantum gravity, and quantum cosmology.

About Einstein Prize:
- The Einstein Prize is a biennial prize awarded by the American Physical Society.
- The recipients are chosen for their outstanding accomplishments in the field of gravitational physics.
- The prize carries an award of $10,000.
- The prize is special because is it the highest honour bestowed by APS in the broad area of gravitational science.

THE WORLD'S MOST INNOVATIVE UNIVERSITIES-2018

- *What is it?* The Reuters' top 100 World's Most Innovative University ranking recognises universities from across the world for their work in inventing new technologies, advance science and power new markets and industries. It was first published in 2015, since then there has been no mention of any Indian university in the list.

The 2018 edition:
- For the fourth year running, Stanford University tops Reuters' ranking of the World's Most Innovative Universities. No Indian university is in the list.
- In this top 100 list, 48 universities are from North America find mention on the list, 23 Asian universities, 27 from Europe and 2 from the Middle East. The list has no mention of universities from South America, Africa and Oceania countries that include Australasia, Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia.
- US dominated the list with 46 universities among the top 100. This year Chinese varsities have increased their presence in this with total five universities.

- The key factor was this year's ranking was Geopolitical trends. Stanford University from US has topped this list for four consecutive years. The second and third spots have been held by US's Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Harvard University respectively.

ALTERNATIVE NOBEL LITERATURE PRIZE

- *Context*: Guadeloupean author Maryse Conde has won the New Academy Prize in Literature, an alternative award formed in protest to Nobel Literature Prize.

About New Academy Prize in Literature:
- New Academy Prize in Literature was formed by New Academy consisting of more than 100 Swedish writers, artists and journalists in protest to denounce what its founders called bias, arrogance and sexism of Swedish Academy, which selects Nobel laureates.
- The New Academy Prize is accompanied by one million kronor, or around $112,000.

JAL BACHAO, VIDEO BANAO, PURASKAR PAO CONTEST

- The **Ministry of Water Resources,**

River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation announced the winners for the Third and Fourth fortnight of the Jal Bachao, Video Banao, Puraskar Pao contest.

What is the contest about?

Jal Bachao, Video Banao, Puraskar Pao contest was launched by the Ministry in collaboration with the MyGov portal of the Government of India with the objective of spreading awareness about water conservation.

INDIA FOR HUMANITY INITIATIVE

- **Context**: Union Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has launched India for Humanity initiative to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi and honour of his service to humanity. It will feature year- long series of artificial limb fitment camps in a number of countries spanning globe.
- For this initative, MEA has collaborated with renowned charitable organisation Bhagwan Mahaveer Viklang Sahayata Samiti (BMVSS).
- **Aim**: to provide physical, economic and social rehabilitation of differently-abled around world by helping them regain their mobility and dignity to become self-respecting and productive members of society. It focuses on Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of compassion, caring and service to humanity.

NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

- *Dr. Denis Mukwege* and *Nadia Murad* have jointly been awarded the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize. They were given award for their efforts

to end use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict.

- The Nobel Peace Prize is awarded by a committee elected by the Norwegian Parliament.

JIMEX

- *What is it?* It is a joint Maritime Exercise between India and Japan. It was started in January 2012 with special focus on Maritime Security Cooperation.
- *Why in News?* The 3rd edition of **Japan-India Maritime Exercise (JIMEX)** is being held at Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. JIMEX-18 is aimed to enhance interoperability, improve understanding and imbibe best practices between navies of two countries.

GITA GOPINATH BECOMES FIRST WOMAN CHIEF ECONOMIST AT IMF

- India-born **Gita Gopinath** has been appointed as the Chief Economist of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).
- She has become the **first woman** to hold the position. Gita Gopinath has also become the *second Indian* to hold the position, after former RBI Governor **Raghuram Rajan**.

NATIONAL REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL (NAREDCO)

- *Why in News?* Realtors body National Real Estate Development Council (**NAREDCO**) has signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs to provide skill training and jobs in construction sector for 2.5 lakh poor people.
- The partnership will strengthen skill trainings and employment opportunities in construction sector for urban poor under **Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission.**

About National Real Estate Development Council (NAREDCO):
- It is **autonomous self-regulatory body** under **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs**. It was established in **1998** and is headquartered in **New Delhi**.
- It serves as apex national body for real estate industry and provides single platform for Government, industry and public to discuss various problems and opportunities face to face for speedy resolution of issues.
- Its mandate also includes to induce transparency and ethics in real estate business and transform unorganized Indian real estate sector into matured and globally competitive business sector.

IBSAMAR

- **Context**: The sixth edition of **IBSAMAR**, a joint multi–national **maritime exercise** between **Indian, Brazilian and South African** Navies was held at **Simons Town, South Africa**.
- **Aim**: The aim of this maritime

exercise is to undertake collective training for participating navies, building interoperability and mutual understanding as well as sharing of best practices.
- **Exercise IBSAMAR**: It was initiated in **2006**. It is considered as most visible manifestation of convergence of democratic values, economic interests and maritime cooperation. The last edition of IBSAMAR V was conducted off Goa, India in February 2016 and all previous exercises were held in South Africa.

OPERATION SAMUDRA MAITRI

- India has launched massive *humanitarian operation* **Samudra Maitri** to provide assistance to *earthquake and tsunami victims* in **Indonesia**.
- Under this operation, India has dispatched two aircraft C-130J and C-17 and three naval ships carrying relief material and personnel to the country.

SAHYOG HOP TAC -2018

- *What is it?* It is the maiden joint exercise of Coast Guards of India and Vietnam.
- It was held recently in the Bay of Bengal off the Chennai coast, Tamil Nadu.
- It was aimed at strengthening the working level relationship between coast guards of both navies.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH REHABILITATION IN SEHORE DISTRICT

- The Union Cabinet has approved the establishment of National Institute of Mental Health Rehabilitation (NIMHR) in Sehore District in

Madhya Pradesh.

About:

- NIMHR will be the first of its kind in the country in the area of mental health rehabilitation.
- It will serve as an institution of excellence for capacity building in human resource and research in the area of mental health rehabilitation, and also recommending body suggesting models/protocols for effective rehabilitation of persons with mental illness.

INDIAN RAILWAY STATIONS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION LIMITED (IRSDC)

- **Context**: Cabinet approves Redevelopment of Railway Stations by IRSDC as Nodal Agency, through simplified procedures and longer lease tenure.

About IRSDC:

- The Indian Railway Stations Development Corporation (IRSDC) is a special purpose vehicle (SPV) of the Government of India that has been designed to develop new stations and redevelop existing Indian railway stations.
- IRSDC is a joint venture between IRCON and Rail Land Development Authority with a 51:49 equity shareholding ratio respectively.

IBSAMAR VI

- The sixth edition of IBSAMAR, a joint Multi – National Maritime Exercise between the **Indian, Brazilian and South African Navies**, is being held at **Simons Town, South Africa**.

About IBSAMAR:

- IBSAMAR are a series of naval exercises between the navies of India, Brazil, South Africa. The aim of the exercise is to undertake collective training for participating navies, building interoperability and mutual understanding as well as sharing of best practices. The first exercise took place in 2008.

EXERCISE AVIAINDRA-18

- The second edition of **Exercise Aviaindra**, a **Biennial Air Force level** exercise between **Indian** and the **Russian** Federation, was held recently in Russia.
- The aim of the exercise was to formulate and validate use of airpower in anti-terrorist operation in a bilateral scenario. It also includes simulator training. The exercise included briefing on Aerospace safety and anti- terrorist air operations.