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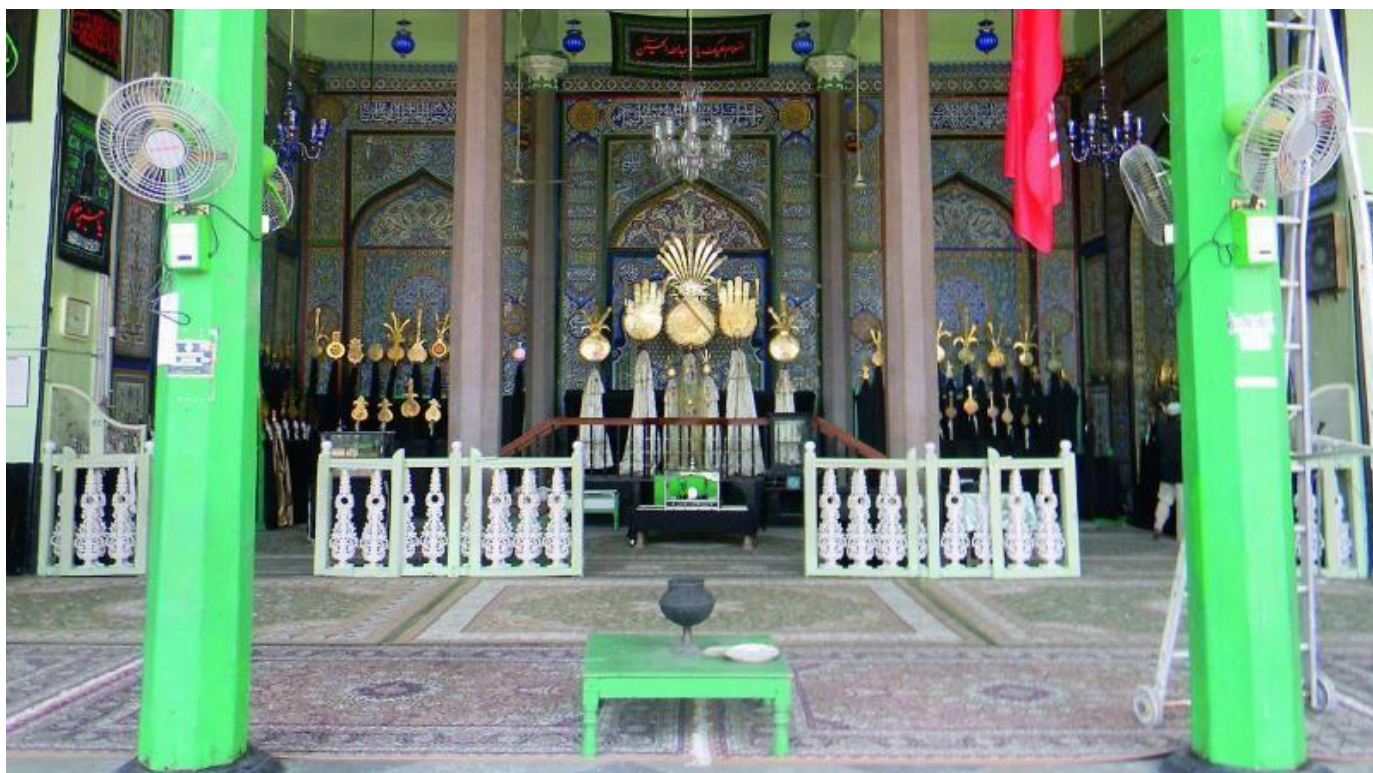
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Badshahi Ashoorkhana



- **Context:** Telangana government and Aga Khan Trust are working to restore Hyderabad's 17th century Badshahi Ashoorkhana.

About Hyderabad's 17th century Badshahi Ashoorkhana:

- The 400-year old Ashoorkhana was built by **Muhammed Quli Qutub Shah**.
- **It was a house of mourning**, where large congregations of Muslims gathered in memory of the martyrdom of Imam Hussain during the month of Muharram.
- **The building consists of** a Kaman, Naqqar Khana (where ceremonial drums are beaten), Niyaz Khana (where visitors are fed), Sarai Khana (place to rest), Abdar Khana (drinking water is stored), the

chabutra (platform) and a guard room.

- During the rule of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, in 1178 Hijri (about 1764 AD), the Ashoorkhana was converted into a **bandikhana**. For 80 years, it was used as a stable where horses were kept, before it was restored as a place of worship by the then mutawalli Mir Nawazish Ali Khan.
- The eight wooden pillars were reconstructed and the alams were reinstalled. During this time, the main entrance, Bab-e-Faiz-e-Imam-e-Alamiyan, was also constructed.

Sanchi Stupa Of India And Pho Minh Pagoda Of Viet Nam



during the Ly Dynasty and later expanded in 1262 during the Tran Dynasty.

It was a place for high-ranking mandarins and the aristocracy of the Tran Royal Court to worship and lead their religious life.

- **Context:** Cabinet approves MoU between India and Viet Nam on Joint issue of postage stamp. Joint Issue depicts Sanchi Stupa of India and Pho Minh Pagoda of Viet Nam.

About Sanchi Stupa:

- **When was it built:** Commissioned in 3rd century BCE, Expansion/additions/restoration works/ made in different periods.
- **Who built it:** Commissioned by Emperor Ashoka of the Maurya Dynasty.
- **Where is it located:** Located 46 km north-east of Bhopal, the capital city of Madhya Pradesh, India.
- **Architectural Style:** Buddhist Art and Architecture.
- **Other facts:** It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

About Pho Minh Pagoda:

- The pagoda was originally built

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Vakataka Dynasty

Why in news?

- A team of archaeologists have confirmed that the Vakataka dynasty ruled from its capital Nandivardhan, or the present day Nagardhan
- It is a large village discovered near Ramtek taluka in Nagpur district.

About Vakataka Dynasty:

- The **Vakataka Empire** originated from the Deccan in the mid-3rd century CE.
- They were the most important **successors of the Satavahanas in the Deccan** and **contemporaneous with the Guptas** in northern India.
- The Vakataka dynasty was a **Brahmin dynasty**. Little is known about **Vindhyashakti**, the founder of the family.
- Territorial expansion began in the reign of his son

Pravarasena I.

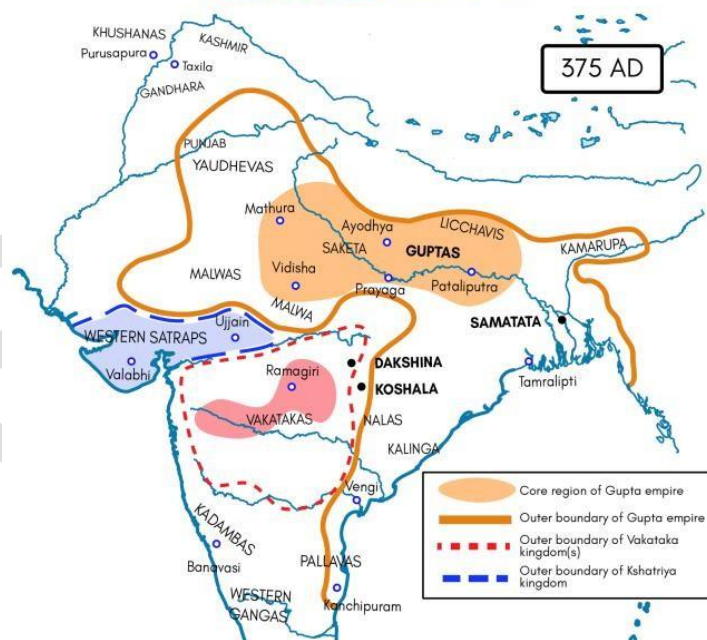
- The Vakatakas are noted for having been patrons of the arts, architecture and literature.
- The rock-cut Buddhist viharas and chaityas of Ajanta Caves (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) were built under the patronage of Vakataka emperor, Harishena.

Significance of this discovery

- Till now, researchers have only managed to get written inscriptions and copper plates, all featuring the Vakataka king Prithvisena. It is the first traces sealing the fact that the king shifted his capital from Padmapura to Nandivardhan in Vidarbha.
- They have unearthed some vital signs and remains in the form of typical artefacts including ceramics, ear studs made of glass were excavated belonging to the period during the Vakataka rule.

- Terracotta objects depicting images of gods, animals, humans along with amulets, scotches, wheels, skin rubbers, spindle whorls were discovered.
- Some of the ceramics, according to the researchers, dates back to 3-4th century BCE.
- A near-intact clay sealing of the Vakataka empress Prabhavatigupta, the chief queen of the Vakataka king Rudrasena II has also been unearthed.

APPROXIMATE EXTENT OF THE VAKATAKA TERRITORIES IN 375 CE



Saint Kabir

Why in news?

PM offered floral tributes at Sant Kabir Samadhi, on the occasion of the 500th death anniversary of the great saint and poet, Kabir.

About Saint Kabir

- Kabir Das, a mystical poet and great Saint of India, was born in the year 1440 and died in the year 1518. He is the most important Nirguna Bhakti saint.
- Kabir's teachings were based on a complete, indeed vehement, rejection of the major religious traditions and vouched for Nirguna form of Bhakti.
- His teachings openly ridiculed all forms of external worship of both Brahmanical, Hinduism and Islam, the pre-eminence of the priestly classes and the caste system.
- It is considered that he got all his spiritual training from his Guru named, Ramananda, in his early childhood.
- **Kabir Panth** is the huge religious community which identifies the Kabir as the originator of the Sant Mat sects.
- Kabir Das is the first Indian saint who has coordinated the Hinduism and Islam by giving a universal path which could be followed by both Hindus and Muslims.
- According to him every life has relationship with two spiritual principles, Jivatma and Paramatma. His view about the moksha that, it is the process of uniting these two divine principles.
- Some of the great writings of the Kabir Das are Bijak, Kabir Granthawali, Anurag Sagar, Sakhi Granth etc.

with attributes or in human form. Vishnu in its incarnations as Rama, or Krishna, are most popular deities that were worshipped by Saguna Bhakti saints.

- Thus, Saguna bhakti movement of North India was essentially vaishnavite in character as compared to Southern Bhakti movement which had both Vashnav as well as Shaiv streams.

Nirguna bhakti and Saguna bhakti

- The nirguna bhaktas were devotees of a formless God even while calling him variously as Rama, Govinda, Hari or Raghunatha. The most conspicuous among them were Kabir and Nanak.
- The saguna bhaktas were devotees of god

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Seva Bhoj Scheme

Why in news?

Recently, Ministry of Culture launched a new scheme “Seva Bhoj Yojna”.

More about the scheme

- It is a central sector scheme to reduce financial burden of Charitable Religious Institutions.
- It envisages reimbursing the Central Government share of Central Goods and Services Tax (CGST) and Integrated Goods and Service Tax (IGST) of such Charitable Religious Institutions who provide Food/Prasad/Langar/Bhandara free of cost without any discrimination to Public/Devotees.
- It is applicable to all Charitable Religious Institutions such as Temples, Gurudwara, Mosque, Church, Dharmik Ashram, Dargah, Matth, Monasteries etc. which follows following norms:
 - which have been in existence for preceding five years before applying for financial assistance/grant.
 - which have been distributing free food, langar and prasad to public for at least past three years on the day of application.
 - which serve free food to at least 5000 people in a month.
 - which should not be blacklisted under provisions of FCRA or any other Act/Rules of the Central/State Government.
- The ministry will register the eligible charitable religious institutions for a time period ending with finance commission period and subsequently the registration may be renewed subject to the performance evaluation of the institutions.

Nalanda University

- **Context:** The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal for withdrawal of Nalanda University (Amendment) Bill, 2013 pending in the Rajya Sabha.

include two persons of eminence and two members from the academic faculty of the University. The Bill also makes provision for the appointment of Deans and Provosts.

Background:

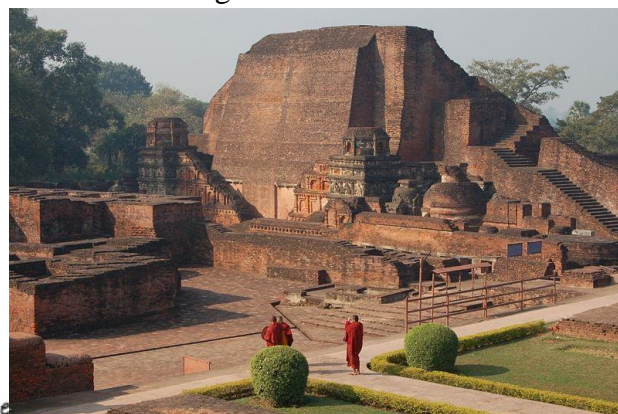
- The Nalanda University was established on the basis of a Joint Press Statement at the 4th East Asia Summit held in Thailand in October, 2009, which supported its establishment as a non-state, non-profit, secular and self-governing international institution.
- Subsequently, the Nalanda University Act, 2010 was passed by the Parliament and came into effect from 25th November 2010.

Key facts:

- Nalanda stands out as the most ancient university of the Indian Subcontinent. It engaged in the organized transmission of knowledge over an uninterrupted period of 800 years.
- The historical development of the site testifies to the development of Buddhism into a religion and the flourishing of monastic and educational traditions.
- It was a major Mahavihara or a large Buddhist monastery that also doubled up as an important centre of learning from the 5th to 1200 AD in the erstwhile kingdom of Magadh.
- The construction of Nalanda university began in 5th century AD and flourished under the Gupta rulers. It came to an end in the 12th century when it was destroyed in 1193 AD by the invading Turkish army led by its commander Bakhtiar Khilji.
- UNESCO has declared Bihar's much awaited ancient site – the ruins of Nalanda Mahavihara – a World Heritage Site.

Highlights of Nalanda University (Amendment) Bill, 2013:

- It establishes Nalanda University in Bihar as a result of decisions taken at the East Asia Summits.
- Under the Act, the University is a non-profit public-private partnership, supported by each member country as well as other sources. The Bill amends the Act to provide for the Government of India to meet the university's capital and recurring expenditure to the extent required.
- The powers of the University are amended to include the power to set up a consortium of international partners to meet the objectives of the University, and appoint persons working in any other University or academic institution, including those located outside India, as faculty of the University.
- The size of the Governing Board of the University is being increased to



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Ambubachi Mela

- **Context:** Ambubachi Mela, a four-day fair to mark the annual menstruation of the goddess is being held at Kamakhya temple in Guwahati.

About Ambubachi Mela:

- The Ambubachi Mela symbolises the *fertility cult of goddess Kamakhya*.
- There is *no idol in the temple*, the goddess is worshipped in the form of a yoni-like stone over which a natural spring flows.
- Also known as *Siddha Kubjika*, the goddess is a Hindu tantric goddess of desire who evolved in the Himalayan hills. She is also identified as Kali and Maha Tripura.
- The festival is also known as *‘Mahakumbh of the East’* as it draws lakhs of devotees from all over the world.

Social significance of the festival:

- The ritualistic fair celebrating the goddess’ period is one of the reasons why the taboo associated with menstruation is less in Assam compared with other parts of India.
- The attainment of womanhood of girls in Assam is celebrated with a ritual called ‘Tuloni Biya’, meaning small wedding. Ambubachi Mela serves as an occasion to promote awareness on menstrual hygiene.

Facts for Prelims:

Kamakhya, *atop Nilachal Hills in Guwahati*, is one of 51 shaktipeeths or seat of Shakti followers, each representing a body part of the Sati, Lord Shiva’s companion.

37TH UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE

Why in news?

India's nomination of the architectures of "**Victorian and Art Deco Ensembles of Mumbai**" has been included in UNESCO's World Heritage list.

More about news

- It has been included in the list **under Criteria (ii) and (iv)** of the UNESCO's Operational Guidelines.
- India accepted the renaming of the ensemble as **Victorian Gothic and Art Deco Ensembles of Mumbai** as recommended by the World Heritage Committee.
- This is the **third site from Mumbai** after the **Elephanta Caves** and **Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus railway station**.
- Across India, there are now **37 world heritage sites**. With **five sites**, **Maharashtra** has the **maximum number of sites in India**.
- India stands **second largest in number after China** in **ASPAC (Asia and Pacific) region**. It is **overall sixth in the world**.

About the sites

- This collection of **Victorian and Art Deco landmarks** is the **largest such conglomeration** and **first** of the combination of these two genres of architecture in the world **to be included in world heritage list**.
- The Ensemble consists of **94 buildings** primarily of **19th century Victorian Gothic revival** and **early 20th century Art Deco style of architecture** with the **Oval Maidan in the centre**.
- Some characteristics of Victorian art are: Use of **pointed arches**, **Heavy stone and brick work**, Use of **polychromes** (contrasting colors) and **Bold forms** like towers, massive hip and gabled roofs.

- Art Deco, also called **style modern** was movement in the decorative arts and architecture. The Art Deco edifices, with their cinemas and residential buildings, blend Indian design with Art Deco imagery, creating a unique style that has been described as Indo-Deco.

Selection criteria (ii) and (iv)

(ii) - To exhibit an important interchange of human values on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design.

(iv) - To be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates a significant stage in human history.

AITUC

- **Context:** Accusing the Centre of running an “anti-worker government”, leading trade union body AITUC is planning to launch a nationwide campaign against the government.

About AITUC:

- The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federations in India.
- It was founded in **1920** in Bombay by **Lala Lajpat Rai, Joseph Baptista, N. M. Joshi, Diwan Chaman Lall** and a few others.
- Until 1945 when unions became organised on party lines, it was the primary trade union organisation in India. Since then, it has been associated with the Communist Party of India.
- AITUC is a founder member of the World Federation of Trade Unions

PIETERMARITZBURG

- **Context:** External Affairs Minister recently undertook a train journey from Pentrich to Pietermaritzburg.

principles of peaceful resistance and mobilize people in South Africa and in India against the discriminatory rules of the British.

Significance of the place:

- It is a railway station in South Africa where a young Mahatma Gandhi was thrown out of a “Whites-only” compartment 125 years ago.
- On June 7, 1893, Gandhi, then a young lawyer, was thrown off the train’s first class compartment at Pietermaritzburg station after he refused to give up his seat as ordered by racially prejudiced officials.

Outcomes:

The incident led him to develop his Satyagraha

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Bankim Chandra



- **Context:** The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in West Bengal is planning to celebrate the achievements of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay.

Bankim Chandra- important contributions:

- Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay wrote the national song **Vande Mataram**.
- The 19th century author's novel **Anandamath** — which was set in the background of the Sanyashi Bidroho (rebellion of monks in late 18th century) — is considered to be one of key works on Bengal's nationalism.
- His first Bengali fiction is called '**Durgeshnondini**' published in 1865.
- He also wrote other famous novels like Kapalkundala in 1866, Mrinalini in 1869, Vishbriksha in 1873, Chandrasekhar in 1877, Rajani in 1877, Rajsimha in 1881 and Devi Chaudhurani in 1884. He brought out a monthly magazine called Bangadarshan in 1872.

Global Action Plan On Physical Activity 2018-2030

Why in News?

Recently, World Health Organisation released Global Action Plan on Physical Activities 2018-2030.

About the Action Plan

- It recommends a set of policy areas, for improving the environments and opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to do more walking, cycling, sport, active recreation, dance and play.
- Plan target- 15% relative reduction in the global prevalence of physical inactivity in adults and in adolescents by 2030.
- Increasing inactivity is linked to various Non-Communicable Diseases (such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, cancer and obesity) which in turn are responsible for a high number of premature deaths all over the world. It is estimated that inactivity itself kills more than 5 million per year and is as dangerous as smoking.
- This global action plan sets out four strategic objectives achievable through 20 policy actions that are universally applicable to all countries viz, Create active society, create active environment, Create Active People, and Create active System.
- The framework consists of policy actions aimed at improving the social, cultural, economic, environmental factors and enhance individual education and information respectively.

Important Recommendations

Certain important ones among various recommendations by the Plan are-

- **Implement best practice communication campaigns and community-based campaigns**, linked with community-based programmes, to heighten awareness, knowledge and understanding of, and appreciation for, the multiple health benefits of regular

physical activity.

- **Implement regular mass-participation initiatives in public spaces**, engaging whole communities, to provide free access to enjoyable and affordable, socially and culturally appropriate experiences of physical activity.
- **Strengthen Urban and Transport planning policies** that enable and promote walking, cycling, other forms of mobility involving the use of wheels (including wheelchairs, scooters and skates) and the use of public transport, in urban, peri-urban and rural communities.
- **Strengthen provision of good-quality physical education** and more positive experiences and opportunities for active recreation, sports and play for girls and boys, applying the principles of the whole-of-school approach to establish health and physical literacy, and promote the enjoyment of, and participation in, physical activity, according to capacity and ability.
- **Enhance provision of more physical activity** programmes and promotion in parks and other natural environments as well as in private and public workplaces, to support participation in physical activity, by all people of diverse abilities.
- **Strengthen the national and institutional research and evaluation capacity** and stimulate the application of digital technologies and innovation to accelerate the development and implementation of effective policy solutions aimed at increasing physical activity and reducing sedentary behaviour.
- **Strengthen financing mechanisms** to secure sustained implementation of national and subnational action and the development of the enabling systems that support the development and implementation of such policies.

Physical Activity

- It is defined as any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure (**World Health Organisation**).
- It includes exercise as well as other activities which involve bodily movement and are done as part of playing, working, active transportation, house chores and recreational activities.

**Related Sustainable Development Goals
SDGs**

Investing in policies to promote physical activities can contribute directly to achieving many of the 2030 SDGs as follows-

- SDG2: Ending all forms of malnutrition.
- SDG3: Good Health and well-being.
- SDG8: Decent work and economic growth

DISHA DASHBOARD

Why in news?

Ministry of Rural Development recently launched the **DISHA dashboard**.

Features

- It has been developed to facilitate data driven decision making.
- Currently, 18 schemes are covered; the ultimate plan is to integrate all 42 Central schemes which are already monitored by DISHA or District Development Coordination and Monitoring Committees.
- Currently, the tool is available to legislators and government officials, but soon some of its features will be available online to the public.
- It will make it easier to monitor governance by geography in real time and overcome geographic mismatches.

District Development and Monitoring Committees/DISHA

- These are constituted by the union government to ensure a better coordination among all the elected representatives in Parliament, State Legislatures and Local Governments (Panchayati Raj Institutions/ Municipal Bodies) for efficient and time-bound development of districts.
- These committees would monitor the implementation of schemes and programmes of Ministry of Rural Development and other Ministries to promote synergy and convergence for greater impact.
- The **Chairperson of the committee** will be the senior most Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) elected from the district, nominated by the Union Ministry of Rural Development.
- The other Members of Parliament (Lok Sabha) representing the district will be designated as Co-Chairpersons.

- One MP (Rajya Sabha) representing the State and exercising option to be associated with the district level Committee of that district (on first come basis) will be designated as Co-Chairperson.
- The committee will include various other members such as: All Members of the State Legislative Assembly elected from the district, All Mayors / the Chairpersons of Municipalities, chairperson of the Zilla Panchayat etc.
- Five elected heads of Gram Panchayat including two women, One representative each of SC, ST and Women to be nominated by the Chairperson will be among other members of the committee.
- The Member Secretary of DISHA should be the District Collector / District Magistrate/ Deputy Commissioner except in cases where specific exemption has been given by the Union Government.

Indecent Representation Of Women (Prohibition) Act (IRWA)

- **Context:** Based on the observations made by Parliamentary Standing Committee and recommendation made by the National Commission for Women on the basis of consultation with civil society groups and likeminded individuals, WCD has proposed amendments in IRWA keeping in mind the recent technological advancement in the field of communications such as social media platforms, over the top services etc.

Reforms proposed:

- Amendment in definition of term advertisement to include digital form or electronic form or hoardings, or through SMS, MMS etc.
- Amendment in definition of distribution to include publication, license or uploading using computer resource, or communication device or in.
- Insertion of a new definition to define the term publish.
- Amendment in section 4 to include that No person shall publish or distribute or cause to be published or cause to be distributed by any means any material which contains indecent representation of women in any form:
- Penalty similar to that provided under the Information Technology Act, 2000.

Creation of new authority:

- Creation of a Centralised Authority under the aegis of National Commission of Women (NCW). This Authority will be headed by Member Secretary, NCW, having representatives from Advertising Standards Council of India, Press

Council of India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and one member having experience of working on women issues.

- This Centralised Authority will be authorized to receive complaints or grievances regarding any programme or advertisement broadcasted or publication and investigate/ examine all matters relating to the indecent representation of women.

What necessitated this?

- Reforms have been proposed keeping in mind the recent technological advancements.
- The need was felt to widen the scope of the law so as to cover such forms of media on one hand and to strengthen the existing safeguards to prevent indecent representation of women through any media form on the other.
- Hence, the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Amendment Bill, 2012 was introduced in Rajya Sabha December, 2012 which referred the Bill to Department related Parliament Standing Committee for consideration.

U.K. Women Celebrate 100 Years Of Voting Rights



- **Context:** June 10, 2018 marked 100 years since the first women won the right to vote in Britain.

Background:

- The Representation of the People Act, 1918 granted property- owning British women over age 30 the right to vote.

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Women In Prisons

Why in news?

The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) has published its report titled ‘Women in Prisons.’

Condition of women prisoners in India (based on 2015 data):

- There are approximately 4.2 Lakh persons in jail in India, of which, around 18000 (**about 4.3%**) are women. Of these, around 12000 (**66.8%**) are **undertrial prisoners**.
- The number of women prisoners is showing an **increasing trend** - from 3.3% of all prisoners in 2000 to 4.3% in 2015.
- About 50% of these women are in age group of 30-50 years and the next 31% are in age group of 18-30 years.
- There are 1,401 prisons in India, and **only 18 are exclusive for women** which can house just around 3000 female prisoners. Thus, a majority of women inmates are housed in **women’s enclosures of general prisons**.

Problems faced by women prisoners

- Women are often confined to **small wards inside male prisons**, their needs becoming secondary to those of the general inmate population.
- While several cases of sexual harassment, violence and abuse against women in jails have been observed, the **grievance redressal mechanism** is still weak.
- There is **inadequacy of female staff** which often translates to the reality that male staff becomes responsible for female inmates, which is very much undesirable.
- Their small numbers (4.3%) ensure they remain **low on policy priority** and hence the coverage of facilities such as sanitary napkins, pre- and post-natal care for pregnant mothers is patchy.
- They are not provided with **meals** that are nutritious and according to their bodily

requirements.

- Women tend to **lose ties with their children** over the years, due to inadequate child custody procedures (children upto 6 years are allowed in jail with their mothers, after that they are sent away to children home).
- They are abandoned or harassed **post-release**, mainly due to the stigma attached with incarceration.

Details and recommendations of the report

- **Care-giving mothers:**
- They should be allowed to make arrangements for their children prior to their imprisonment
- They should be allowed reasonable suspension of detention.
- If there is no relative/friend, her child below 6 years should be put in a child care institution.
- Extended visits and frequent meetings should be allowed with the child.

Undertrial women:

- Bail should be granted to those who have spent one-third of their maximum possible sentence in detention by amending section 436A of CrPC.
- A maximum time frame may be decided for release of women prisoners after bail is granted but surety is not produced.
- **Post-natal stage women:**
- A separate accommodation should be provided
- to them to maintain hygiene and protect the infant from contagion, for at least a year after childbirth.
- Special provisions related to health and nutrition of such women be made.
- Instruments of restraint, punishment by close confinement or disciplinary segregation should never be used on pregnant and lactating women.

Pregnant women:

- They must be given information and access to abortion during incarceration, to the extent permissible by law.

- **Women with sensory disabilities or those with language barriers:**

- Legal consultations must be conducted in confidentiality and without censorship.
- Adequate arrangements must be made by the prison administration to ensure that such persons do not face any disadvantage by providing an independent interpreter

- **For grievance redressal:**

- Apart from the prisoner herself, her legal adviser or family members should be allowed to make complaints regarding her stay in prison.
- An inmate register can also be placed at an accessible spot in the prison for submitting grievances.
- All official visitors must hold special one-on-one interviews with prisoners away from prison authorities during inspection visits.

- **For mental needs:**

- They should be given access to female counsellors/psychologists at least on a weekly basis or as frequently as needed by them.

- **For re-integration of women in society:**

- A comprehensive after-care programme should be put in place, covering employment, financial support, regaining of child custody, shelter, counselling, continuity of health care services etc.
- Counselling should also be provided to family members and employers to adequately receive the woman after release
- Prison authorities should coordinate with local police to ensure released prisoners are not harassed by them due to the attached stigma
- At least one voluntary organisation

should be designated in each district to help with integration of released prisoners.

- Prisoners must be given the **right to vote**.

The International Norms:**UN BANGKOK RULES on women offenders and prisoners:**

Adopted in 2010, these rules talk about appropriate healthcare to women, treating them with humanity and preserving their dignity during searches, protecting them from violence and provide for the children of the prisoners.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) is the core international treaty on the protection of the rights of prisoners. India ratified the Covenant in 1979 and is bound to incorporate its provisions into domestic law and state practice.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESR) states that prisoners have a right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

The UN standard Minimum Rule presents most comprehensive guidelines regarding prisoners and was adopted by UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1957.

Other Steps taken for women prisoners Model Prison Manual, 2016

- The manual contains additional provisions for Women prisoners and their children as well.
- These provisions are based on **UN Bangkok Rules** and is drafted by the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D),
- The manual calls for women doctors, superintendents, separate kitchens for women inmates, and pre- and post-natal care for pregnant inmates, as also temporary release for an impending delivery.
- It also talk about ensuring creche and nursery schools for the children to be looked after.

Swadhar Greh:

This is a scheme for rehabilitation of women victims of difficult circumstances. Among other beneficiaries, the scheme also includes women prisoners released from jail and are without family, social and economic support.

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Draft Higher Education Commission Of India (HECI) Bill, 2018

Why in news?

The Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MHRD) has prepared a **HECI (Repeal of University Grants Commission Act) Bill 2018** and has placed it in public domain for comments and suggestions.

Challenges in Higher Education in India

- **Enrolment:** The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of India in higher education is only 25.2% which is quite low as compared to the developed as well as, other developing countries. With the increase of enrolments at school level, the supply of higher education institutes is insufficient to meet the growing demand in the country.
- **Equity:** According to various studies the GER in higher education in India among male and female varies to a greater extent and there are regional variations too.
- **Quality:** Still Large number of colleges and universities in India are unable to meet the minimum requirements laid down by the UGC and our universities are not in a position to mark its place among the top universities of the world.
- **Faculty:** Faculty shortages and the inability of the state educational system to attract and retain well qualified teachers have been posing challenges to quality education for many years. There are 40 per cent vacancies of faculty members in central universities.
- **Infrastructure:** Poor infrastructure is another challenge to the higher education system of India particularly the institutes run by the public sector.
- **Political interference:** Most of the educational Institutions are owned by the political leaders, who are playing key role in governing bodies of the Universities.
- **Structure of higher education:**

Management of the Indian education faces challenges of overcentralisation, bureaucratic structures and lack of accountability, transparency, and professionalism.

- **Regulation issues:** The existing regulatory structure (represented by UGC) requires redefinition based on changing priorities of higher education.
 - o Multiple regulatory bodies such as UGC, AICTE, MCI etc with overlapping jurisdiction and grey areas exist.
 - o Regulatory and grants/funds-giving roles are mixed up.
 - o Excessive and restrictive regulation and lack of institutional autonomy exist.
 - o To enhance quality of education in higher educational institutions and for its uniform development, there is a need for creation of a Body that lays down uniform standards, and ensures maintenance of the same through systematic monitoring and promotion

Arguments in favour of the bill

- The fund-granting process of the UGC and the technical education regulator — All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) — has been plagued with **allegations of corruption and inefficiency**.
- The **separation of grant functions** will help HECI to focus only on academic matters.
- UGC has been criticised in the past, especially for what has been seen as its restrictive regime. The Professor Yash Pal committee and Hari Gautam committee recommended an education regulator to rid the higher education sector of red tape.
- HECI could mark the end of

"Inspection Raj". HECI will specify norms and standards to establish, commence or wind up academic operations of an HEI using an online e-governance module. The effectivity of the body will increase through transparent public disclosures, merit-based decision making on matters regarding standards and quality in higher education.

- **The power to ensure compliance** will help in improving standards/quality of the higher educational institutions (HEI).
- The advisory council with the head of all state councils for higher education as its members would also **provide larger opportunity to States** which so far had a negligible role in the formulation of higher education policy.
- Encouraging HEIs to establish code of good practices covering promotion of research, teaching and learning is futuristic.

based incentivisation, and even recommend disinvestment from higher education institutions have been made **unilateral and absolute**.

- With its mandate of improving academic standards with a specific focus on learning outcomes, evaluation of academic performance by institutions, and training of teachers, the HECI is likely to **overregulate and micromanage universities**.
- The proposed draft has drastically **reduced the presence of teachers in the body**. UGC has 4 teacher members out of total 10 members, while the HECI has only 2 teacher members out of total 12 members.

Criticism against the bill

- Since UGC has been established through an Act of Parliament, it should have been **discussed within the parliament** and with the academicians on how to improve it first, before deciding upon its replacement.
- Transferring all financial powers from the UGC to the MHRD would amount to **imposing direct state control** over higher education institutions. This shift in financial control to the Ministry could be used for regimentation of knowledge. The bill talks about promoting autonomy. Several institutions have opposed autonomy as it is a route towards commercialisation and increased marginalisation or complete exclusion of students from socially oppressed and economically weaker sections.
- The powers to authorise, monitor, shut down, lay down norms for graded autonomy or standards for performance-

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PROPOSED CHANGES

UGC Act

HECI Bill



UGC will have chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, 10 other members

HECI will have chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, 12 other members



No provision for govt to remove chairman, vice-chairman, members

Govt can remove chairman, vice-chairman, member for nine reasons



UGC to disburse grants to universities

HECI not responsible for disbursing grants to universities; this function will be discharged by HRD Ministry



Can withhold grants of an institution that doesn't comply with its directions and standard

Can revoke approval of an institution for not complying with its standards



Retirement age of chairman, vice-chairman fixed at 65 yrs

Retirement age of chairman, vice-chairman fixed at 70 yrs



Chairman, vice-chairman, members can accept job offers from higher education institutions run by Center, state, private bodies

Two-year cooling-off period for chairman, vice-chairman, members



No provision for online application

Only online applications for HECI's approval



No provision for an advisory council

Will have an advisory council chaired by HRD Minister



India Is Still A Poor Country

- **Context:** *India is no longer the country with the largest number of people living in extreme poverty* as per the latest World Poverty Clock study compiled by Brookings Institute. The dislodging of India from the ignominious number one position is a feat that took over fifty years to achieve.
- **Definition:** The study defines poverty as *living on less than \$1.9 a day*.

Highlights of the study:

- India has finally shed the dubious distinction of being home to the largest number of poor, with *Nigeria taking that unwanted position in May 2018*.
- Nigeria had about 87 million people in extreme poverty, compared with India's 73 million. What is more, extreme poverty in Nigeria is growing by six people every minute.
- *About 44 Indians come out of extreme poverty every minute*, one of the fastest rates of poverty reduction in the world. If present trends continue, India could drop to No. 3 later this year, with the Democratic Republic of the Congo taking the number 2 spot.
- *The study showed global income increases in the last decades have led to systematic decreases in poverty rates worldwide*, with the experience in India and China having played the most important role when it comes to the overall number of persons escaping absolute poverty.
- *The study said that Africa accounts*

for about two-thirds of the world's extreme poor. If current trends persist, they will account for nine-tenths by 2030. Fourteen out of 18 countries in the world where the number of extreme poor is rising are in Africa.

What the World Bank says?

- The estimates of extreme poverty reduction may not match with Indian numbers because of differences in how poverty is measured. According to the World Bank, between 2004 and 2011 poverty declined in India from 38.9% of the population to 21.2% (2011 purchasing power parity at \$1.9 per person per day).

Way ahead:

In the last four years, Indian government initiated some structural reforms but it must do more to achieve a double-digit growth rate, create more jobs, revamp land and labour markets, implement the recommendations of Niti Aayog on the ease of doing business in India and accelerate privatization.

Swachh Iconic Places



Swachh Iconic Places

Goal: To achieve a higher level of sanitation / cleanliness in and around Iconic Places in the country

- 10 Iconic places selected in Phase-I in 2016-17 (one year implementation is completed)
- Further 10 Places were selected in Phase-II (implementation started from Jan 2018)
- Phase-III under conceptualization that would include sites on the bank of Ganga

Central PSUs and other corporates supporting through CSR

- **Context:** The government has selected ten new iconic sites under Phase III of the flagship project Swachh Iconic Places (SIP) of the Swachh Bharat Mission.

Key facts:

- Phase I iconic places are: Ajmer Sharif Dargah, CST Mumbai, Golden Temple, Kamakhya Temple, Maikarnika Ghat, Meenakshi Temple, Shri Mata Vaishno Devi, Shree Jagannath Temple, The Taj Mahal and Tirupati Temple.
- Phase II included Gangotri, Yamunotri, Mahakaleshwar Temple, Charminar, Convent and Church of St. Francis of Assisi, Kalady, Gommateswara, Baidyanath Dham, Gaya Tirth and Somnath temple.
- Phase III includes Raghavendra Swamy Temple (Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh); Hazardwari Palace (Murshidabad,

West Bengal); Brahma Sarovar Temple (Kurukshetra, Haryana); VidurKuti (Bijnor, Uttar Pradesh); Mana village (Chamoli, Uttarakhand); Pangong Lake (Leh-Ladakh, J&K); Nagvasuki Temple (Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh); Ima Keithal/market (Imphal, Manipur); Sabarimala Temple (Kerala); and Kanvashram (Uttarakhand).

About Swachh Iconic Places (SIP):

- **What is it?** Swachh Iconic Places (SIP) is an initiative of Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation under Swachh Bharat Mission. Initiated as a project to implement Prime Minister's vision to take iconic places and their surroundings to higher standards of Swachhata, so that all visitors benefit and also take away home the message of cleanliness, Swachh Iconic Places is now in its second phase.

Global Initiative On Academic Network (GIAN)

- **Implementation of the project:** SIP is a truly collaborative project with three other central Ministries: Urban Development, Culture, Tourism; all levels in the concerned States and more importantly, Public Sector and Private companies as partners.
- **Context:** In a bid to make Indian cities more sustainable, the NITI Aayog has launched a new course on ‘Urban Analytics – Evaluating and Measuring Sustainability of Cities’ at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Roorkee. **The course was launched under Global Initiative on Academic Network (GIAN).** The course will provide an understanding and analysis on the urbanisation and its impacts that would help in evaluating the conditions of sustainability in Indian cities.
- There is a need to harness the potential of urban information system and urban planning for making Indian cities more sustainable.
- All stakeholders should come forward with innovative and contextual solutions for Indian cities and create a model of a “living lab” by adopting a rural agglomeration in a nearby area which will transform into a township in the near future.
- **Way ahead:**
- India is the global host of the World Environment Day 2018, where the focus is on Sustainability and achievement of Sustainable Development Goals including SDG 11 which has a goal to “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”.
- Now, it is the responsibility of all the stakeholders involved to achieve this goal in a timely manner.

GIAN is envisaged to achieve the following objectives:

- To increase the footfalls of reputed international faculty in the Indian academic institutes.
- Provide opportunity to our faculty to learn and share knowledge and teaching skills in cutting edge areas.
- To provide opportunity to our students to seek knowledge and experience from reputed International faculty.
- To create avenue for possible collaborative research with the international faculty.
- Develop high quality course material in niche areas, both through video and print that can be used by a larger body of students and teachers.
- To document and develop new pedagogic methods in emerging topics of national and international interest.
- **What needs to be done to make our cities sustainable?**

What is GIAN program?

- Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN) in Higher Education was launched in 2015. It is a program of Ministry of Human Resource and Development.
- **Aim:** GIAN aims at tapping the talent pool of scientists and entrepreneurs to engage with the institutes of higher education in India to augment the country’s existing academic resources, accelerate the pace of quality reforms, and further strengthen India’s scientific and technological capabilities.

WHO Releases New Global Classification Of Diseases

About Global Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance System (GLASS)

- Launched in October 2015, it is being developed to support the global action plan on antimicrobial resistance.
- It is aimed at **supporting global surveillance and research** in order to strengthen the evidence base on **antimicrobial resistance (AMR)** and help informed decision-making and drive national, regional, and global actions.
- It promotes and supports a **standardized approach to the collection, analysis and sharing of AMR data at a global level** by encouraging and facilitating the establishment of **national AMR surveillance systems** that are capable of monitoring AMR trends and producing reliable and comparable data.
- **Objectives of GLASS:**
 - Foster national surveillance systems and harmonized global standards;
 - estimate the extent and burden of AMR globally by selected indicators;
 - analyse and report global data on AMR on a regular basis;
 - detect emerging resistance and its international spread;
 - inform implementation of targeted prevention and control programmes; and
 - assess the impact of interventions.

and other conditions.

- The ICD serves as a foundation for identifying global health trends and is used by health insurers whose reimbursements depend on ICD coding.

Significant features of ICD- 11

- **It is an advance preview** to allow countries to plan how to use the new revision, prepare translations, and train health professionals. The new ICD will be presented at the **World Health Assembly** in May 2019 for adoption by member states and will go into effect from January 2022.
- Includes more codes: The new edition carries about 55,000 codes for injuries, diseases and causes of death, more than the 10th edition that had 14,400 codes.
- **More closely reflects the progress in medicine and advances in scientific understanding:** the codes relating to antimicrobial resistance in the new ICD are more closely aligned with the **Global Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance System (GLASS)** (box).
- **Better captures data** regarding healthcare safety, meaning it will help identify and reduce unnecessary events that may harm health, including unsafe workflows in hospitals. It also uses for the first time an **electronic and user friendly format**.
- **Inclusion of new chapters, including ones on traditional medicine and sexual health.** While traditional medicine has not been classified in this system until now, the chapter on sexual health brings together conditions that were previously categorized in other ways (for instance gender incongruence was earlier listed under mental health condition).
- **Gaming Disorder:** The WHO also added **gaming disorder** to the section on

Why in News?

Recently, World Health Organisation (WHO) released its **11th edition of International Classification of Diseases (ICD- 11)**.

About ICD

- The **International Classification of Diseases (ICD)** is a common language used all over the world by researchers and policy makers as a reference for data, whereas doctors and other medical practitioners use it to diagnose disease

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addictive disorders. Gaming addiction pushes all other activities to the periphery affecting personal, familial, social, educational and occupational functioning and can lead to disturbed sleep patterns, diet problems and lack of physical activities.

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Nutrition Security

Why in news?

United Nation has published its report on "The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World" for 2017.

Background

- This is an **annual report jointly prepared** by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO).
- UNICEF and WHO have joined for the first time.
- For the first time, this year's report provides two measures of food insecurity:
 - o **prevalence of undernourishment (PoU)**,
 - o **prevalence of severe food insecurity** based on **Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)**. This is a new tool based on direct interviews to measure people's ability to access food.
- The report assesses the trends for **six nutrition indicators**, including three **SDG 2 indicators** of child malnutrition (stunting, wasting and overweight) and three **World Health Assembly (WHA)** indicators (Anaemia in women of reproductive age, exclusive breastfeeding in first 6 months and low birth weight).
- The focus of this year's report is on the **nexus between SDG 2 and SDG 16** - that is, between conflict, food security and peace.
- The report shows how conflict affects food security and nutrition, and how improved food security and more-resilient rural livelihoods can prevent conflict and contribute to lasting peace.

Key messages of the report

- **Rise in undernourishment:** The number of chronically undernourished people in the world is estimated to have increased to 815 million in 2016 from 777 million in 2015. After a prolonged decline (900 million in 2000), this recent increase could signal a reversal of trends.
 - o **Stunting:** Though there is fall in stunting, 155 million children under five years of age suffer from stunted growth globally.
 - o **Wasting:** It affects one in twelve (52 million or 8%) of all children under five years of age in 2016, more than half of whom (27.6 million) live in Southern Asia.
- **Coexistence of multiple malnutrition:** under-nutrition among children, anaemia among women, and adult obesity have been found simultaneously.
 - o In 2016, 41 million children under five years of age were overweight.
- **Areas affected:** Parts of sub-Saharan Africa, South-Eastern Asia and Western Asia is worst affected, and deterioration is observed in situations of conflict and conflict combined with droughts or floods/climate (due to El Nino and La Nina) related shocks.
 - o An estimated 489 million of 815 million undernourished people and an estimated 122 million of 155 million stunted children live in countries affected by conflict.
 - o Africa has the highest levels of severe food insecurity reaching 27.4 % of the population - almost four times that of any other region in 2016.
 - o In Asia, the prevalence of severe

food insecurity decreased slightly between 2014 and 2016, from 7.7 to 7.0 % overall, driven mainly by the reduction observed in Central Asia and Southern Asia.

- The prevalence of food insecurity was slightly higher among women at the global level as well as in every region of the world.
- Addressing food insecurity and malnutrition in conflict-affected situations requires immediate humanitarian assistance, long-term development and sustaining peace.

How does Conflict affect food security and nutrition?

- Conflict can cause deep economic recessions, drive up inflation, disrupt employment and erode finances for social protection and health care, to the detriment of the availability and access of food in markets and so damaging health and nutrition.
- The impact on food systems can be severe if the economy and people's livelihoods rely significantly on agriculture, as the effects can be felt across the food- value chain, including production, harvesting, processing, transportation, financing and marketing.
- Conflict undermines resilience and often forces individuals and households to engage in increasingly destructive and irreversible coping strategies that threaten their future livelihoods, food security and nutrition.

Can food insecurity and under-nutrition trigger conflict?

- According to WFP, undernourishment is one of the important determinants of the incidences of armed conflict, and that when coupled with poverty, food insecurity increases the likelihood and intensity of armed conflict.
- In countries with low socio-economic indicators - such as higher rates of child

- mortality, poverty, food insecurity and undernutrition - there is a higher risk of conflict.
- Sharp increase in food prices tend to exacerbate the risk of political unrest and conflict, as witnessed between 2007-08 and 2011 when food riots broke out in more than 40 countries (Arab Spring).
- A severe drought tends to threaten local food security and aggravate humanitarian conditions, which in turn can trigger large-scale human displacement and create a breeding ground for igniting or prolonging conflicts as seen in Syrian civil war.
- Competition for natural resources can be detrimental to the food security of vulnerable rural households, potentially culminating in conflict as seen in Darfur and in greater horn of Africa.
 - Gender dimensions involved in food security and nutrition in conflict zones
- Men and women often have different roles and responsibilities in securing adequate food and nutrition at the household level. Conflicts tend to alter gender roles and social norms.
- The engagement of men in conflict puts greater responsibility in the hands of women in sustaining the livelihood of the household, including for the access to food, nutrition and health care of household members.
- Conflict situations often are characterized by increased sexual violence, mostly targeted at women.
- In crisis situations and among refugees, one in every five women of childbearing age is likely to be pregnant. Conflicts put these women and their babies at increased risk if health-care systems falter and their food security situation deteriorates.
- Rural women often have **less access to resources and income**, which makes them more vulnerable and hence more

likely to resort to riskier coping strategies which may affect their health and eventually of entire household.

- Conflict leads to **increased female labour participation** particularly in low skilled work which may expose them to unsafe and insecure labour conditions.
- **Child labour** in its worst forms are seen during times of conflict.
- Shifting gender roles can also have **beneficial effects on household welfare**. Where women gain more control of resources, household food consumption tends to increase and child nutrition improve. Their economic empowerment may further give them greater voice in household and community decision-making as seen in Somalia, Colombia, Nepal etc.

UN's assessment of India between 2014-16

- 14.5% of the total population is undernourished
- 21.5% Children under five suffer from wasting in 2016.
- 38.5% children under five are stunted
- 51.4% women of reproductive age are anaemic
- Obesity among adults has reached 3.6% and is increasing.
- Exclusive breastfeeding has increased rapidly and around 64.9% children are exclusively breast fed for first six months.

Reasons behind such a scenario:

- Insufficient intake of both macro and micro-nutrients cause malnourishment. Since food security in India is primarily focussed on providing rice and wheat only, the diet lacks other essential nutrients and results into stunting etc.
- Only 17% children achieved a minimum level of diet diversity.
- Acute food insecurity in tribal and rural households is due to a loss of their traditional dependence on forest

livelihood and the State's deepening agrarian crisis.

- Systemic issues and a weaknesses in public nutrition programmes have aggravated the problem e.g. many of the tribal families do not receive rations (through public distribution system) because they do not have a ration card.
- The nutrition expenditure as a percentage of the Budget has drastically declined in many states.

Way-forward

- Prevent conflict through addressing its root and immediate causes such as economic exclusion, extractive or predatory institutions, inequitable social services, access to and use of natural resources, food insecurity, and climatic disasters.
- Timely intervention by government and humanitarian organisations.
- Scaling up social protection, Cash-for-work and food-for-assets programmes, creating or rehabilitating critical productive infrastructure, such as roads or irrigation systems.
- Farmers displaced by conflict can be trained in new livelihood skills, with which they can earn an income in camp settings.
- In pastoralist regions, watering points can be built in safe areas to avoid the risk of leading livestock into conflict zones.
- Support can be provided to internally displaced people, refugees and ex-combatants for returning home and resuming productive activities, for example, by providing seeds, tools, livestock, or skills training.

Non-Communicable Diseases

Why in news?

Recently Report of World Health Organization's (WHO) Independent High-Level Commission on non-communicable diseases (NCD) titled “Time to deliver” has been released.

Findings of the report

- NCDs and mental disorders currently pose one of the biggest threats to health and development globally, particularly in the developing world. The risk of dying prematurely from an NCD in **a low or lower- middle income country is almost double that in high-income country.**
- NCDs affect the people around the world **at all stages of the life course, from childhood to old age.** Obesity, including in children, is increasing in all countries, with the most rapid rises occurring in low- and middle-income countries.
- **Most of the premature death is due to four NCDs** —cardiovascular diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases, and diabetes. Many other NCDs, such as neurological, skin, genetic disorders, disabilities etc., are closely associated with these four major NCDs.
- Although **the number of premature deaths has risen** in the years 2000 to 2015, **the probability of dying from any one of the four major NCDs is declining** due to
 - o A growing younger population **aged 30 to 70 years.**
 - o Falling mortality in two categories, **cardiovascular and chronic respiratory diseases.**
- The global rate of decline in NCDs death was 17% between 2000 and 2015. However it is **still not enough to meet the target of a one-third reduction in premature mortality from NCDs by 2030, as specified in SDG target 3.4.**
- There is increasing evidence about the

role of indoor and outdoor air pollution, with its links to urbanization, in the development of NCDs.

- **Mental disorders:** Depression alone affects 300 million people globally and is the leading cause of disability worldwide. Nearly 800,000 people die from suicide every year. People with severe mental disorders have **a reduced life expectancy of 10 to 20 years**, largely owing to lack of treatment.

Challenges

- **Failure in converting their Commitments:** into legislative and regulatory measures sustained investments, or in financing for NCD programmes consistently. This will have enormous **health, economic, and societal consequences** in all countries.
- **Capacity building:** Many countries do not have the requisite technical expertise, resources, research capacity, and data to address NCD challenges.
- Mental disorders are too often not included in basic UHC packages: It leads to an exceptionally large gap in treatment.
- **Ageing population:** The growing trend of population ageing has enormous ramifications for the prevention and management of NCDs.
- **Vicious cycle of poverty and NCDs:** NCDs and their risk factors worsen poverty, while poverty, isolation, marginalization, and discrimination contribute to rising rates of NCDs, poses a threat to public health and socio-economic development.
- **Other challenges:** Weak health systems, inadequate access, and lack of prevention and health promotion services and evidence-based interventions and medicines are other challenges to each country's path towards UHC in line with its national context and priorities.

Recommendations

- **Leadership and responsibility:** Heads of state and government and not just Ministers of Health should be involved in overseeing while political leaders at all levels should take responsibility for comprehensive local actions.
- **Prioritizing interventions:** within the overall NCD and mental health agenda, based on public health needs. **For e.g. comprehensive tobacco control, comprehensive cardiovascular prevention and treatment programmes etc.**
- **Re-orienting health systems:** to ensure that the national UHC public benefit package includes NCD and mental health services, strengthen primary health services to ensure suitable coverage and synergise existing chronic-care platforms to jumpstart NCD and mental health care.
- **Collaborate and regulate:** Governments should increase engagement with the private sector, academia, civil society, and communities, building on a whole-of-society approach to NCDs, and share experiences and challenges, including policy models that work.
- **Finance:** Governments and the international community should develop a new economic paradigm for funding action on NCDs and mental health. The percentage of national budgets allocated to health, health promotion, and essential public health functions should be increased.
- **Strengthen accountability of government to their citizens:** for action on NCDs. Also, WHO should simplify the existing NCD accountability mechanism and establish clear tracking for the highest impact programmes that can lead to achievement of SDG target 3.4.

Steps taken globally

- **The Moscow Declaration** adopted during the First Global Ministerial Conference on Healthy Lifestyles and Non-communicable Disease Control in 2011 stressed on the need of a multi-sectoral approach.
- Member States of WHO have adopted and taken action on a number of interventions such as Global Action Plan for Prevention and Control of NCDs (2013-2020), the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, the Global Strategy on Diet Physical Activity and Health etc.
- **WHO's Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013- 2020** to strengthen and integrate mental health prevention and prevention services.
- The **WHO Mental Health Atlas** to provide a comprehensive, longitudinal, monitoring of the mental health system performance.
- Adoption of an **Outcome Document at the UN General Assembly** in 2014, which included four time-bound commitments for implementation in 2015 and 2016. The commitments include setting national NCD targets, developing a national plan, reducing risk factors for NCDs and strengthening health systems to respond to NCDs.
- In 2015, a specific NCD target within **SDG target 3.4** was adopted which is a **one-third reduction of premature NCD mortality by 2030** through prevention and treatment of NCDs and the promotion of mental health and well-being.
- In 2017, the **Montevideo Roadmap 2018–2030 on NCDs** as a Sustainable Development Priority was adopted by Member States at the WHO Global Conference on NCDs.
- **25x25 strategy** where Member States agreed to a **25% reduction in premature NCD mortality by 2025.**

Women Entrepreneurs Platform (WEP)

- **Context:** *NITI Aayog's Women Entrepreneurs Platform (WEP)* has signed five separate Statement of Intent (SoIs) with Financial Institutions & Social Organisations. These SOIs will provide financial assistance to women entrepreneurs and address the finance related challenges faced by them through WEP.

Need for economic empowerment of women:

- Economically empowered women are major catalysts for development. There is greater recognition of the positive relationship between increased economic activity by women and improved social outcomes.
- Women often tend to reinvest their income in their children's education, health and nutrition. This has a positive impact on the potential for economic growth.

Challenges:

- India presents lower opportunities for women to assume leadership roles, participation in the workforce or engagement in entrepreneurial activities.
- Lack of education, technological know-how and cultural bias coupled with stringent business and government regulations are some key impediments that happen to undermine women's ability to rise to positions of leadership and take advantage of entrepreneurial opportunities in India.

Way ahead:

- Women entrepreneurs have been carving out a niche for them across

the globe, including India especially in niche and unconventional businesses.

- However, there is significant potential to harness the untapped potential of women's entrepreneurship in India.

About the Women Entrepreneurship Platform:

- **Aim:** The initiative is aimed at building an ecosystem for women across India to realize their entrepreneurial aspirations, scale-up innovative initiatives and chalk-out sustainable, long-term strategies for their businesses. This will be done through an enabling network of industry collaborations, partnerships, mentors and peer-to-peer connect.
- **What it does?** From providing unique services such as credit evaluation of women-led startups by CRISIL and potential equity investments through an INR 10 crore fund established by DICE Districts, the WEP opens up avenues of growth and opportunity for women entrepreneurs.

National Health Profile

Why in News?

Government has released the National Health Profile (NHP)-2018 and launched **National Health Resource Repository**.

About National Health Profile

- Objective of this annual publication is to **create a database of health information of India** which is comprehensive, up-to-date and easily accessible to all stakeholders in the healthcare sector.
- National Health Profile covers-
 - o Demographic information,
 - o Socio-economic information,
 - o Health status
 - o Health finance indicators,
 - o Comprehensive information on health infrastructure and human resources in health.
- It is prepared by Central Bureau of Health Intelligence.
- Health Profile is an important tool as it has helped in designing various programmes and benefitted many initiatives like Free Drugs and Diagnostics and Mission Parivar Vikas.
- It seeks to promote meaningful use of data collection and exchange services for better healthcare management by providing a common platform for sharing information.
- It shall **enable advanced research** towards ongoing & forthcoming healthcare challenges arising from other determinants of health like – disease, environment etc.
- It shall also enhance the coordination between central and state government for optimization of health resources, and decentralize the decision making at district and state level.
- It shall promote convergence between similar programmes by providing interoperability.
- It also seeks to furnish standardized data, distribution of resources and trends on the global platform, using regularly updated health status indicators.

About National Health Resource Repository (NHRR)

- It is the **first ever registry in India** of authentic, standardised and updated geo-spatial data of **all public and private healthcare**.
- **ISRO** is the project technology partner for providing data security.
- It **aims to strengthen evidence-based decision making** and develop a platform for citizens and provider-centric services by secured **Information Technology (IT)-enabled** repository of India's healthcare resources.

Central Bureau of Health Intelligence (CBHI)

- It was established in 1961 and works as the **health intelligence wing** of the Directorate General of Health Services in the Ministry of Health & FW.
- Its vision is to have “**A strong Health Management Information System in entire country**”.

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ARTICLE 35A**WHAT IS ARTICLE 35A?**

ARTICLE 35A (1954) was incorporated in the Indian Constitution through a Constitutional amendment even much before the Constitution of J&K came into existence (1956).

The Article allows the state of Jammu and Kashmir to grant special privi-

leges and rights to permanent residents but denies rights to several others who too have genuine claims.

It debars non-residents of J&K from buying land or property getting a government job or voting in Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir.

- **Context:** The Centre has decided not to file any “counter-affidavit” on Article 35A, which has been challenged in the Supreme Court through a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) petition. The Supreme Court has scheduled further hearing for August 6.

What you need to know about Article 35A?

- Article 35A is a provision in the Constitution that empowers the Jammu and Kashmir legislature to define permanent residents of the state. It was added through the Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order, 1954, issued under Article 370.
- Article 35A empowers Jammu and Kashmir legislature to define “permanent residents” of the state along with their special rights and privileges. This Article has an intricate relationship with Article 370.

WHO ARE PERMANENT RESIDENTS?

- Jammu and Kashmir Assembly defined Permanent Resident as a person who was a state subject on May 14, 1954 or who had been a resident of the state for 10 years and has “lawfully acquired immovable

property in the state.”

- A person who is not a permanent resident of Jammu and Kashmir is not allowed to buy or own properties in the state or vote in state Assembly election or contest election to the state Assembly. An outsider cannot get a job in the Jammu and Kashmir government.

Arguments against Article 35A:

- The petition says Article 35 A is against the “very spirit of oneness of India” as it creates a “class within a class of Indian citizens”. Restricting citizens from other States from getting employment or buying property within Jammu and Kashmir is a violation of fundamental rights under Articles 14, 19 and 21 of the Constitution.
- Also, the parliamentary route of lawmaking was bypassed when the President incorporated Article 35A into the Constitution. Article 368 (i) of the Constitution empowers only Parliament to amend the Constitution.

What’s the case now?

- Attempts to undo Article 35A of the Indian Constitution would strike a fatal blow to the nationalists in the state. Kashmiris are apprehensive that such a move would open the sluice gates for a demographic transformation of the Valley.
- The J&K government is also concerned at the reluctance of the Union government to file a counter affidavit in the Supreme Court. Against the backdrop of the escalating protests in Kashmir, this issue could potentially be explosive.

Cauvery Management Authority

- **Context:** Acting on the Supreme Court’s direction, the Centre recently constituted a Cauvery Water Management Authority (CMA) to address the dispute over sharing of river water among Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and Puducherry.

About the Cauvery Management Authority:

- **Composition:** The authority would comprise a chairman, eight members besides a secretary. Out of eight members, two each will be full-time and part-time members, while the rest four would be part-time members from states.
- **Powers:** The authority will exercise power and discharge such duty for “sufficient and expedient for securing compliance and implementation” of the Supreme Court order in relation to “storage, apportionment, regulation and control of Cauvery waters”. It can also seek the help of the central government for implementation of the award and take appropriate action.

Other functions:

- The authority will supervise operation of reservoirs and with regulation of water releases therefrom with the assistance of regulation committee.
- The authority will also look at regulated release of water by Karnataka, at the inter-state contact point presently identified as Billigundulu gauge and discharge station, located on the common border of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.
- The authority at the beginning of the

water year (June 1 each year) would determine the total residual storage in the specified reservoirs.

- The authority has also been tasked to advise the states to take suitable measures to improve water use efficiency, by way of promoting micro-irrigation (drip and sprinkler), change in cropping pattern, improved agronomic practices, system deficiency correction and command area development.
- It has to also prepare an annual report covering the activities of the authority for the preceding year. The Centre will initially contribute a sum of Rs 2 crore for the functioning of the authority.

Background:

- The apex court, in its verdict delivered on February 16, had asked the Centre to frame the Cauvery management scheme, including creation of the Cauvery Management Board, for release of water from Karnataka to Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry.

Modifications made by the Court:

- The top court had modified the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT) award of 2007 and made it clear that it will not be extending the time for this on any ground.
- It had raised the 270 tmcft share of Cauvery water for Karnataka by 14.75 tmcft and reduced Tamil Nadu’s share, while compensating it by allowing extraction of 10 tmcft groundwater from the river basin, saying the issue of drinking water has to be placed on a “higher pedestal”.

Facts for Prelims:

- **Cauvery River** rises on **Brahmagiri Hill** of the **Western Ghats** in south-western **Karnataka state**. It flows in a south-easterly direction for 475 miles through the states of **Karnataka** and **Tamil Nadu**.
- Before emptying into the Bay of Bengal south of **Cuddalore**, Tamil Nadu, the river breaks into a large number of distributaries forming a wide delta called the “**garden of southern India**.” The river is important for its irrigation canal projects.
- In the upper course, at the **Krishnaraja Sagara**, the Kaveri is joined by two tributaries, the **Hemavati** and **Lakshmantirtha**, where a dam was constructed for irrigation.
- Upon entering Tamil Nadu, the Kaveri continues through a **series of twisted wild gorges** until it reaches **Hogenakal Falls**. There the **Mettur Dam** was constructed for irrigation and hydel power.
- It's main tributaries are the **Kabani** (Kabbani), **Amaravati**, **Noyil**, and **Bhavani** rivers.

Governor's Rule In J&K

- **Context:** The state of Jammu and Kashmir is all set to see a governor's rule following the sudden break in ties between BJP and PDP and subsequent resignation of chief minister Mehbooba Mufti.

What's so special about this?

- The imposition of governor's rule in J&K is slightly different than that in other states. In other states, the president's rule is imposed under the Article 356 of Constitution of India. In J&K, governor's rule is mentioned under Article 370 section 92 – ‘Provisions in case of failure of constitutional machinery in the State.’

Article 370 section 92: Provisions in case of failure of constitutional machinery in the State:

1. If at any time, the Governor is satisfied that a situation has arisen in which the Government of the State cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution, the Governor may by Proclamation-
2. Assume to himself all or any of the functions of the Government of the State and all or any of the powers vested in or exercisable by anybody or authority in the State.
3. Make such incidental and consequential provisions as appear to the Governor to be necessary or desirable for giving effect to the objects of the Proclamation, including provisions for suspending in whole or in part the operation of any provision of this Constitution relating to anybody or authority in the State.

4. Any such Proclamation may be revoked or varied by a subsequent Proclamation.
5. Any such Proclamation whether varied under subsection (2) or not, shall except where it is a Proclamation revoking a previous Proclamation, cease to operate on the expiration of six months from the date on which it was first issued.
6. If the Government or by a Proclamation under his section assumes, to himself any, of the powers of the Legislature to make his laws, any law made by him in the exercise of that power shall, subject to, the terms there of continue to have effect until two years have elapsed from the date on which the proclamation ceases to have effect, unless sooner.
7. No Proclamation under this section shall, except where it is a Proclamation revoking a previous Proclamation, be laid before each House of the Legislature as soon as it is convened.
8. **What is President's Rule in the Indian context?**
9. ***The imposition of Article 356 of the Constitution*** on a State following the failure of constitutional machinery is called President's Rule in India. Once the President's Rule has been imposed on a state, the elected state government will be temporarily dissolved, and the Governor, who is appointed by the government at the Centre, will replace the Chief Minister as the chief executive of the State.
10. The state will fall under the direct control of the Union government, and the Governor will continue to be head the proceedings, representing

the President of India – who is the Head of the State.

11. The imposition of the President’s rule requires the sanction of both the houses of Parliament. If approved, it can go on for a period of six months. However, the imposition cannot be extended for more than three years, and needs to be brought before the two houses every six months for approval.

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Lateral Entry

Why in News?

Central Government had recently invited applications for senior-level positions via lateral entry.

More About the News

- Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) has invited applications for 10 **joint secretary-level posts** in the departments of Economic Affairs, Revenue, Commerce and Highways and others.
- **Criteria for selection-** Graduation Degree, Minimum 40 Years age, 15 years' experience in fields like Revenue, Finance, Transport, Civil Aviation and Commerce.
- The recruitment will be on **contract basis** for **three to five years** depending upon the performance.

Arguments in Favour of Lateral Entry

- **Helpful in Policy Making-** It is essential to have **people with specialized skills** and domain expertise in important positions as policy making is becoming complex in nature.
 - o The IAS officers see the government only from within, lateral entry would enable government to understand the impact of its policies on stakeholders — the private sector, the non-government sector and the larger public.
 - o **First ARC** had pointed out the **need for specialization as far back as in 1965**. The Surinder Nath Committee and the Hota Committee followed suit in 2003 and 2004, respectively, as did the second ARC.
- **Increase in efficiency and governance-** Political & Economic Risk Consultancy Ltd in its 2012 report rated Indian Bureaucracy as the worst in Asia due to corruption and inefficiency.

- o Career progression in the IAS is almost automatic which could put officers in comfort zone. Lateral entrants could also **induce competition** within the system.
- o A UPSC-commissioned report of the Civil Services Examination Review Committee headed by YK Alagh (2001) had recommended lateral entry into middle and senior levels of the government.
- o Niti Aayog, in its Three Year Action Agenda for 2017-2020 had said that sector specialists be inducted into the system through lateral entry as that would “bring competition to the established career bureaucracy”.

- **Entry and retention of talent in Government-** Justice **BN Srikrishna-headed Sixth Central Pay Commission report (2006)** said lateral entry could “ensure entry and retention of talent in the government even for those jobs that have a high demand and premium in the open market”.
- **Shortage of officers:** According to a report by Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions there is a shortage of nearly 1,500 IAS officers in the country.
 - o **Baswan Committee (2016)** had supported lateral entry considering the shortage of officers.
- **Recruitment of IAS officers at very young age-** makes it difficult to test potential administrative and judgement capabilities. Some who are potentially good administrators fail to make it, and some who do make it, fall short of the requirements. Mid-career lateral entrants with proven capabilities will help bridge this deficiency.
- **Not a new phenomenon:** It has been **successful in RBI** and the erstwhile

Planning Commission, as well as its successor, the Niti Aayog.

- o **Ministry of finance** has institutionalised the practice of **appointing advisors** to the government from the world of academia and the corporate sector.
- o Concept already being followed by countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Australia, Belgium, New Zealand etc.

Arguments against Lateral Entry

- **Difficult to ensure responsibility and accountability**-for the decisions taken by the private people during their service, especially given the short tenures of 3 to 5 years.
- **No long term stakes:** The advantage with the current civil service is that policy makers have long-term interests in government.
- **Bypassing constitutional mechanism-** The recent order of the government instructed the cabinet secretary- headed committee to recruit professionals bypassing the Union Public Service Commission which is an independent organisation.
- **Transparency in Recruitment-** Political interference in the Selection process may occur and it may promote Nepotism and Spoils System (an arrangement that employed and promoted civil servants who were friends and supporters of the political group in power).
- **Lack of field experience-** Officers who will join might score on domain knowledge, but they may fall short on the experience of working in the “fields”.
- **Deters existing talent:** Lateral entry shows that experienced civil servants are less efficient and expert than private professionals, which is a not necessarily true.

- The best talent can be attracted only if there is reasonable assurance of reaching top level managerial positions.
- By suggesting a contract-based system for positions of joint secretary and above, the signal would be sent out that only mid-career positions would be within reach in about 15-18 years of service and there would be considerable uncertainty about career progression thereafter.
- **Earlier experiences:** The past experience of inducting private-sector managers to run public-sector enterprises has not been particularly satisfactory. For e.g. Air India, Indian Airlines etc.
- **Issue of Reservation-** It is unclear whether there would be reservation for recruitment through Lateral Entry or not.

Way Forward

- India civil services portray all the characteristics of Weberian Ideal bureaucracy i.e. **hierarchy, a division of power**. Various reforms apart from institutionalised lateral entry are the need of the moment such as:
- **Set up public administration universities for aspiring and serving civil servants:** can create a large pool of aspiring civil servants as well as enable serving bureaucrats to attain deep knowledge of the country’s political economy, increased domain expertise and improved managerial skills.
- **Deputation to Private Sector-** A Parliamentary panel has recommended deputation of IAS and IPS officers in private sector to bring in domain expertise and competition.
- **Central Civil Services Authority** as recommended by 2nd ARC should take decision on posts which could be advertised for lateral entry and such other matters that may be referred to it by the Government.
- **Appraisal mechanisms:** Such as government’s new “360 degree”

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performance appraisal mechanism for senior bureaucrats, whereby officers are graded based on comprehensive feedback from their superiors, juniors and external stakeholders.

- incentives for bureaucrats that are linked to their district's annual development indicators can also be offered.

- **Make bureaucratic decision-making less top-down and more transparent:**

The colonial Indian Civil Service was designed with the primary aim of maintaining law and order and pursuing state-led development while remaining insulated from the needs of the masses. India must transition away from this top down approach.

Statehood For Delhi

Why in news?

- The ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has decided to give another push to its demand for full statehood to Delhi with a public campaign.

Why statehood should be granted?

- In 1991, when the **69th Amendment to the Constitution** created the Legislative Assembly of Delhi, the city's population was much smaller. Today, there are nearly two crore people in Delhi.
- Nowhere in any democracy are two crore people represented by a government with restricted powers.
- When the Union Territories were first created, the idea was to provide a flexible yet transitional status to several territories that joined the Indian. With time, Goa, Manipur, Himachal Pradesh and Tripura have been granted statehood.
- Now, the time has come to enter the second and final stage to create the full State of Delhi.
- **United Nations report** projects that Delhi urban agglomeration will make it the most populous city in the world by 2028.
- An elected government representing a massive population need to have a say in law and order and land management.

Why statehood should not be granted?

- The support for full statehood has not been a national compulsion, but a call fuelled by Delhi's local political ambitions.
- Delhi is the national capital and must necessarily be viewed from the prism of the interests of the entire country.
- Delhi is home to vital institutions such as the president's estate, the Parliament and foreign embassies. All of these infrastructures require special security cover and close coordination with

centrally administered agencies such as the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and Intelligence Bureau (IB).

- These institutions are the sole responsibility of the Union Government and not of any one particular state legislative assembly
- Indian government must have some territory under its control; it cannot possibly be an occupant or a tenant of a state government
- Many regional parties have expressed their strong reservation to acceding full statehood for Delhi. For them, India's national capital belongs to every citizen of
- the country and not just those who reside in the city
- Statehood would deprive Delhi of the many advantages it gets as national capital.
- For instance, the entire burden of policing—involving the coordination of a mammoth staff—is borne by the federal government.

Background

- Till 1992, except for a brief interlude, Delhi was a union territory under the complete control of the Government of India.
- Delhi was allowed its 'statehood' early in the 1990s, with a Chief Minister and a popularly elected unicameral legislature though the 'State' remained truncated in its powers.
- But It remained in substance a union territory and in form a State, with the Lt. Governor retained as its chief executive.
- The Chief Minister and his Cabinet made a late entry into space where Lt Governor and several municipal corporations already existed which created friction.
- Many departments of the Centre, State,

scores of parastatals and five ULBs (urban local bodies) providing bits of governance in the city.

- It could safely be asserted that Delhi has more government and less governance than any other city or state in the country.

Recent Supreme Court Verdict on Delhi-Centre Power Tussle

- The Supreme Court judgement in the Government of NCT Delhi vs Union of India case, overturned the August 2016
- judgment of the Delhi high court, which had ruled that since Delhi was a Union territory all powers lay with the central government, not the elected Delhi government.
- Resolving the dispute over the demarcation of powers between the Union Government and the Government of Delhi, the Supreme Court laid down a few key principles:
 - Delhi government has power in all areas except land, police and public order and **the LG is bound by the aid and advice of the government** in areas other than those exempted
 - The only exception to this rule, it said, was a proviso to **Article 239-AA**, which allowed **the LG to refer to the President any issue** on which there was a difference of opinion with the council of ministers. In such a case, the LG would be bound by the President's decision.
 - Delhi Lieutenant Governor cannot act independently and must take the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers because national capital enjoys special status and is not a full state. Hence, the role of the L-G is different than that of a Governor.
 - It observed that neither the state nor the L-G should feel lionized, but realise they are serving Constitutional obligations and there is no space for

absolutism or anarchy in our Constitution.

Way forward?

- Overlapping jurisdictions in a national capital is inbuilt and constitutional entities have to manage this reality.
- Provide greater autonomy and reasonably robust fairer power-sharing arrangements among different constituents.
 - For a start, Delhi should demand the urgent revision of the existing constitutional provisions (i.e. 69th Amendment, Article 239) and Rules of Business.
- Given the overlapping and often-contested jurisdictions, it is imperative to strive for a **credible and institutionalised dispute-resolution mechanism** as has been adopted by national capitals all over the world.
 - The existing system of referring the disputes to the office of the president is a failed model that lacks credibility and invariably gets resolved in favour of the national government.
- City-government should have a hand in the running of the local municipal bodies.
 - What is required is an empowered Mayor, performing the functions of a municipal body extending to all such subjects where the GoI does not operate.
- The functions of the parastatals, unrecognised by the Constitution, need to be merged in the ULB. Any such subject/function that operationally is difficult to be merged with the ULB can function under the aegis of the Lt Governor.
- Governance restructuring would need to be done in a manner that accountability in relation to specific functions falls squarely on a single organisation/individual.

Reservation In Promotion

Why in news?

The Supreme Court has permitted Central government for **reservation in promotion to SC/ST employees working in the public sector** in “accordance with law”.

Background

- This direction of apex court came in the response to government’s complaint that promotions were at a “standstill” due to separate orders passed by various high courts.
- The Supreme Court’s decision will permit the government to **fill a large number of vacancies** in various departments.
- ‘In accordance with law’ points towards the **guidelines laid down in M Nagaraj case 2006** presently applicable as there is **no specific law** which deals with the reservation in promotions.
- The apex court had further that a seven-judge Constitution bench needs to be constituted to look into the Nagaraj judgement.
- In Nagaraj judgement, apex court while upholding the previous constitutional amendments regarding this issue, put some restrictions on the state that it should:
 - collect quantifiable data showing backwardness of the class and inadequacy of representation of that class in public employment.
 - ensure that efficiency of administration is not reduced while giving promotion.
 - not breach the ceiling-limit of 50% or obliterate the creamy layer or extend the reservation indefinitely.

Argument in favour of reservation in promotion

- The makers of the Constitution used the reservation policy for **giving protection to the deprived sections of society due**

to systemic deprivation of rights, social discrimination and violence. Besides, the Supreme Court has, time and again,

- upheld any **affirmative action seeks to provide a level playing field to the oppressed classes** with the overall objective to achieve equality of opportunity.
- The representation of SCs/STs, though, has gone up at various levels, **representation in senior levels is highly skewed against SCs/STs due to prejudices.** Over the years Institutions has failed to promote equality and internal democracy within them. There were **only 4 SC/ST officers at the secretary rank in the government in 2017.**
- Overall **efficiency in government is hard to quantify**, and the reporting of output by officers is not free from social bias. For ex. **In Maharashtra**, a public servant was denied promotion because his **‘character and integrity was not good’.**

Argument against the reservation in promotions

- Provisions under **articles 16(4), 16 (4A) and 16 (4B)** of the Constitution are only enabling provisions, and **not a fundamental right.** In a case the Supreme Court ruled that **no reservation in promotions would be given** in appointment for faculty posts at the super specialty block in AIIMS.
- The **intent of framers of the constitution** behind including reservation policy was **not reservation without merit.**
- **Gaining employment and position does not ensure the end of social discrimination** and, hence, should not be used as a single yardstick for calculating backwardness.

- The reservation in promotion may **hurt the efficiency of administration.**
- There is **ambiguity and vagueness in promotion process** as of now. Thus, there is a need for a **new, comprehensive law** to be enacted.

Related cases and amendments

- Article 15(4) allows State to make special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for SCs and STs
- In the Indira Sawhney case (1992), the Supreme Court held that the reservation policy cannot be extended to promotions.
- However, **77th Constitutional Amendment (CA)**, inserted **Clause 4A** in Article 16 and restored provision of reservations in promotions.
- The court in 1990s restored their seniority once promoted at par with the SC/ST candidates who got quick promotions ahead of their batch mates.

SINGAPORE SUMMIT

Why in news?

US President Donald Trump and North Korea leader Kim Jong Un created history by coming together at the US- North Korea summit held in Singapore, which resulted in the signing of a “comprehensive document”.

Background

- North Korea has founded its regime’s stability on **Byungjin policy**, i.e. pursuing economic development and nuclear weapons programme simultaneously.
- The recent thaw in relations had been aided by attempts by both North and South Korea to restore normalcy on the divided peninsula, beginning with cordiality during the Winter Olympics and then a meeting between the two Korean leaders.
- Suspension of the annual military exercises by USA and South Korea took place prior to the visit.
- For its part, the North has announced the release of three American prisoners.
- North Korea had also announced to destroy its Punggye-ri nuclear testing zone.

Outcomes

- It marks the establishment of new US-DPRK (Democratic People’s Republic of Korea) relations.
- US had committed to provide security guarantees to North Korea and end US-South Korea Joint war games.
- Reaffirming the **Panmunjom declaration**, Chairman Kim committed to work towards complete denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula. This can reduce the dangers of proliferation of nuclear weapons in future.
- This opens the doorway for the reunification of the Korean peninsula in

the long run.

- However, joint statement issued by the two leaders was brief, vague and generic with probable differences in interpretations of denuclearisation by both parties.
- Also, sanctions on North Korea also continue at present, and South Korea and Japan not being part of the process was a matter of concern.

Geopolitical impact for North East Asia

- The suspension of joint military drills between the US and South Korea and desire to eventually pull out some of its 28,500 troops in South Korea has **created concerns regarding USA’s security provider role in North East Asia.**
- Japan is feeling marginalized given Trump’s “America First” attitude and the situation could eventually lead
- to **Japan and South Korea acquiring their own nuclear deterrent** within the American alliance system.
- East Asia may be on the cusp of a major strategic shift, comparable to the 1972 U.S. opening to China led by then-president Richard Nixon
- **China can be the big winner** as a reduction of US might in North East Asia and the widening gap between the
- US and its allies serve Beijing’s interests.
- **For India, It could benefit in ensuring a new market in the East Asia** which is significant in the wake of the government’s ‘Act East policy’. It also reduces **the threat from the North Korea-Pakistan** nexus which emerged when in the 1990s nuclear technology was indirectly transferred between Pakistan and North Korea.

DEFENCE ACQUISITION COUNCIL (DAC)

- **Context:** The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) has approved procurement of high powered radars for the Indian Air Force and air cushion vehicles for the Army and the Coast Guard together worth over ₹ 5,500 crore.
- The 12 high power radars will be procured indigenously under the ‘Buy (Indian) IDDM’ category.

based on long-term procurement plans. It also clears all acquisitions, which includes both imported and those produced indigenously or under a foreign license.

Facts for Prelims:

- A new category of procurement ‘Buy {Indian-IDDM (Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured)} has been introduced in Defence Procurement Procedure-2016 and the same has been accorded top most priority for procurement of capital equipment.
- Under the new category, indigenously designed equipment with 40% indigenous content (IC), or equipment not necessarily designed in-house but having a 60% IC, is intended for procurement from the local industry.

Defence Acquisition Council (DAC):

- **What is it?** To counter corruption and speed up decision-making in military procurement, the government of India in 2001 decided to set up an integrated DAC. It is headed by the Defence Minister.
- **Objective:** The objective of the DAC is to ensure expeditious procurement of the approved requirements of the Armed Forces, in terms of capabilities sought, and time frame prescribed, by optimally utilizing the allocated budgetary resources.
- **Functions:** The DAC is responsible to give policy guidelines to acquisitions,

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NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR PROTECTION OF CHILD RIGHTS(NCPCR)

- **Context:** Indian Railways and the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) have jointly launched an awareness campaign on Protection of children in contact with Railways.

Significance of the campaign:

- This is an endeavour to spread awareness about large number of vulnerable children coming in contact with Railways as passengers or abandoned, trafficked, runaway children separated from their family.

About NCPCR:

- The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) was set up in March 2007 under the Commission for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005.
- It works under the administrative control of the Ministry of Women & Child Development.
- The Child is defined as a person in the 0 to 18 years age group.
- The Commission's Mandate is to ensure that all Laws, Policies, Programmes, and Administrative Mechanisms are in consonance with the Child Rights perspective as enshrined in the Constitution of India and also the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.



VIGILANCE COMMISSIONER

- **Context:** Former NIA chief Sharad Kumar is the new vigilance commissioner for a term of four years or till he attains the age of 65.

About CVC:

- It is the apex vigilance institution. It was created via executive resolution (based on the recommendations of **Santhanam committee**) in 1964 but was conferred with statutory status in 2003. It submits its report to the President of India.
- **Composition:** Presently, the body consists of central vigilance commissioner along with 2 vigilance commissioners.
- **Appointment:** They are appointed by the President of India on the recommendations of a committee consisting of Prime Minister, Union Home Minister and Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha (if there is no LoP then the leader of the single largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha).
- **Term:** Their term is 4 years or 65 years, whichever is earlier.

Removal: The Central Vigilance Commissioner or any Vigilance Commissioner can be removed from his office only by order of the President on the ground of proved misbehavior or incapacity after the Supreme Court, on a reference made to it by the President, has, on inquiry, reported that the Central Vigilance Commissioner or any Vigilance Commissioner, as the case may be, ought to be removed.

AIIB ANNUAL MEETING AT MUMBAI

Why in news?

Recently, third annual meeting of AIIB was held in Mumbai.

Highlights of the meeting

- The meeting was **jointly held by** The Department of Economic Affairs and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).
- **Theme of the meeting** was “Mobilizing finance for Infrastructure: Innovation and Collaboration” which recognises the vital role of private sector in bridging infrastructural gap.
- During the event **Indian Infrastructure Expo 2018** was also held with an objective to offer companies from public and private sector to showcase their latest solutions, technologies and offerings in the realms of infrastructure project development and delivery.
- The next annual meeting of AIIB will be held in Luxembourg in 2019.

Asian Infrastructure Forum

- During the annual meeting of AIIB, **Asian Infrastructure Fund** was also launched.
- It will **gather infrastructure practitioners** in a practical and project driven discourse, focussed on matching finance to critical infrastructural needs.
- The forum will focus on infrastructure funding w.r.t. **fintech and green finance** and also focus on creating business development opportunities for participants.
- During the inaugural meeting of the forum workshops were held on transport, Energy, Connectivity, Sustainable Cities etc.

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

- It is a multilateral development bank with a mission to improve social and economic outcomes in Asia and beyond.
- It was established in December 2015 but commenced operation in January 2016 and is headquartered in Beijing. Currently it has 86 members with India as a founding member.
- India holding about 8.99% stake and 7.5% vote is the second largest shareholder in AIIB with China holding 32% being the largest.
- So far AIIB has approved 23 projects with a total funding of USD4.22 billion. Recently it also proposed to invest USD200 million in the **National Infrastructure Investment Fund (NIIF)**.

ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS (OPCW)**Why in news?**

OPCW has been granted new powers to assign blame for attacks using banned toxic materials.

More on news

- Until now OPCW had **limited power** to only send teams to places to collect samples and draw conclusions whether the chemical weapons attack had happened or not.
- It did not have powers to identify the perpetrator (country or non-state actors) of the chemical weapons' attacks.
- The British-led motion was supported by the United States and European Union, but opposed by Russia, Iran, Syria, and their allies.
- However, India voted against the decision because
 - o India asserts that the consultations conducted by the sponsor on the draft decision with far reaching importance and implications were incomplete.
 - o The major concerns of India have not been addressed.
 - o India believes there is too much powers wielded in the hands of the Director General, leading to the partisan use of the institute.

OPCW

- It was established in the year 1997 with headquarter at The Hague, Netherlands.
- It is the implementing body for the **Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons.**
- The OPCW Member States share the collective goal of preventing chemistry from ever again being used for warfare, thereby strengthening international security.
- To this end, the Convention contains four key provisions:
 - o destroying all existing chemical weapons under international verification by the OPCW;

- o monitoring chemical industry to prevent new weapons from re-emerging;
- o providing assistance and protection to States Parties against chemical threats; and
- o fostering international cooperation to strengthen implementation of the Convention and promote the peaceful use of chemistry.
- It has membership of 193 countries.
 - o India is a member.
 - o Israel has signed but not ratified the Convention. Egypt, North Korea, Palestine and South Sudan have neither signed nor acceded.
- The Conference of the States Parties is the plenary organ consisting of all members of the OPCW having equal voting rights. It has the general power to oversee implementation of the Convention
- OPCW has reached a major milestone of destroying over 90% of the stockpile of the chemical weapons and was awarded **2013 Nobel Peace Prize** for its extensive efforts to eliminate chemical weapons.
- **The OPCW- The Hague Award-** It was established to honor select individuals and institutions by highlighting their exceptional contributions towards the goal of a world permanently free of chemical weapons.

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IBSA DECLARATION FOR SOUTH-SOUTH CO-OP

Why in news?

Recently, at a **Ministerial meeting of IBSA in Pretoria, South Africa**, Foreign Ministers of India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA) adopted a declaration to contribute to greater understanding of development and South-South Cooperation (SSC).

Background About South-South Cooperation (SSC)

- South South Cooperation (SSC) is defined as the **exchange and sharing of developmental solutions among countries in the global south**.
- The formation of SSC can be traced to the **Asian–African Conference that took place in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955** which is also known as the **Bandung Conference**.

About the IBSA Declaration on South-South Cooperation (SSC)

The declaration calls for the following Principles and basis for South-South Cooperation:

- **SSC as a common endeavour of peoples and countries of the South.** It notes the shared histories, understanding and beliefs and developmental experiences of global south.
- **Developing Countries as developing Partners:** Developing countries engaged in SSC are not donors and recipients but developing partners.
- **Solidarity and the spirit of sharing** are the primary motivations for SSC.
- **Voluntary in nature:** SSC is voluntary in nature and not obligatory like Official Development Assistance (ODA).
- **Demand driven process:** Partner countries determine the priorities in the SSC projects. Primary responsibility towards development rests with the States themselves under their ownership and leadership.

- **Respect for national sovereignty** is at the core of SSC. It is guided by principles of respect for national sovereignty; national ownership and independence; equality; non-conditionality; non-interference in domestic affairs; and mutual benefit.
- **Complements North-South Cooperation:** South- South Cooperation serves as a complement to and not as a substitute for North-South cooperation, in supporting the acceleration of the development agenda. It calls upon the global North to honour its ODA commitments fully, scale up existing resources and commit additional resources to provide the necessary means to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change as well as implementing SDGs.

KHADI & VILLAGE INDUSTRIES COMMISSION (KVIC)

- **Context:** KVIC has created a world record of distributing maximum number of bee-boxes in one day.

- The Wider Objective – Creating self-reliance amongst people and building up a strong rural community spirit.

Key facts:

- The record was achieved by the KVIC in the Zangalee Army area at Kupwara in Kashmir beating its previous best of 1000 bee boxes distributed in Kaziranga forest area among the Mishing tribe on the occasion of World Honey BeeDay.
- Two thousand three hundred thirty (2330) bee-boxes were distributed among 233 beneficiaries in the Zangalee Army area.

KHADI AND VILLAGE INDUSTRIES COMMISSION (KVIC)

- Khadi & Village Industries Commission (KVIC) established under the Khadi and Village Industries Commission Act, 1956
- The functions of the Commission is to plan, promote, organize and assist in the establishment and development of khadi and village industries in the rural area in coordination with other agencies engaged in rural development wherever necessary.

About Khadi & Village Industries Commission (KVIC):

- The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) is *a statutory body* established by an Act of Parliament (Khadi and Village Industries Commission Act of 1956). In April 1957, it took over the work of former All India Khadi and Village Industries Board.
- **Functions:** It is an apex organization under the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, with regard to khadi and village industries within India, which seeks to – “plan, promote, facilitate, organise and assist in the establishment and development of khadi and village industries in the rural areas in coordination with other agencies engaged in rural development wherever necessary.”

The Commission has three main objectives which guide its functioning. These are:

- The Social Objective – Providing employment in rural areas.
- The Economic Objective – Providing salable articles.

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NATIONAL TESTING AGENCY

- **Context:** The National Testing Agency, which is being set up to relieve the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) of the burden of conducting multiple examinations, will also train paper setters to set better question papers and provide better model answers.

In order to serve the requirements of the rural students, NTA would locate the centres at sub-district/district level and as far as possible would provide hands-on training to the students.

About NTA:

- In pursuance of the Budget Announcement 2017-18, the Union Cabinet, in November 2017, approved creation of the National Testing Agency (NTA) as an **autonomous and self-sustained premier testing organization** to conduct entrance examinations for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the country.
- **Composition:** It will be chaired by an educationist who will be appointed by the MHRD. The agency will have a board of governors who will represent the member institutions.
 - The NTA would initially conduct those entrance examinations which are currently being conducted by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). The examinations will be conducted in online mode twice a year in order to give adequate opportunity to candidates to bring out their best.
 - Among the examinations that will be transferred to the NTA are the prestigious Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) for admission to engineering colleges like the IITs and NITs and the National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test (NEET) for admission to all medical colleges in the country, except AIIMS and JIPMER, Puducherry.

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SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION

Why in news?

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit was held in **Qingdao, China**. **Key takeaways of the meet/ Qingdao declaration**

- It reaffirmed the resolve to fight **terrorism, separatism and extremism** and called for a **unified global counter-terrorism front under the coordination of the U.N.** It also endorsed the demand for the **UN Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism**.
- The SCO leaders adopted a **Joint Appeal to Youth** to counter the radicalization from extremist ideologies.
- It emphasized the importance of **comprehensive measures to reach a peaceful settlement** of international and regional conflicts.
- India **refused to endorse the ambitious Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**. Being the lone dissenting voice against the project in the joint declaration it said that India welcomes connectivity projects that **respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations**.
- India coined **SECURE strategy** for comprehensive security in the SCO region.
- The declaration also showed its support for the Iranian nuclear deal and stressed on to consistently implement the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iranian nuclear programme. Iran is presently an observer member of the SCO.

Shanghai co-operation Organization (SCO)

- This is **Eurasian political, economic, and security organization formed in 2001** and headquartered in **Beijing**.
- It owes its origin to its predecessor
- **Shanghai Five**.
- Its driving philosophy is known as **The**

“Shanghai Spirit” which emphasizes harmony, working by consensus, respect for other cultures, non-interference in the internal affairs of others, and non-alignment.

- **Culture has become an important element** of the SCO, attuned to the group’s search for an **inclusive Eurasian identity**
- SCO comprises eight-member states, **India, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, Russian, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan**.
- This year meet is **India’s first participation in the summit as a full-time member**. India, along with Pakistan, became full-time members during the **Astana summit in Kazakhstan** in June 2017.
- Besides it has **4 observer states and 6 dialogue partners**.

Significance for India

- The SCO’s main objective of **working cooperatively against the “three evils” of terrorism, separatism, and extremism** is in consonance with India’s interests.
- With **almost half of world population** the group has potential to boost tourism sector of the country. Presently tourists from SCO countries constituted **only 6% of India’s total tourists**, which can be **doubled to 12%**.
- Regular participation in the meetings of **Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)** and joint military exercises will help **enhance combat capabilities and intelligence sharing**.
- It will help revive India China relation especially after Doklam issue. On the sidelines, China agreed to again provide India **hydrological data of the Brahmaputra River in flood season** and to **import non-Basmati rice from India** which is likely to bridge the

ballooning trade deficit to a certain extent.

- It can be seen as **an opportunity for the India and Pakistan to cooperate** on issues of mutual interest without bringing in their bilateral disputes.
- It will give India **fresh leads to engage with Central Asia**. Apart from Trade with Landlocked countries like Uzbekistan through the Iranian port of Chabahar, the cultural connect and people to people engagement will be enhanced.

- It is mandated for **counter terrorism activities, collecting military intelligence and security** of the SCO region.
- **The Executive Committee of the RATS** is the permanent body of the SCO based in **Tashkent**.

Challenges

- **India has again refused to endorse the BRI project**. Without its participation the success of project cannot be ensured. Besides, Military standoff at **Doklam damaged the India China relations**.
- **India and Pakistan** relations have always been under strain due to **Kashmir issue**. Without solving it, Mutual cooperation between them cannot be expected.
- The US has imposed sanctions on Russia under **The Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act**
- **(CAATSA)**, which affects **Indian defence purchases** from its strongest defence partner.
- The **India-US-Japan-Australia quadrilateral** has also been revived recently against the backdrop of Chinese assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific.

SECURE Strategy

S- Security of citizens

E- Economic development for all

C- Connecting the region

U- Uniting our people

R- Respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity

E- Environmental protection

Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)

- It was established under the aegis of **SCO** in **2002**.

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US EXTRATERRITORIAL SANCTIONS

Why in News?

USA has recently imposed several extraterritorial sanctions targeting Russia and Iran which would have direct ramifications for India.

Recent US extraterritorial Sanctions and their potential impacts on India:

1. USA's withdrawal from Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)

- USA imposed unilateral sanctions on Iran after its withdrawal from Iran Nuclear Deal. This has increased oil prices, foreign exchange outflows, weakened Rupee value and would affect India's oil trade with Iran which was its third **biggest source of oil in 2017**.
- It may also **affect the progress of the International North South Transport Corridor** and the **Chabahar port** in Iran which India sees as a gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia bypassing Pakistan.
- India maintained that all the parties concerned should engage constructively to resolve the Iran issue peacefully and that Iran's right to peaceful use of nuclear energy must be ensured.
- In 2005 Tehran cancelled a long-term LNG deal favourable to India after it voted against Iran in the International Atomic Energy Agency's governing board, under US pressure.
- India was forced to significantly slash Iranian oil imports between 2012 and 2015 and paid Iran in rupees or initiated barter trade. India might have to readopt those measures now.

2. US sanctions towards Russia, Iran and North Korea using CAATSA

The US is ingeniously employing extraterritorial sanctions to advance its geopolitical and commercial interests to boost its own arms sales.

- CAATSA is likely to affect India's arms

procurement from Russia in a number of ways-

- o India's planned procurement from Russia, particularly the **S-400 Triumf air defence system worth \$4.5 billion**, Project 1135.6 frigates and Ka226T helicopters, would **come under the immediate scanner of US authorities**.
- o It would **affect all the joint ventures (JVs)** between Indian and Russian defense companies for instance **Indo Russian Aviation Ltd, Multi-Role Transport Aircraft Ltd and Brahmos Aerospace** impacting **indigenization and self reliance efforts** of India under its Make in India programme.
- o It would also **affect India's purchase of spare parts, components, raw materials and other assistance for which Indian entities are dependent on Russia** for maintenance of existing equipment.

Potential Impacts of these sanctions on India-US relations

- **Heighten India's traditional insecurity about the US** as a reliable partner impacting New Delhi's defence and security cooperation with Washington, for instance, US designating India as a Major Defence Partner.
- **Huge loss for the American Companies-** As per the MoD's existing **Guidelines on Penalties in Business Dealings with Entities**, reneging of any contractual obligations might attract either suspension or ban of the concerned American companies from taking part in several mega procurement contracts that is being aggressively pushed through its **newly announced Strategic Partnership (SP) model** as part of its Make in India and diversification policies.

More about Countering America's Adversaries**through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)**

- Enacted on August 2, 2017, it aims to counter the aggression by **Iran, Russia and North Korea** through punitive measures.
- **Title II of the Act** deals with sanctions on Russian interests such as its oil and gas industry, defence and security sector, and financial institutions, in the backdrop of its military intervention in Ukraine and its alleged meddling in the 2016 US Presidential elections.
- Under the Act, the **Department of State** has notified almost all major **39 Russian entities** from defence and intelligence sector, dealings with which could make third parties liable to sanctions.

extraterritorial sanctions.

- India should include provisions in its existing guidelines for penalties in business dealings, banning companies of countries resorting to extraterritorial sanctions on the lines of EU which would update a **“blocking statute”** framed in 1996 to protect European firms against US sanctions.
- The US must realize the importance of India's military and economic growth if Washington wants a strong India defending and strengthening the liberal order in Indo-Pacific. It should work out ways in which these sanctions have little impact on India.

About Extraterritorial/Secondary Sanctions:

These are the sanctions that are designed to restrict the economic activity of governments, businesses, and nationals of third countries which are considered as a violation of their sovereignty and international laws.

Way Forward

- As a sovereign country, India cannot be dictated regarding its defence cooperation or trade ties with any other nations. This was highlighted by Prime Minister at the recent Shangri La Dialogue when he mentioned that India favoured **an open and stable trade regime**. Similarly, External affairs minister emphasized that **“India followed only UN sanctions, not unilateral sanctions of any country”**.
- As these sanctions violate **international law, the UN Charter and WTO rules**, India along with other nations must use **diplomatic measures**, including taking US to the WTO dispute-resolution body and introducing a UN General Assembly resolution against unlawful

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ENFORCEMENT DIRECTORATE

- **Context:** The Enforcement Directorate has zeroed in on some non-government organisations (NGOs) that are suspected to have funded Naxal operatives in Chhattisgarh. The action is being taken following several rounds of multi-agency meetings on devising a coordinated strategy to choke funding to Naxal operatives in various States.

About Enforcement Directorate:

- **What is it?** It is a law enforcement agency and economic intelligence agency responsible for enforcing economic laws and fighting economic crime in India. It is part of the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance.
- **Objectives:** The prime objective of the Enforcement Directorate is the enforcement of two key Acts- the Foreign Exchange Management Act 1999 (FEMA) and the Prevention of Money Laundering Act 2002 (PMLA). Other objectives are primarily linked to checking money laundering in India.
- **Composition:** It comprises officers of the Indian Revenue Service, Indian Police Service and the Indian Administrative Service.

Background: The origin of this Directorate goes back to 1 May 1956, when an ‘Enforcement Unit’ was formed, in Department of Economic Affairs, for handling Exchange Control Laws violations under Foreign Exchange Regulation Act, 1947. In the year 1957, this Unit was renamed as ‘Enforcement Directorate’.

EXPORT CREDIT GUARANTEE CORPORATION

- **Context:** Cabinet has approved the capital infusion of Rs.2000 crore for strengthening of Export Credit Guarantee Corporation (ECGC).

Benefits:

- The infusion would enhance insurance coverage to MSME exports and strengthen India's exports to emerging and challenging markets like Africa, CIS and Latin American countries.
- With enhanced capital, ECGC's underwriting capacity and risk to capital ratio will improve considerably.
- With a stronger under writing capacity, ECGC will be in a better position to support Indian exporters to tap new and unexplored markets.
- Increased capital infusion will help ECGC to diversify its product portfolio and provide cost effective credit insurance helping exporters to gain a stronger foothold in the difficult markets.

About Export Credit Guarantee Corporation:

- ECGC is a premier export credit agency of the Government of India to provide Export Credit Insurance Services to facilitate exports from the country. The ECGC offers credit insurance schemes to exporters to protect the against losses due to non-payment of export dues by overseas buyers due to political and / or commercial risks.

HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION OF INDIA

- **Context:** A Higher Education Commission of India (Repeal of University Grants Commission Act) Bill 2018 which seeks to repeal UGC Act and provides for setting up of Higher Education Commission of India has been prepared by the Ministry of HRD.

Roles and functions of Higher Education Commission of India:

- The focus of the Commission will be on improving academic standards and quality of higher education, specifying norms for learning outcomes, lay down standards of teaching/research etc.
- It will provide a roadmap for mentoring of institutions found failing in maintaining the required academic standards.
- The Commission will encourage higher education institutions to formulate a Code of Good Practices covering promotion of research, teaching and learning.
- The Commission will also specify norms and processes for fixing of fee chargeable by higher education institutions and advice the Central Government or the State Governments, as the case may be, regarding steps to be taken for making education affordable to all.
- The Commission will monitor, through a national data base, all matters covering the development of emerging fields of knowledge and balanced growth of higher education institutions in all spheres and specially in promotion of academic quality in higher education.

Composition:

- The proposed commission will have 12 members appointed by the central

government, apart from the chairperson and vice-chairperson.

Powers:

- It shall have the power to enforce its decisions through legal provisions in the Act.
- It shall have the power to grant authorization for starting of academic operations on the basis of their compliance with norms of academic quality.
- It will also have the powers to revoke authorization granting to a higher education institution where there is a case of wilful or continuous default in compliance with the norms /regulations.
- It will also have the power to recommend closure of institutions which fail to adhere to minimum standards without affecting students' interest.

Brief history of UGC:

- Previously, UGC was formed in 1946 to oversee the work of the three Central Universities of Aligarh, Banaras and, Delhi. In 1947, a Committee was entrusted with the responsibility of dealing with all the then existing Universities.
- After independence, the *University Education Commission was set up in 1948 under the Chairmanship of S. Radhakrishnan* and it recommended that the UGC be reconstituted on the general model of the University Grants Commission of the United Kingdom.
- The UGC was however, formally established in November 1956, by an Act of Parliament as a statutory body of the Government of India.

INDIA MONGOLIA

Why in news?

Mongolia has launched construction of its first strategically important oil refinery funded by India in southern Dornogovi province.

More about the news

- Supported by a \$1 billion soft credit line from India announced in 2015, the new refinery is as part of India's effort to develop further ties with the landlocked country and help reduce its energy dependence on neighbouring China and Russia.
- The refinery, planned for completion in late 2022, will be capable of processing 1.5 million tonnes of crude oil per year and will meet Mongolia's demand for gasoline, diesel, aviation fuel and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG). The refinery will process Mongolia's own crude oil, which is now sold to China.

India Mongolia Relations

Mongolia, a large landlocked country wedged between giants China and Russia, has a population of just 3 million. Almost half its people live as nomadic stock herders.

- Diplomatic Relation:** India established diplomatic relations with Mongolia in 1955. In 1991, India supported Mongolia's membership to Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Mongolia along with India and Bhutan co-sponsored famous UN Resolution for the recognition of Bangladesh as an independent country in 1972.
 - In 2011, a **line of credit of US\$20 million** was announced for setting up of “Centre of Excellence for IT, Communication & Outsourcing” in Ulaanbaatar.
 - In 2015, Indian PM visited Mongolia signed a Joint Statement on ‘Strategic Partnership’ between India and Mongolia.
 - Further MOU on Cooperation in the field of Border Patrolling &

Surveillance, MOU on cooperation between National Security Councils, Revised Air Services Agreement were also signed

- International Cooperation:** Mongolia also supports India for becoming a **permanent member of a reformed and expanded UNSC**. Further India and Mongolia declared support to each other for UNSC non-permanent seats respectively for terms 2021-22 and 2023-24.
- Defence Cooperation:** There is India-Mongolia Joint Working Group for Defence cooperation which meets annually. Joint India-Mongolia exercise ‘**Nomadic Elephant**’ is held annually and India is a regular participant in the multilateral exercise ‘**Khan Quest**’ held in Mongolia. There is also an agreement for cooperation for border patrolling between the two countries.
- Energy Cooperation:** A Working Group for cooperation in the field of nuclear energy has been set up between the respective agencies of the two countries i.e. the DAE and the Nuclear Energy Agency of Mongolia.
- Commercial, Economic and Technical Cooperation:** Main items of exports to Mongolia include medicines, mining machinery and auto parts, etc. Imports from Mongolia include raw cashmere wool.
- Humanitarian Assistance:** Humanitarian assistance worth US\$20,000 for the children of herders in Sukhbaatar Aimag (severely affected by harsh winter ‘Zud’) was also provided in 2017.
- Other Area:** India also offers scholarships to Mongolian students under Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation programme, also known as ITEC, and through scholarships offered by the Indian Council of Cultural Relations.

Challenges

- **Connectivity** with Mongolia is also a big challenge for India as it is a **landlocked country** sandwiched between two giant neighbours. Only recently India and Mongolia have agreed to explore the possibility of launching direct air connectivity between New Delhi and the Mongolian capital Ulaanbaatar.
- Mongolia's is highly **dependent on China and Russia for trade and investment** which could pose challenges for India in making significant inroads into Mongolia.
- Mongolia location is in close **proximity to China's volatile regions**. Any, internal developments in China will also have implications for both Mongolia and India.
- Even domestically Mongolia is **grappling with corruption, environmental degradation, unemployment and underemployment and lack of effective women participation** in economy mainly due to predominance of nomadic herding in the country.

Way Forward

- Mongolia plays a key role in Asian energy transportation as it falls on the crossroads of major energy supply routes.
- India also needs to factor Mongolia in its Russia policy as well, for safeguarding interests in the Asia-Pacific region. India's benign presence in Mongolia is desirable for India's future interest in Russia's resource-rich trans-Siberia and Far East.
- To preserve and promote the common heritage of Indo-Mongolian culture is important. This should serve as the basis for nurturing and pursuing future common interests.

INDIA-MALDIVES

Why in news?

India has reduced the amount of restriction-free exports of essential commodities permitted to Maldives recently

India-Maldives relations

- India established **formal diplomatic relations** with Maldives after the independence of Maldives from the British rule in 1966.
- India has been a friend in need of people of Maldives:
 - Operation Cactus was **India's military aid** of 1600 soldiers to Maldives to fight the armed attack of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) supported rebel groups in 1988 for an attempted coup.
 - India provided bottled water through its helicopters to Maldives when its only water treatment plant collapsed in December 2014.
 - In 2016 Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) meeting India prevented countries from executing punitive sanctions due to failure in creating an 'Inclusive country' and a 'Genuine Democracy'.
 - India has also undertaken projects in Maldives such as:
 - ✓ Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital (IGMH): The 200-bed state-of-the-art hospital is considered a premier institute
 - ✓ Faculty of Engineering Technology (FET) which has a capacity to train several hundred students a year.
 - ✓ **India-Maldives Friendship Faculty of Hospitality & Tourism**

Studies

- India has provided **liberal economic aid** and cooperated with Maldives for improving its Infrastructure.
- India shares very **close military ties** with Maldives by having two helicopter bases, integration of radars and Indian Coast Guard surveillance along Maldivian coast. India also aims to remain as a net security provider to Maldives.
- India also promotes **people to people contacts** through air connectivity, education linked scholarship programs and cultural exchanges. Indians constitute second largest expatriate community in Maldives with approximate strength of around 22000.

Contemporary situation

- Under the current regime of Maldives, since 2013, India-Maldives relations have been deteriorating.
- Maldives' closeness to China has increased as big infrastructure projects have been given to Chinese
- companies and Chinese naval ships were allowed to dock in Male.
- Further Maldives has signed its first ever **Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with China**. FTA was signed even after President Yameen, during a visit to New Delhi, said that his country would sign an FTA with India first. FTA will draw the Maldives more closely into China's security net considering:
- China already has an FTA with

Pakistan, and is exploring or negotiating FTAs with Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal.

- The Maldives has also agreed to become a partner in China's maritime silk route.
- Bilateral diplomatic relations between India and Maldives have taken a beating since Maldivian President Abdulla Yameen **declared a state of emergency in response to a Supreme Court order quashing the conviction of former President Mohamed Nasheed and eight other opposition politicians on various charges, including terrorism.**
- Maldives with China's backing has cracked down on the opposition and free speech and has asked India not to interfere in its internal matters.
- Maldives recently also asked **India to take back one of two naval Dhruv Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) New Delhi had gifted to Male and has cancelled work permits of many Indians indicating further deterioration of ties between the two countries.**
- Consequently, India has lowered the **limits on the export of certain essential commodities** such as potatoes, onions, and eggs to the Maldives which were decided under an earlier agreement in 1981 and may trigger food shortages in the country.

India's stake and Concerns

- The first gesture of India's disappointment over the happenings in archipelago state is that despite 'Neighborhood first' policy, Indian PM skipped

Maldives in his Indian Ocean Tour due to **cancellation of GMR contract** by Maldives later given to China and country's approach towards restoring democracy but this has only resulted in its tilt towards China.

- India is equally concerned over **increasing radicalization of youth** in Maldives which has security implications for India. Maldives has also decided to sell or lease an atoll to Saudi Arabia which will set up Madrasas thus aggravating Wahhabism in the country.
- The current emergency situation is also a very serious as **democratic institutions are being subverted** which would make it difficult for Indian Government to negotiate a better relation with Maldives, this calls for India's intervention in Maldives. But unlike India's operation Cactus, where request for intervention was from the sitting president, in the present case the demand for intervention is from opposition parties. The situation does not meet the requirements articulated by the 'responsibility to protect' doctrine, under Article 2 of the UN charter and India's traditional policy of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other sovereign countries.

Way forward

- India should involve in **political mediation** between the government and Opposition, to restore order in Maldives and facilitate conditions for the upcoming elections due in next few months. A democratic

Government would be in the best of interests for both Maldives as well as India. India must get considerable international support for the same.

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INDIA-SEYCHELLES RELATIONS

Why in news?

Seychelles' President Daniel Faure visited India for bilateral talks in the backdrop of the Seychelles' parliament refusal to ratify an Indian naval base plan on the Assumption Island.

Areas of co operation

- India-Seychelles diplomatic relationship was established in **1976** when Seychelles got independence and the two countries share close relationship based primarily on the **twin planks of maritime security and co- operation in developmental activities.**
- India and Seychelles are working together to bolster the **island nation's need for maritime security in Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and making the IOR safe for development and trade activities.** Besides cooperation in **counter piracy and counter terrorism in high seas** are also going on which is critical for India's extended maritime security.
- Under Development cooperation several initiatives like Training **under Indian technical and economic co- operation (ITEC) Programme**, provision of patrol vessels, hydrographic surveys etc. have been taken.
- **Defence Co-operation**
 - o Indian navy has deployed **maritime reconnaissance aircraft to Seychelles for surveillance of the island nation's Exclusive Economic Zone.**
 - o Besides, **Joint Military Exercise Lamitye** also being conducted since **2001. Importance of Seychelles for India**
- Seychelles forms a crucial part of Indian Ocean Region where India is trying to increase its influence by extending economic, military and diplomatic cooperation and through strategic

partnership.

- Apart from its **strategic location on international sea lanes of communication, Seychelles is a leader among SIDS group (Small Island Developing States)** which has multifold areas of convergence with India.
- It is a **leader in advancing the concept of 'blue economy'**, which covers several aspects like environment, hydrocarbons, marine economy, renewable energy and exploration of continental shelf.
- This island nation also forms the entry gate to eastern Africa with which India has had historical socio - commercial links and now forms a huge market for Indian firms.
- **Countering Chinese Influence**
 - o China has begun making inroads into these island nations with infrastructure projects and other commercial investments.
 - o Recent **Maldives India fallout regarding job visas and lease of Hambantota port by Sri Lanka to China** has made it imperative for India to actively engage with this island
- Seychelles have supported India in international fora, including **endorsing India's permanent membership of an expanded UN Security Council.**
- **Importance of India for Seychelles**
- India has always been there to help for the country in any crisis. Indian navy conducted **"Operation Flower**
- **Are Blooming"** in **1986** to avert a coup and helped the island achieve political stability.
- India provides **multi-dimensional assistance to Seychelles. More than 1% of population is trained under ITEC programme of India.**
- India has been instrumental in

establishing **communication facilities** across Seychelles as a part of the **Pan African e-Network project** between India and the African Union.

- The **Indian Diaspora in Seychelles** consists of **approx 8% of the Seychelles** population which has been influential in forging **socio-cultural and economic ties** between two countries.

Issues

- Huge Chinese investments in several infrastructure projects are diminishing Indian influence in the island nation.
- **Seychelles also offered refueling and docking facility to Chinese ships** coming from Djibouti naval base which India is apprehensive about.
- **Assumption island naval base:** The pact to build a naval base on the island had been under discussion since 2003 and was finally signed after amendments in January 2018. But national assembly of Seychelles refused to ratify the project as it would draw the country in the middle of India-China rivalry. However, now both the countries have agreed to work on the project **keeping each other's interest in mind.**
- **Way Forward**
- India must continue **working in area of mutual interest like counter terrorism, piracy** etc. and must work out the contentious issues with dialogue.
- India's priority should be to engage with the island nation and **counter any economic advantage that China can offer.**
- India must deploy **greater military assistance** like supply of naval equipment and training to defence forces for counter piracy and enhanced security of EEZ of the Seychelles.

INDIA-CHINA-NEPAL RELATIONS

Why in news?

China has proposed a new dialogue mechanism with Nepal that would also involve India during the visit of Nepal's Prime Minister to China.

What is new 2+1 Dialogue mechanism?

- **Two Plus One** format for dialogue as proposed is **different from a trilateral mechanism**. Under the Chinese proposal, **China and India can jointly conduct a dialogue with a third regional country** i.e. it is **not Nepal specific** and can be applied to **any other country in South Asia**.

Need of such mechanism

- Nepal's developmental needs are immense and needed **meaningful and mutually beneficial economic partnership** with both its neighbours India and China which are rising in global and regional stature.
- U.S. administration has started **global trade restrictive policies** which may have adverse impact for developing and emerging economies. This kind of platform will **help mitigate the impact of such policies on countries like India and China**.
- Nepal can move from the state of a **land-locked to a land-linked country** through the development of adequate cross-border connectivity and can serve **as a bridge between two arch rivals**.
- China and Nepal have proposed developing a **multidimensional trans-Himalayan connectivity network**. Bringing India on board is essential for success of such projects related to regional connectivity.

Changing Dynamics of India China Nepal Triangle

India's advantage

- Nepal geographically is surrounded by India on three sides. It is seen as a buffer

state between India and China.

Two thirds of Nepal's global trade is with India and over **90 per cent of their exports/imports go through India**. Millions of Nepalese live and work in India, and hundreds of thousands criss-cross the border every day. Besides Indian goods are much cheaper than Chinese exports.

China Card

- India's relation with Nepal has deteriorated after Nepal promulgated the new constitution in 2015. **The demand of madhesi people who live in tarai region were ignored in new constitution**. For almost six months there was blocked in India-Nepal border. **Continuous blockade have generated anti-India feeling in Nepal**.
- **China** provided Nepal with fuel supply at the time and after that China has offered Nepal, energy and infrastructure deals, rail links, a free trade agreement and a trade and transit treaty.
- **Through these agreements Nepal tried to send a strong message to India** that Nepal has a viable option in mobilizing support from China to counter any pressure generated from India.
- Increasing Chinese investment and co-operation with Nepal will **reduce dependence of Nepal on India**. This may have serious strategic implication for India.
- Nepal will **actively participate in China's Belt and Road initiative** ignoring the India's sovereignty contention of China Pakistan economic Corridor.
- Nepal and China are also exploring the possibility of a free trade agreement and China is also pressing for a Peace and Friendship Treaty.
- Even cooperation between Nepal Army and Chinese People's Liberation Army is

also on rise, after their first joint military exercise last year.

Way forward

- There is a set pattern of the **Nepal flashing the China card more frequently in recent pasts**. Its neighbourhood policies vis-à-vis India and China are changing. India, therefore, has to deal with its immediate neighbours with **prudence and sensitivity** and ensure that they are not alienated.
- Nepal must act **as a bridge between two rising nations** and help bring co-operation prosperity and peace in the region.

Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (Pmsma)

- **Context:** ‘IPledgefor9’ *Achievers Awards* were given recently to the individuals and teams of doctors from the private sector and States for their exemplary services, outstanding support of institutions and commitment from support partners in achieving PMSMA’s objectives of safe motherhood to every woman in the country.
- ‘IPledgeFor9’ *Achievers Awards* have been devised to celebrate individual and team achievements and acknowledge voluntary contributions for PMSMA in states and districts across India.

Background:

- Data indicates that Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) in India was very high in the year 1990 with 556 women dying during child birth per hundred thousand live births as compared to the global MMR of 385/lakh live births.
- As per RGI- SRS (2011-13), MMR of India has now declined to 167/lakh live births against a global MMR of 216/lakh live births (2015). India has registered an overall decline in MMR of 70% between 1990 and 2015 in comparison to a global decline of 44%.

Way ahead:

- While India has made considerable progress in the reduction of maternal and infant mortality, every year approximately 44000 women still die due to pregnancy-related causes and approximately 6.6 lakh infants die within the first 28 days of life.
- Many of these deaths are preventable and many lives can be saved if quality care is provided to pregnant

women during their antenatal period and high risk factors such as severe anemia, pregnancy-induced hypertension etc are detected on time and managed well.

Facts for Prelims:

- SDG 3.1 By 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100 000 live births.

About PMSMA:

- The Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan has been launched by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW), Government of India.
- *The program aims to provide assured, comprehensive and quality antenatal care, free of cost, universally to all pregnant women on the 9th of every month.*
- PMSMA guarantees a minimum package of antenatal care services to women in their 2nd/3rd trimesters of pregnancy at designated government health facilities.
- The programme follows a systematic approach for engagement with private sector which includes motivating private practitioners to volunteer for the campaign; developing strategies for generating awareness and appealing to the private sector to participate in the Abhiyan at government health facilities.
- Different colour stickers will be Red Sticker for Serious patients, Blue Sticker for High blood pressure and Yellow Sticker for Other diseases.

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna (Urban)

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana

- ☀ Housing Loan for Urban Poor (EWS: Annual Household Income up to ₹ 3 lakhs; LIG: Annual Household Income above ₹ 3 lakhs and upto ₹ 6 lakhs).
- ☀ Maximum carpet area of the property not to exceed 30 sq. mtrs. for EWS and 60 sq. mtrs. for LIG.
- ☀ Interest subsidy is available for housing loan for purchase and construction purpose.
- ☀ Interest subsidy for loan amount up to ₹ 6 lakhs for maximum period of 15 years @ 6.5% on Net Present Value (NPV) basis.
- ☀ Scheme is valid up to 31.03.2022.

- **Context:** The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has approved construction of another 3,18,900 affordable houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna (Urban) with an investment of Rs 8,692 crore. With this, 51 Lakh Houses have been sanctioned under the scheme in three years of implementation.

About PMAY-Urban:

- The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) Programme launched by the **Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (MoHUPA)**, in Mission mode envisions provision of Housing for All by 2022, when the Nation completes 75 years of its Independence.

The Mission seeks to address the housing requirement of urban poor including slum dwellers through following programme verticals:

- Slum rehabilitation of Slum Dwellers with participation of private developers using land as a resource.
- Promotion of Affordable Housing for weaker section through credit linked subsidy.
- Affordable Housing in Partnership with Public & Private sectors.

- Subsidy for beneficiary-led individual house construction /enhancement.

Key facts:

- The beneficiaries are poor and people living under EWS and LIG categories in the country.
- The scheme is divided into three phases. In the first phase, a total of 100 cities will be covered from April 2015 to March 2017. In phase two, 200 cities will be covered from April 2017 to March 2019. In the third phase, the leftover cities will be covered from April 2019 to March 2022.
- The government is providing an interest subsidy of 6.5% on housing loans which can be availed by beneficiaries for 15 years from start of loan date.
- The government will grant Rs 1 lakh to all the beneficiaries of the scheme. In addition, Rs 1.5 lakh will be given to all eligible urban poor who want to construct their houses in urban areas or plan to go for renovation in their existing houses. One can also avail loans under this scheme to build toilets in existing houses.

KASHMIR SUPER 50

- **Context:** A group of 30 students, part of Kashmir Super 50 recently visited New Delhi and interacted with General Bipin Rawat, Chief of the Army Staff.

About Project Kashmir Super 50:

- Project Kashmir Super 50 is a joint initiative by Indian Army, Center for Social Responsibility and Leadership (CSRL) and PETRONET LNG Limited (PLL).
- It was launched on 22 March 2013 to transform the educational status of children from economically weaker sections in the Kashmir region.
- As part of the 11-month program, selected students are provided with complete free residential coaching for IIT-JEE, JK CET and other premier Engineering Institutes.

Significance of the scheme:

- Kashmir Super 50 has been one of the most successful projects undertaken by the Indian Army in the valley and has directly impacted the lives of number of youths in J&K by providing them the right guidance and opportunity to make a career for themselves.
- The project has equally helped the families of these youths in their growth and prosperity. It is a major initiative towards bringing normalcy in the valley.

India China Water Relations

WATER POWER

TIBET AUTONOMOUS REGION



Why in news?

China has undertaken various projects across the border and India has been insisting on greater water cooperation between the two countries.

Status of water cooperation between India-China

The Trans-border rivers flowing from China to India fall into two main groups i.e. The **Brahmaputra river system** on the Eastern side, which consist of river Siang (main stream of river Brahmaputra) and its tributaries, namely Subansiri and Lohit and the **Indus river system** on the Western side consists of river Indus and the river Sutlej. Both countries have signed-

- Memorandum of Understanding upon provision of Hydrological Information of

the River Brahmaputra / Yaluzangbu in 2002

- Memorandum of Understanding on Hydrological Data Sharing on River Sutlej / Langqen Zangbo in 2010 and renewed in 2015.
- **Expert Level Mechanism (ELM)** to discuss interaction and cooperation on provision of flood season hydrological data, emergency management and other issues regarding trans-border Rivers in 2006.

Issues in Water cooperation in India China Relations

- **Suboptimal Cooperation:** Currently China only shares hydrological data on the Yartung Tsangpo/Brahmaputra (YTB) and Satluj during the monsoon season.
- **Differential Approach:** In South Asia, China has been insistent in establishing greater ties with Bangladesh on flood forecasting, water technologies, and water management.
- **Border Dispute:** The discussions over the YTB have often been overshadowed by the border dispute and there has been no progress in discussing more pressing issues of who has the right to how much water and the impact of dams and diversions on the upper reaches of the river.
- **Multilateral Approach:** China's approach to transboundary water sharing is shifting towards multilateral arrangements unlike India which prefers bilateral relations, as it has with Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh.
 - o In 2015, China signed the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) framework along with five other countries as an alternative to the Asian Development Bank-led

Mekong River Commission, which China never signed.

- o The LMC aligns with China's Belt and Road Initiative and focuses on land and water connectivity, besides river management.
- **Projects undertaken by China (See Box)** on Tibetan side without any transparency or information sharing framework.

Need of Greater Collaboration

- **Environmental Pollution:** Due to China's lack of concern for environment and the trans boundary impacts, Siang - Brahmaputra's main artery recently turned blackish grey as it entered India.
- **Weakening of Indian Monsoon:** Considering the climate system's global interconnections, geo-engineering experiments in Tibet can bring more rain by sucking in moisture from other regions which would potentially weaken monsoons in India and elsewhere in Asia thus opening a new interventionist frontier.
- **Threat to biodiversity:** Tibet on Chinese side and Himalayan ecosystem on Indian side are one of the world's most biodiverse regions and the reckless exploitation of their mineral and water resources has threatened fragile ecosystems.
- **Warming of Plateau:** Tibet is called the “Third Pole” due to its largest perennial ice mass on the planet after the Arctic and Antarctica but now Tibet warming is at almost three times the global average. It will have major long-term implications for the triple role Tibet plays as Asia's main freshwater repository, largest water supplier and principal rainmaker.
- **Loss of Water Flow:** Climate models suggest that major rivers running off the Himalayas, after increasing flows as glaciers melt, could lose 10-20% of their flow by 2050. This would not only reduce the rivers' capacity to produce electricity, but would exacerbate regional

political tensions.

- **Humanitarian Implications:** Any disaster including flash flood, landslide, dam burst etc. can cause widespread loss of life, wildlife, livelihoods and basic infrastructure in not only in India's Northeast but also in Bangladesh.

Chinese projects in Tibet

Tibet is an area rich in natural resources and rightly called Xizang, or “Western Treasure Land” in Chinese. China has undertaken following activities across the border:

- **Water Grab:** China is engaged in the greatest water grab in history by not only damming the rivers (Jiexu, Zangmu and Jiacha) on the plateau.
- **China's ‘Gold Rush’:** China's has started mineral mining or the “gold rush” as part of its wider efforts in the Himalayas to extract precious metals, rare earths and other resources from Tibetan plateau.
- **Geo-engineering Experiments:** Most rain in Tibet is concentrated in its water-rich southern and south-eastern belts along the international frontiers; the rest of the plateau is dry. Recently there are reports of China's geoengineering experiments to “trigger natural disasters such as floods, droughts and tornadoes to weaken” an enemy in the event of a war.

What India needs to do?

- India has also undertaken multiple hydropower projects on the Brahmaputra against Chinese dam-building activities in pursuance of the **international law of ‘prior appropriation’**, which states that the first user gets the rights to continue using that quantity of water.
- India further needs to clearly envision the desired end goal and strategic outcomes for dealing with impending water conflicts.
- It also needs to de-emphasise China's role for the time being and re-strengthen its relationship with lower riparian

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countries including Bangladesh and restore its image as a responsible upper riparian.

- India needs to raise the issue proactively in **informal meets** such as Wuhan Summit and also mirror its strength and firmness in negotiations with China on water rights, as it did in the case of the Doklam stand-off and in opposing the Belt and Road Initiative, rather than projecting itself as a victim.
- Further there is need to build an **Himalayan Charter** to delve on areas of mutual cooperation and create a **Himalayan Council** to work on specific issues related to the future of the Himalayas as discussed in third Himalayan Consensus summit in Nepal.
- Further there is need of improving **diplomatic communication**, more **transparency** by way of all-year hydrological sharing of data and exchange of information regarding infrastructural development in the area and developing effective and innovative frameworks of resource management including all stakeholders.
- Simultaneously **International pressure** needs to be mounted on Beijing to refrain from activities that cause “decline of Tibet’s natural resources” and “environmental impairment”. Asia’s ecological interests cannot be safeguarded unless China is forced to respect international environmental standards.

INDO-PACIFIC**INDO-PACIFIC REGION****Why in news?**

India, Japan, the US and Australia have reiterated their shared commitment to the Indo-Pacific region in recent past.

Indo-Pacific as the new Geo-Political Construct

The “Indo-Pacific” idea was originally conceived in 2006-07. The term ‘Indo-Pacific’ combines the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the Western Pacific Region (WP) – inclusive of the contiguous seas off East Asia and Southeast Asia – into a singular regional construct. Now

it has gained eminence due to:

- **Increasing geopolitical connect:** between the Indian Ocean and the western Pacific in both the geo-economic and security dimensions is on the rise and the change in regional nomenclature from Asia-Pacific to Indo Pacific is a better representative of the same.
- **Geo-economic opportunities:** eastward shift of the world’s economic “center of gravity” towards the Asian continent and thus the Indo-Pacific is regarded as a singular and integrated geopolitical

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construct.

- **Growing Eminence of India:** Even though the “Indo” in “Indo-Pacific” represents the Indian Ocean and not India, the global community expects India to play a major role in terms of ensuring a maritime environment that is conducive for economic growth and development.
- **Politico-military aggressiveness of China:** In the backdrop of China’s string of pearls theory Indo-Pacific presented an opportunity to capitalise on China’s key strategic vulnerability, viz., its energy lifelines transiting the Indian Ocean and to showcase Indian Navy’s capability to moderate China’s behaviour, thereby dissuading its future aggressiveness.

Recent Measures and Policy initiatives:

- **Australia:** In 2013, Australia released its Defence White Paper making it first government articulation of Indo-Pacific and endorsing India’s centrality in the Indo-Pacific construct.
- **USA:**
 - o It recently renamed its strategically important Pacific Command (PACOM) as the **U.S. Indo-Pacific Command**, indicating that for U.S. government, East Asia and the Indian Ocean Region are gradually becoming a single competitive space and India is a key partner in its strategic planning.
 - o Even 2018 **National Defence Strategy** of US acknowledges Pacific challenges and signals America’s resolve and lasting commitment to the Indo-Pacific.
- **Japan:**
 - o Its Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy rests on “two oceans” — Indian and Pacific — and “two continents” — Africa and Asia and will help Japan in preparing to deal with the fast changing global and

regional order and threats

- **India:**
 - o In Shangri La Dialogue India embracing concept of Indo-Pacific announced that along with key partners in the region—it is committed to a “free, open, transparent, rules-based, peaceful, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific, where sovereignty, territorial integrity and international law, freedom of navigation and overflight are respected.

Future Relevance of Indo-Pacific strategy

- The relevance of the ‘Indo-Pacific’ concept will be enhanced in the future due to the **strengthening linkages** between the IOR and the WP.
- Furthermore, the growing trade and people-to-people connectivity between the IOR and WP countries may bring economic prosperity in the IOR region, and slowly **reduce inequalities** in terms of economic and human development indices.
- China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and India’s Act East policy may also contribute to **economic integration** of the IOR and the WP.
- Further it will also help in evolving **balance of power in Asia**, and to address the fault-lines therein, with the overarching aim of preserving regional and global stability.
- India and other partners need to demonstrate their ability to enforce UNCLOS otherwise there will be little incentive for rule breakers, like China, to adhere to the norms or respect freedom of navigation.

The emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a geo-strategic concept is a welcome development. However, it needs further diplomatic movement and there needs to be greater clarity on economic issues. Japan and Australia will play an important role in bolstering economic linkages and connectivity and India should also

play its part in multilateral cooperation.

Concept of Indo-Pacific from different perspectives

- **For USA**, it highlights inadequacy of the “Asia-Pacific” term (which means ‘the Asian littoral of the Pacific Ocean’) to meet its geopolitical and foreign policy objectives of maintaining its sphere of influence in face of the Chinese challenge. Secondly it aims to incorporate India into the region-wide security architecture by making it a “net security provider”.
- **For India** it means an extended eastern maritime neighbourhood in tandem with Act East Policy and Indian Navy’s new maritime security strategy to the entire western and south-western Pacific Ocean.
- **China** on its part has not expressed any resentment and may use it to increase its own influence in Indian Ocean especially through BRI.
- **For Japan** it means an enhanced maritime security role in the area in cooperation with India to reduce its seaborne energy and food imports across the IOR
- **For Indonesia**: Possessing substantial potential to become a major maritime power, Indonesia is also likely to be a key player in the process of melting the IOR-WP divide, and thereby reinforcing the ‘Indo-Pacific’ construct as it has coasts facing both the oceans.

Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM)

Context: Ministry of Rural Development recently conferred National Awards on Best Performing Self Help Groups under DAY – National Rural Livelihood Mission.

National awards:

- Conferring awards to best performing SHG and Village Organizations was initiated by DAY-NRLM in 2016-17.
- The National Awards to the Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are intended to provide public recognition to the outstanding performance of the community institutions and incorporate a sense of pride among the poor community members.

Significance of SHGs:

- The SHGs are a perfect example of how livelihoods of households can transform through a collective approach, managed in line with core democratic and financial principles.
- The SHG has contributed to several community level activities for the common good.
- These include awareness promotion for constructing household toilets using SBM funds, environmental sanitation, liquid waste management and support for maintenance of village commons.
- SHG has demonstrated strong features of a progressive community based institution.

Facts for Prelims:

- **SARAS Aajeevika Mela** is an annual event of DAY-NRLM and it aims to provide a platform to the rural artisans to showcase their skills and products and also develop market linkages for their products.
- **Aajeevika Grameen Express Yojana**, under DAY- NRLM, aims to provide an alternative source of livelihoods to members of SHGs by facilitating them to operate public transport services in backward rural areas, as identified by the States. It also aims to provide safe, affordable and community monitored rural transport services to connect remote villages with key services and amenities for the overall economic development of the area.

About Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana:

- Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) was launched by the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Government of India in June 2011.
- The Mission aims at creating efficient and effective institutional platforms of the rural poor enabling them to increase household income through sustainable livelihood enhancements and improved access to financial services.

Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gramin Kaushal Yojana (DDU-GKY)



Context: Ministry of Shipping in association with Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gramin Kaushal Yojana (DDU-GKY), Ministry of Rural Development recently conducted a workshop on “Skill Development in the Port and Maritime Sector”.

Significance:

- India is one of the leading suppliers of seafarers in the world and now want to be the leading supplier for all talent in the Port and Maritime sector. Skill Development in the Port & Maritime sector is an opportunity to improve India's coastal areas, usher in port led prosperity and provide the world with skilled youth.

About DDU GKY:

- The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) announced the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) Antyodaya Diwas, on 25th September 2014. DDU-GKY is a part of the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), tasked with the dual objectives of adding diversity to the incomes of rural poor families and cater to the

career aspirations of rural youth.

- DDU-GKY is uniquely focused on rural youth between the ages of 15 and 35 years from poor families. As a part of the Skill India campaign, it plays an instrumental role in supporting the social and economic programs of the government like the Make In India, Digital India, Smart Cities and Start-Up India, Stand-Up India campaigns.

In order to ensure complete social and regional inclusion the following special schemes have been launched:

- Himayat:** A special scheme for the youth (rural & urban) of Jammu & Kashmir.
- Roshni:** A special initiative for the rural youth of poor families in 27 Left-wing Extremist (LWE) districts across 9 states.

Facts for Prelims- Center of Excellence in Maritime and Ship Building (CEMS):

- Under the Ministry of Shipping's flagship Sagarmala Programme a world class Center of Excellence in Maritime and Ship Building (CEMS) is being set up in partnership with Siemens and Indian Register of

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- It will have campuses at Vishakhapatnam and Mumbai and will train 10,512 students per year.
- The CEMS aims to become an international nodal Centre in South Asia, attracting students from neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia for skill development in the Port and Maritime sector.

Atal Bhujal Yojana (ABHY)

- **Context:** The World Bank has approved Atal Bhujal Yojana (ABHY). The scheme is to be implemented over a period of five years from 2018-19 to 2022-23, with World Bank assistance.

About Atal Bhujal Yojana:

- It is a Rs.6000 crore Central Sector Scheme of the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation. The scheme aims to improve ground water management in priority areas in the country through community participation.

Priority areas:

- The priority areas identified under the scheme fall in the states of Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. These States represent about 25% of the total number of over-exploited, critical and semi-critical blocks in terms of ground water in India.
- They also cover two major types of groundwater systems found in India – alluvial and hard rock aquifers- and have varying degrees of institutional readiness and experience in groundwater management.

Implementation of the scheme:

- Funds under the scheme will be provided to the states for strengthening the institutions responsible for ground water governance, as well as for encouraging community involvement for improving ground water management to foster behavioural changes that promote conservation and efficient use of water. The

scheme will also facilitate convergence of ongoing Government schemes in the states by incentivizing their focussed implementation in identified priority areas.

Expected outcomes:

- The implementation of the scheme is expected to have several positive outcomes like better understanding of the ground water regime, focused and integrated community based approach for addressing issues related to ground water depletion, sustainable ground water management through convergence of on-going and new schemes, adoption of efficient water use practices to reduce ground water use for irrigation and augmentation of ground water resources in targeted areas.

Status of groundwater in India:

- Central Ground Water Authority (CGWA) is regulating ground water development in 23 States/UTs.
- As per the assessment of dynamic ground water resources of country carried out jointly by CGWB and State Ground Water Departments, out of the total 6584 numbers of assessment units (Block/ Taluks/ Mandals/ watershed/ Firkka), 1034 units have been categorized as ‘Over-exploited’.
- This may be due to increase in population, rapid urbanization & industrialization and other related factors.

ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS (OPCW)

- **Context:** OPCW has granted itself new powers to assign blame for attacks, despite protests by Russia. Until now, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) could only say whether chemical weapons were used – but not who had used them.

Significance of the move:

- This is an important step forward for arms control. It strengthens the unravelling consensus against the use of chemical weapons. It marks a victory for the rules-based international order, which itself is under increasing strain given the rise of populists and nationalism in many countries.

About OPCW:

- The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons is the implementing body of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which entered into force in 1997.
- The organisation was awarded the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize “for its extensive efforts to eliminate chemical weapons”.

The Convention contains four key provisions:

- Destroying all existing chemical weapons under international verification by the OPCW.
- Monitoring chemical industry to prevent new weapons from re-emerging.
- Providing assistance and protection to States Parties against chemical threats.
- Fostering international cooperation to strengthen implementation of the Convention and promote the peaceful use of chemistry.

UN MIGRATION AGENCY

- **Context:** António Manuel de Carvalho Ferreira Vitorino of Portugal was recently elected by the member States of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to serve as the agency's Director General.

About IOM:

- IOM is the leading intergovernmental organization in the field of migration with over 10,000 staff serving in over 400 offices across more than 150 countries.
- It was initially established in 1951 as the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM) to help resettle people displaced by World War II.
- It provides services and advice to Governments and migrants, such as humanitarian assistance to migrants in need, including refugees and internally displaced people.
- The agency works with its partners in the international community to help ensure orderly and humane migration management and to promote international cooperation and understanding on migration issues.

United Nations Relief And Works Agency (UNRWA)

- **Context:** A total of 20 countries, including India, announced contributions to the 2018 budget of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestine Refugees. India has pledged USD 5 million. The contributions are to help bolster “severe funding crisis” following US’ cut in its annual aid to UNRWA.

Background:

- UNRWA has been providing health, education, relief and social services, as well as emergency humanitarian assistance, to some 5.3 million Palestinian refugees across its five fields of operation — Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip — for 65 years.
- However, in January, the agency’s financial situation became catastrophic due to the sudden loss of USD 300 million in voluntary contributions. The Trump administration in January US said it would withhold USD 65 million of USD 125 million it had planned to send to UNRWA.

About UNRWA:

- Following the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict, UNRWA was established by United Nations General Assembly to carry out direct relief and works programmes for Palestine refugees. The Agency began operations on 1 May 1950.
- In the absence of a solution to the Palestine refugee problem, the General Assembly has repeatedly renewed UNRWA’s mandate, most recently extending it until 30 June 2020.

- **UNRWA is the only UN agency dedicated to helping refugees from a specific region or conflict** and is separate from UNHCR.
- **Funding:** The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions from UN Member States. UNRWA also receives some funding from the Regular Budget of the United Nations, which is used mostly for international staffing costs.
- **The Agency’s services encompass** education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, microfinance and emergency assistance, including in times of armed conflict.

Centre For United Nations Peacekeeping (CUNPK)

- **Context:** The Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping (CUNPK), India and the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect have jointly started the pilot “Training of Trainers (ToT) Course on Civilian Protection and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P)” in Delhi.

Key facts:

- The course is being attended by 30 officers including eight from Friendly Foreign Countries.
- The course is designed for mid-level military officials from the countries that are active “Troop Contributing Countries” to the UN peacekeeping operations.

About CUNPK:

- The Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping (CUNPK), has been set up in New Delhi, drawing on India’s vast experience in the field of UN Peacekeeping.
- It functions under the directions of a Board of management under the Chairmanship of Vice Chief of the Army Staff.

Role and important functions:

- The Centre conducts International Training Capsules for Military Contingent Officers, Military Observers, and Staff and Logistics Officers.
- The Centre regularly organizes Seminars, Joint Working Groups and Command Post Exercises at the National and International level.
- It is also a repository of information on India’s involvement in UN Peacekeeping and is continuing to build and update its research on

peacekeeping related issues.

What you need to know about UN Peacekeeping?

- United Nations Peacekeeping was created in 1948. Its first mission involved the establishment of the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), which served to observe and maintain ceasefire during the 1948 Arab- Israeli War.
- UN Peacekeeping maintains three basic principles: Consent of the parties, impartiality and non-use of Force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate.
- The UN Peacekeepers are led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DKPO).
- There are currently 17 UN peace operations deployed on four continents.
- UN Peacekeepers are from diverse backgrounds, from areas all around the world. They include police, military and civilian personnel. They are often referred to as Blue Berets or Blue Helmets because of their light blue berets or helmets.
- The UN Peacekeeping Force won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1988.
- The United Nations Charter gives the United Nations Security Council the power and responsibility to take collective action to maintain international peace and security. For this reason, the international community usually looks to the Security Council to authorize peacekeeping operations.

Facts for Prelims:

- *The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect* seeks to transform the principle of the Responsibility to Protect into a

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practical guide for action in the face of mass atrocities.

- The Global Centre was founded by a number of supportive governments, leading figures from the human rights community, as well as by International Crisis Group, Human Rights Watch, Oxfam International, Refugees International, and WFM-Institute for Global Policy.

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Global Alliance To Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis

- **Context:** India is hosting the 10th meeting of Global Alliance to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis. India has highest burden of Lymphatic Filariasis and there is need of taking leadership role to Eliminate lymphatic filariasis.
- **Theme:** Celebrating progress towards elimination: Voices from the field on overcoming programme challenges.

kill the affected people, but may cause permanent disfigurement, reduced productivity and social stigma.

About GAELF:

It is an alliance of partners from 72 LF endemic national country programmes, NGOs, private sectors, academic and research institutes and international development agencies that assists WHO's Global Programme to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis.

About Lymphatic Filariasis:

- LF or commonly known as Elephantiasis is one of the oldest and most debilitating neglected disease, which is currently endemic in 73 countries of the world, including India.
- LF is a devastating parasitic infection spread by mosquitoes. The parasites are thread-like worms (filariae) that develop in and then damage the human lymphatic system and associated tissues.
- It is usually contracted in childhood, often before the age of five. The lymphatic system is a network of vessels and specialised tissues that are essential to the maintaining the overall fluid balance and health of organs and limbs and importantly are a major component of the body's immune defence system.

Effects:

- The damage caused by the filaria or adult worms living in the lymphatic system upset this delicate fluid balance and fluid remains in the tissues causing chronic swelling usually of the lower limbs.
- The disease affects the poorest population in society, particularly those living in areas with poor water, sanitation and hygiene. LF does not

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G7 BLOC

- **Context:** 44th annual G7 Summit is being held in Quebec, Canada.

What is G7 Summit?

- G7 Summit is an event conducted annually where world leaders from seven powerful economies of the world, US, Canada, UK, France, Germany, Japan and Italy come together to discuss burning issues happening around the globe.
- They, by mutual understanding, also form policies or figure out remedies for the concerned issue.

What is the 44th G7 Summit all about?

- Every year few international issues which need to be tackled are taken into account and policies are formed around them. Canada has put forward the following 5 themes for this year's summit:
 - Investing in growth that works for everyone.
 - Preparing for jobs of the future.
 - Working together on climate change, oceans and clean energy.
 - Building a more peaceful and secure world.
 - Advancing gender equality and impacting women's empowerment.

UN SECURITY COUNCIL

- **Context:** The UN General Assembly has elected Belgium, the Dominican Republic, Germany, Indonesia and South Africa to serve as non-permanent members on the Security Council for two years starting in January.
- The five new members will replace Bolivia, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, the Netherlands and Sweden on the council.

Selection of members:

- There are 15 members on the UN Security Council, including the five permanent ones — Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States — and 10 non-permanent members, half of which are elected each year.
- Each candidate country needed to secure two thirds of the votes in order to clinch a seat.

About UNSC:

What is it?

- The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the organs of the United Nations and is charged with the maintenance of international peace and security.
- Its powers include the establishment of peacekeeping operations, the establishment of international sanctions, and the authorization of military action through Security Council resolutions; it is the only UN body with the authority to issue binding resolutions to member states.

Members:

- The Security Council consists of fifteen members. Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, and the United States—serve as the body's five permanent members. These

permanent members can veto any substantive Security Council resolution, including those on the admission of new member states or candidates for Secretary-General.

- The Security Council also has 10 non-permanent members, elected on a regional basis to serve two-year terms. The body's presidency rotates monthly among its members.

Proposed reforms:

- Reform of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) encompasses five key issues: categories of membership, the question of the veto held by the five permanent members, regional representation, the size of an enlarged Council and its working methods, and the Security Council-General Assembly relationship.
- There is also a proposal to admit more permanent members.

Why India should be given a permanent seat in the council?

- India was among the founding members of United Nations.
- It is the second largest and a one of the largest constant contributor of troops to United Nations Peacekeeping missions.
- Today, India has over 8,500 peacekeepers in the field, more than twice as many as the UN's five big powers combined.
- India, since long time, has been demanding expansion of UNSC and its inclusion as permanent member in it. It has been a member of UNSC for 7 terms and a member of G-77 and G-4, so permanent membership is a logical extension.

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IBSA SUMMIT

- **Context:** 2018 IBSA Ministerial meet was recently held in Pretoria, South Africa. The outcome of this meeting was a document titled IBSA Declaration on South-South Cooperation. This document calls for contribution of each of the member of IBSA forum to contribute to greater understanding of development cooperation as a common endeavour of the global south.

About IBSA forum:

- The establishment of IBSA was formalised by *the Brasilia Declaration* of 6 June 2003. IBSA is a coordinating mechanism amongst three emerging countries, three multi ethnic and multicultural democracies, which are determined to:
 - Contribute to the construction of a new international architecture.
 - Bring their voice together on global issues.
 - Deepen their ties in various areas.

Significance of the platform:

- The success of IBSA reflects an important demonstration effect. It demonstrates, most vividly, the desirability and feasibility of South-South cooperation beyond the conventional areas of exchange of experts and training.
- IBSA success in contributing to discourse on global issues also shows the importance of engaging with the countries of the South.

GEO-INTELLIGENCE ASIA – 2018

- **Context:** The Eleventh edition of GeoIntelligence Asia 2018 is being held in New Delhi. It is organised by GeoSpatial Media and Communication with Directorate General of Information System as Knowledge Partners and Military Survey as Co-organisers.
 - **Aim of the seminar:** The seminar brings together the military, security officials including BSF and Police Forces, Government and industry together to examine the latest technology solutions and on the critical role of geospatial technology in military and security applications.
 - **Theme:** ‘GeoSpatial: A Force Multiplier for Defence and Industrial Security’.
- improving emergency response times, especially in vulnerable areas such as a country’s border.
 - Geospatial data is invaluable to the border security operations, to deliver accurate situational awareness information, enabling quick and secure decision-making, while mitigating risks, and increasing national security.

Geospatial Intelligence and its significance:

- Geospatial intelligence is a critical foundation for many aspects of defense and internal security. It offers the capability of monitoring, predicting and countering threats, while helping strategize and support various field operations.
- It facilitates multi-source information sharing and integration across agencies and organizations by providing a common framework on which other information is based.
- The use of big data, advanced geospatial analytics software and sophisticated imaging technologies from (very) high-resolution remote sensing satellites, UAVs and other sensors, enables seamless flow of information in pre-, real-time and post-combat operations.
- Real-time views and insights of impacted regions are key to

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INTERNATIONAL AIR TRANSPORT ASSOCIATION (IATA)

- **Context:** International Air Transport Association (IATA) recently castigated India for taxing international tickets, as it asked governments to facilitate the growth of worldwide connectivity by avoiding creeping re-regulation, maintaining the integrity of global standards and addressing a capacity crisis.

Background:

- The government had announced the implementation of the GST from July 1, 2017. The tax covers airline products and services including tickets, ancillary, change, refund and other products and fees.

About IATA:

- **What is it?** The International Air Transport Association (IATA) is the trade association for the world's airlines, representing some 280 airlines or 83% of total air traffic. Formed in April 1945, it is the successor to the International Air Traffic Association, which was formed in 1919.
- **What it does?** IATA supports airline activity and helps formulate industry policy and standards. It also provides consulting and training services in many areas crucial to aviation.
- **Headquarters:** It is headquartered in Montreal, Quebec, Canada with Executive Offices in Geneva, Switzerland.

NEW UAE VISA RULES

- **Context:** The United Arab Emirates has announced sweeping changes in its labour and visa rules that will ensure the better protection of workers' rights and do away with bank guarantees for recruitment in the private sector.

Eight moves to enhance the UAE's economic competitiveness:

- A new system in place to replace the bank guarantees required for private sector employees' visas.
- Release the current bank guarantees totaling AED 14 billion back to private sector companies.
- Implement a new insurance system for private sector employees valued at AED 60 per year to replace the AED 3,000 bank guarantee per employee.
- Facilitate the process for job seekers in the UAE and grant a six-month temporary visa without fee.
- Exempt transit tourists from entry visa fees for the first 48 hours of their stay.
- Grant a two-year visa for talented and outstanding students.
- Allow visa status adjustment without having to leave and re-enter the country.
- Facilitate the voluntary departure of people overstaying their visa without incurring a ban.

costs for employers and offer greater protection to vulnerable low-income workers.

- The employee will have better protection as he or she can complain to the ministry of human resources and emiratization in the event of non-payment of minimum entitlements and then the ministry can draw on the insurance to provide a pay out.
- The insurance policy will cover end of service benefits, holiday and overtime allowances, unpaid wages, return air ticket and cases of work injury, with the maximum pay out capped at 20,000 dirhams per person. The current system of bank guarantees doesn't cover entitlements such as gratuity and holiday allowances.

Benefits for Indians:

- Indian workers are expected to be among the major beneficiaries of the measures. These will go a long way in easing the financial burden on Indian workers, professionals and entrepreneurs.
- The low-cost insurance policy which replaces the bank guarantees will cut

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Nuclear Arsenals Around The Globe

- **Context:** Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) has released its 2018 edition of the yearly report on the current state of armaments, disarmament and international security.

Key findings:

- There are nine countries which have nuclear warheads. They include Russia, the US, the UK, France, China, Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea.
- China continues to modernise its nuclear weapon delivery systems and is slowly increasing the size of its nuclear arsenal. The country now has an estimated 280 nuclear warheads. In 2017 report, the number was 270.
- The US and Russia still constitute a major share of approximately 14,465 nuclear weapons that exist in the world. Both together account for nearly 92% of all nuclear weapons despite reducing their strategic nuclear forces pursuant to the implementation of the 2010 Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms.
- Despite the overall decrease in global nuclear weapons year-on-year, India and Pakistan have increased their stockpiles. India, which had an estimated 120-130 nuclear warheads as per 2017 report, now has 130-140 warheads. Similarly, Pakistan, which had 130-140 warheads now has increased to 140-150 warheads. Both countries are also developing new land, sea and air-based missile delivery systems.
- Nuclear warheads in other countries: UK (215 warheads), France (300 warheads), Israel (80 warheads) and

North Korea (10-20 warheads). The figures for North Korea are uncertain.

Way ahead:

- Nuclear weapons remain uniquely dangerous because they are uniquely destructive. The renewed focus on the strategic importance of nuclear deterrence and capacity is a very worrying trend.
- The world needs a clear commitment from the nuclear weapon states to an effective, legally binding process towards nuclear disarmament.

Facts for Prelims:

- **SIPRI** is an independent international institute dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament.
- Established in 1966, SIPRI provides data, analysis and recommendations, based on open sources, to policymakers, researchers, media and the interested public.
- Based in Stockholm, SIPRI also has a presence in Beijing, and is regularly ranked among the most respected think tanks worldwide.

Greece Crisis

- **Context:** Eurozone nations have agreed on the final elements of a plan to get Greece out of its eight-year bailout program and make its massive debt more manageable.

What's the issue?

- Greece has been surviving primarily on loans from the eurozone since 2010, when it lost market access to funds because of a ballooning budget deficit, huge public debt and an underperforming economy, matched with an expansive welfare system. Greece's third bailout is due to end in August.

Causes of the Greece Crisis:

- The seeds were sown back in 2001 when Greece adopted the euro as its currency. Greece had been an EU member since 1981 but couldn't enter the eurozone. Its budget deficit had been too high for the eurozone's Maastricht Criteria.
- All went well for the first several years. Like other eurozone countries, Greece benefited from the power of the euro. It lowered interest rates and brought in investment capital and loans. In 2004, Greece announced it had lied to get around the Maastricht Criteria. The EU imposed no sanctions. Post that, Greek debt continued to rise until the crisis erupted in 2009.

About Eurozone:

- It is a monetary union of 19 of the 28 European Union (EU) member states which have adopted the euro (€) as their common currency and sole legal tender.
- The countries in the eurozone as of 2018 are: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus,

Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, The Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain.

The European Union's Maastricht Treaty “convergence criteria,” or requirements for a member country to use the euro as currency:

- Annual budget deficits must not exceed 3% of gross domestic product.
- Public debt must be under 60% of gross domestic product.
- The country must have exchange rate stability.
- Inflation rates must be within 1.5% of the three EU countries with the lowest rate.
- Long-term interest rates must be within 2% of the three lowest interest rates in the EU.

COMCASA AND BECA

- **Context:** The US side has pressed the Indian side to sign the two foundational agreements for defence cooperation: Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), earlier known as the Communications and Information Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA); and Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA).

Background:

- India and the US have so far signed only one foundational agreement: Logistical Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA).

What is COMCASA?

- COMCASA is a “technology enabler” to help transfer high-tech avionics, encrypted communication and electronic systems to India as well as ensure secrecy of its C4ISR (command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) systems from leaking to other countries like Russia. This agreement would allow the interoperability of India and United States equipments.

What is BECA?

- BECA refers to Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geospatial Cooperation. This agreement would facilitate exchange of geospatial information between India and United States for both military and civilian use.

Significance of COMCASA:

- COMCASA is needed if any classified military information is required to be exchanged between

US and Indian armed forces, and would allow India to fully utilise the communication security equipment on military platforms it imports from the US.

- Signing COMCASA would help because such advanced technologies and sensitive equipments are generally installed on US procured systems only. This agreement could also be important for multinational operations related to rescue, disaster relief etc.

Why is India hesitant to sign these agreements?

- There are widespread fears that the use of American C4ISR systems could compromise India’s tactical operational security, enabling the US to keep track of Indian warships and aircraft.

Way ahead:

- India has asked the United States for a binding assurance in the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (Comcasa) to ensure that the secured communication equipment covered by the pact are available to India and kept operational at all times.
- Besides availability of equipment at all times, India wants it put down in the agreement that the US will not share data from Indian platforms with another country and nor will it access this data without prior permission. Also, the choice to upgrade would rest with India and not determined by the US.

Hague Abduction Convention

- **Context:** The government has clarified that it is not yet ready to sign the Hague treaty on inter-country abduction of children by parents fleeing a bad marriage. On the other hand, the government is planning to follow the Japan example and put safeguards in place before acceding to the Hague treaty.

Background:

- There has been immense pressure from the U.S. on the government to sign the treaty though the government has long held the view that the decision could lead to harassment of women escaping marital discord or domestic violence.

Recommendations of the committee:

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

‘Inter Country Parental Child Removal Disputes Resolution Authority’:

- The Committee has recommended that the Government may establish an ‘Inter Country Parental Child Removal Disputes Resolution Authority’.
- Composition of the authority: The Authority may be chaired by a retired High Court Judge, with Members from Legal and Social sector background along with representatives from key Ministries.
- Functions of the authority: The authority has been envisaged to provide a one window solution in cases of inter country removal and

retention of Children. The Authority may examine the inter country cases of removal and retention of children vis-a-vis the cultural context, merit of the case, and the best interest of the Child.

Need for a policy:

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

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

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

INDIA 2+2 DIALOGUE

- **Context:** The inaugural U.S.-India 2+2 Dialogue will take place in the month of July.

overlapping security and political issues between the foreign and defence ministers of both the countries.

What is 2+2 Dialogue?

- The new dialogue format was agreed to between the two sides during the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Washington D.C. in June, 2017.
- The dialogue mechanism includes defence and foreign ministers of the two countries.
- It replaced India-U.S. Strategic and Commercial Dialogue for trade and commercial issues.

Significance of “2 by 2” Dialogue:

- The objective of this dialogue mechanism is to raise defence and security issues to the forefront and centre of the relationship between India and the U.S.
- It is aimed at enhancing peace and stability across the Indo-Pacific region by elevating strategic consultations in the dialogue.
- The shared priorities include job creation, improving the business and investment climate and sustaining a rules-based global order. The U.S. has strategic consultations in this format with key partners and allies including Australia, Japan and the Philippines.

Facts for Prelims:

- Similarly, India has 2+2 (diplomatic and security) dialogue with Japan. It was launched in 2010. The 2+2 format provides for the annual consultations over a range of

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China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

- **Context:** India has again opposed the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a part of Beijing’s One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative, as it “encroaches” on sovereignty and territorial integrity.

What is CPEC?

- CPEC is clutch of projects valued at \$51 billion project which aims at rapidly expanding and upgrading Pakistan’s infrastructure and strengthening the economic ties between the People’s Republic of China (China) and Pakistan.
- The 3,000 km-long China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) consisting of highways, railways, and pipelines is the latest irritant in the India–China relationship.
- CPEC eventually aims at linking the city of Gwadar in South Western Pakistan to China’s North Western region Xinjiang through a vast network of highways and railways.
- The proposed project will be financed by heavily-subsidised loans, that will be disbursed to the Government of Pakistan by Chinese banking giants such as Exim Bank of China, China Development Bank, and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China.

But, why is India concerned?

- Many experts are not in favour of India supporting CPEC. This is so because any Indian participation would inextricably be linked to the country’s legitimate claims on PoK.
- CPEC rests on a Chinese plan to secure and shorten its supply lines through Gwadar with an enhanced presence in the Indian Ocean. Hence, it is widely believed that upon

CPEC’s fruition, an extensive Chinese presence will undermine India’s influence in the Indian Ocean.

- It is also being contended that if CPEC were to successfully transform the Pakistan economy that could be a “red rag” for India which will remain at the receiving end of a wealthier and stronger Pakistan.
- Besides, India shares a great deal of trust deficit with China and Pakistan and has a history of conflict with both. As a result, even though suggestions to re-approach the project pragmatically have been made, no advocate has overruled the principle strands of contention that continue to mar India’s equations with China and Pakistan.

Way ahead:

- Only by respecting the sovereignty of countries involved, can regional connectivity corridors fulfil their promise and avoid differences and discord.
- China is a country which is very sensitive on matters concerning its sovereignty. So it is expected that they would have some understanding of other people’s sensitivity about their sovereignty.
- Meanwhile, India must uphold its specific reservations on the project and draft a strategy to revert suitably in case CPEC is offered formally through official channels.

MAITRI IRRIGATION PROJECT

- **Context:** India has extended a financial aid of about Rs 10 crore to Nepal for the construction of 2,700 shallow tube well irrigation systems to boost agricultural productivity. The assistance has been extended as part of the final payment for the Nepal-Bharat Maitri Irrigation Project.

About Maitri irrigation project:

- The project was launched in January last year to boost growth to the Himalayan nation's agricultural sector through enhanced facilities.
- The project is aimed at installing 2,700 shallow tube wells in 12 districts of Nepal.
- The project would ensure all-season irrigation facility to about 8,115 hectares of farm land, augment productivity of wheat, rice and seasonal fruits, vegetables and other crops, it said.
- It would also uplift the socio-economic status of farming families in the 12 districts covered under the project.

ASSUMPTION ISLAND



Context: After a growing political opposition, Seychelles President Danny Faure has cancelled the agreement with India for the development of Assumption Island.

Why should India be worried about this?

- The decision by the Seychelles President to drop the deal in the face of protests over a perceived loss of sovereignty is a blow to the

government's "SAGAR" (Security and Growth for All in the Region) programme, announced by PM Modi during a visit to Indian Ocean Rim (IOR) countries in March 2015.

- It also comes amid India's troubles with another IOR country, the Maldives, where the government has demanded that India withdraw two helicopters, pilots and personnel from its atolls that had been sent there to

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help with maritime patrols.

Background:

- Discussions regarding development of Assumption Island began in 2003, but were formalised in 2015. The deal was to include a 20-year access to the base, as well as permission to station some military personnel on ground with facilities on the island funded by India, owned by the Seychelles and jointly managed by both sides.

Why A Base On Assumption Island Is Crucial For Securing The Indian Ocean Region?

- The deal is seen as important for India because it enhances its surveillance capabilities over the Indian Ocean.
- In concert with a coastal surveillance radar station already operating in Seychelles, a naval base at Agalega in Mauritius, a coastal radar station in Madagascar, an array of radars in Maldives, and a strong presence in the littoral waters of Mozambique, Delhi's acquisition of facilities on one of the 67 raised coral islands of the Aldabra group will create an impermeable surveillance net in the southwestern and central Indian Ocean.
- Assumption Island's position dominating the Mozambique channel, a key sea lane for merchant ships, adds to India's kitty a second potential choke point after the Strait of Malacca; the latter is dominated by India's augmented presence in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands chain as well as with naval agreements with Vietnam and Singapore.

connecting the major engines of the international economy in the Northern Atlantic and Asia-Pacific. This is particularly important in an era in which global shipping has burgeoned.

- Indian Ocean is also rich in natural resources. 40% of the world's offshore oil production takes place in the Indian Ocean basin. Fishing in the Indian Ocean now accounts for almost 15% of the world's total.
- Mineral resources are equally important, with nodules containing nickel, cobalt, and iron, and massive sulphide deposits of manganese, copper, iron, zinc, silver, and gold present in sizeable quantities on the sea bed. Indian Ocean coastal sediments are also important sources of titanium, zirconium, tin, zinc, and copper. Additionally, various rare earth elements are present, even if their extraction is not always commercially feasible.
- SAGAR Programme (Security and Growth for All in the Region):**
- It is a maritime initiative which gives priority to Indian Ocean region for ensuring peace, stability and prosperity of India in Indian Ocean region. The goal is to seek a climate of trust and transparency; respect for international maritime rules and norms by all countries; sensitivity to each other's interests; peaceful resolution of maritime issues; and increase in maritime cooperation.

The Indian Ocean is important for the following reasons:

- It enjoys a privileged location at the crossroads of global trade,

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CHABAHAR PORT



- **Context:** India is trying to make Chabahar Port in Iran operational by 2019 despite a threat of renewed US sanctions against Tehran.

Background:

- The Indian-backed Chabahar port complex in Iran is being developed as part of a new transportation corridor for land-locked Afghanistan that could potentially open the way for millions of dollars in trade and cut its dependence on Pakistan, its sometimes-hostile neighbour.

Where is Chabahar port?

- Iran's Chabahar port is located on the Gulf of Oman and is the only oceanic port of the country. The port gives access to the energy-rich Persian Gulf nations' southern coast and India can bypass Pakistan with the Chabahar port becoming functional.

Why Chabahar port is crucial for India?

- The first and foremost significance of the Chabahar port is the fact that **India can bypass Pakistan in transporting goods to Afghanistan**. Chabahar port will boost India's access to Iran, the key gateway to the International North-South Transport Corridor that has sea, rail and road routes between India, Russia, Iran,

Europe and Central Asia.

- Chabahar port will be beneficial to India in **countering Chinese presence in the Arabian Sea** which China is trying to ensure by helping Pakistan develop the Gwadar port. Gwadar port is less than 400 km from Chabahar by road and 100 km by sea.
- With Chabahar port being developed and operated by India, **Iran also becomes a military ally to India**. Chabahar could be used in case China decides to flex its navy muscles by stationing ships in Gwadar port to reckon its upper hand in the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf and Middle East.
- With Chabahar port becoming functional, there will be **a significant boost in the import of iron ore, sugar and rice to India**. The import cost of oil to India will also see a considerable decline. India has already increased its crude purchase from Iran since the West imposed ban on Iran was lifted.
- **Chabahar port will ensure in the establishment of a politically sustainable connectivity between India and Afghanistan**. This will, in turn, lead to better economic ties between the two countries.
- From a diplomatic perspective, Chabahar port could be used as a point from where **humanitarian operations could be coordinated**.

PUBLIC CREDIT REGISTRY

What is a PCR?

- The PCR will be the single point of mandatory reporting for all material events for each loan, notwithstanding any threshold in the loan amount or type of borrower. The PCR will serve as a registry of all credit contracts, duly verified by reporting institutions, for all lending in India and any lending by an Indian institution to a company incorporated in India.
- **Context:** To provide a single-point and real-time source for financial liabilities of a person or entity, the Reserve Bank of India has decided to set up a public credit registry (PCR) in a modular and phased manner. The decision is based on the report of **RBI appointed task force led by YM Deosthalee**.

Need for a public registry:

- Credit information is spread over multiple systems in bits and pieces, making it difficult to get a comprehensive view of the financial liabilities of a person or entity. A PCR aims to remove information asymmetry to foster the level of access to credit, and to strengthen the credit culture in the economy.
- Also, a comprehensive credit information repository covering all types of credit facilities (funded and non-funded) extended by all credit institutions – commercial banks, cooperative banks, NBFCs, MFIs – and also covering borrowings from other sources, including external commercial borrowings and borrowing from market, is essential to ascertain the total indebtedness of a legal or natural person.

Benefits of having a PCR:

- A PCR can potentially help banks in credit assessment and pricing of credit as well as in making risk-based, dynamic and counter-cyclical provisioning.
- The PCR can also help the RBI in understanding if transmission of monetary policy is working, and if not, where are the bottlenecks.
- Further, it can help supervisors, regulators and banks in early intervention and effective restructuring of stressed bank credits.
- A PCR will also help banks and regulators as credit information is a ‘public good’ and its utility is to the credit market at large and to society in general.

Recommendations made by the task force:

- The PCR should be structured as an independent unit within the RBI so that it may be hived off to a separate non-profit at an appropriate time. It should eventually achieve an autonomy and agility to move with the evolving environment and cater to the changing demands.
- The registry should facilitate linkage to related ancillary credit information available outside the banking system, such as corporate balance sheet information and GSTN, depending on the legal provisions.
- The registry should not include elements of judgment such as credit scoring services and had also called for strict privacy guidelines.

Present status:

- Currently, there are multiple granular credit information repositories in India, each with distinct objective and coverage. Within the RBI, CRILC is a borrower-level

supervisory dataset with a threshold in aggregate exposure of Rs 5 crore. Also, there are four privately-owned credit information companies (CICs) in India.

- The RBI has mandated all its regulated entity to submit credit information individually to all four CICs. CICs offer, based on this unique access to the credit data, value added services like credit scoring and analytics to the member credit institutions and to the borrowers.

Talent Surplus In India By 2030

- **Context:** According to a report- ‘*The Salary Surge*’, India would be the only economy that will not face an upward revision of wages by 2030, as it has a talent surplus, bucking the global trend of a talent crunch.

- the best and brightest on salary alone.
- In this trend, smaller markets with limited workforces are likely to feel the most pressure and by 2030.
- At a sector level, manufacturing, a critical driver of growth for emerging economies, may be stalled by the huge impact of the salary surge.

Highlights of the report:

Global Scenario:

- Globally, a shortage of highly skilled employees could dramatically drive up salaries for the most in-demand workers by 2030. This is likely to add more than USD 2.5 trillion in annual labour costs by 2030, for organisations around the world.
- Globally, US companies can expect to pay the most globally facing a wage premium of more than USD 531 billion by 2030, while Germany will be the worst affected, facing a potential wage premium of approximately USD 176 billion by 2030.
- Meanwhile, in the Asia Pacific, the salary surge could add more than USD 1 trillion to annual payrolls by 2030, jeopardising companies’ profitability and threatening business models if kept unchecked.
- The study also found that Japan would be expected to pay the most, an additional USD 468 billion by 2030.

Indian scenario:

Unlike any other country in the study India will have a highly skilled talent surplus by 2030.

Emerging concerns:

- The trend shows scarcity in abundance. There are plenty of people, but not enough with the skills their organisations will need to survive.
- While overall wage increases are just keeping pace with inflation, salaries for in-demand workers will skyrocket if companies choose to compete for

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Working Capital Loan Norms To Be Tightened

- **Context:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has proposed a minimum 40% loan component for working capital funding of ₹150 crore and above to bring in greater credit discipline and improve monetary transmission.
- This will come into effect from October 1 and will be increased to 60% from April 1, 2019.

- repercussions for RBI's liquidity operations.
- Currently, banks do not charge any commitment fee and do not maintain any capital on the unknown portion of the cash credit and, thus, it is classified as an unconditionally cancellable facility, which does not have any risk weight under the marking rules.

Background:

- Currently, working capital is mostly in the form of cash credit for which interest rate is reset once a year. Also, cash credit does not have a tight repayment schedule.

The proposed new norm will address the following issues:

- If there is a loan component then there will be a repayment schedule which will put pressure on borrowers to manage their liquidity.
- Since the loan component will have a fixed tenure, the reset clause can be invoked at the end of each tenure period.

Significance of the move:

- By making it mandatory to have a loan component associated with all working-capital facilities, it will be easier to control the possible volatility which arises on account of cash credit limits.

Need for reforms:

- The working capital requirements of borrowing entities are met by banks through a cash credit limit, which is a revolving facility. The cash credit facility places undue burden on the banks in managing their liquidity requirements, with corresponding

Concerns:

While cash credit has its benefits, it also poses several regulatory challenges such as perpetual roll-overs, transmission of liquidity management from the borrowers to banks/RBI, hampering of smooth transmission of monetary policy, etc.

Credit Enhancement Fund

- **Context:** The government is likely to launch a Rs 500-crore credit enhancement fund next month to facilitate infrastructure investments by insurance and pension funds.

FY17, against 43% from FY2000 to FY13. The NPAs from the segment have also ballooned to 9% in FY17, from 3% in FY13.

About the proposed fund:

- The fund was first announced in the financial budget for fiscal year 2016-17.
- It will help in upgrading credit ratings of bonds issued by infrastructure companies and facilitate investment from investors like pension and insurance funds.
- The initial corpus of the fund, *to be sponsored by IIFCL* (India Infrastructure Finance Company), will be Rs 500 crore, and it will operate as a non-banking finance company.
- IIFCL will hold a 22.5% stake in the NBFC, while the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) has offered to pick up a 10% stake. State-run SBI, Bank of Baroda and LIC will also have stakes in the firm.

Need for a dedicated fund:

- At present, only \$110 billion is being invested in infrastructure, against a requirement of \$200 billion, leading many analysts to classify India as an infrastructure deficit country.
- At present, the banking system does a bulk of infrastructure project financing and exposes itself to asset liability management (ALM) mismatches and hence, alternatives like raising of money through corporate bonds is necessary.
- Also, bank lending to the infra segment has slowed down in the past few years and the annual growth rates plummeted to 3% between FY14 and

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National Targets For Off-Shore Wind Power



- **Context:** To give confidence to wind industry, Government has declared national targets for off-shore wind power.

The targets:

- Medium target of 5 GW by 2022.
- Long term target of 30 GW by 2030.

Significance of the move:

- Offshore wind power would add a new element to the already existing basket of renewable energy for the country.

Why off- shore wind farming is beneficial?

- The offshore wind farming is attractive because of several reasons such as stronger winds for efficient generation of power; no impact on real estate value of land as in case of onshore wind farming; its ability to fulfil the demand of the heavily populated coastal regions and no significant environment costs.

Challenges:

- It is difficult to install large wind power turbines in open seas. Offshore wind turbines are of much larger dimensions and capacities than

onshore turbines.

- The **PLF (plant load factor)** of off-shore wind turbines will be higher than the on-shore projects.
- The **cost per MW** of off-shore wind power project will be higher by 50-100% as compared to on-shore projects depending on the water depth.
- Further deep sea wind farms come with the challenges of assigning **no-go areas for commercial shipping**. There would be a need to devise new lanes, proper lightning for ships to pass on.

Way ahead:

- India is making significant progress in the development of the onshore wind power plants. However, so far progress in the offshore wind power generation has been almost nil. Since India has more than 7600 Kilometres of coast, the prospects of development of offshore wind power are very bright. At global level, it has been observed that, offshore wind energy while being better than onshore wind in terms of efficiency is also becoming competitive and comparable in terms of tariffs.
- With the introduction of the National Offshore Wind Energy Policy, India is trying to replicate the success of the onshore wind power development in the offshore wind power development.

National Off-Shore Wind Policy:

- The Ministry of New & Renewable Energy had notified National Off-Shore Wind Policy in October 2015 to realize the offshore wind power potential in the country.
- With this, *the Ministry of New &*

Renewable Energy (MNRE) has been authorized as the Nodal Ministry for use of offshore areas within the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of the country and the *National Institute of Wind Energy (NIWE) has been authorized as the Nodal Agency* for development of offshore wind energy.

- Government has paved way for development of the offshore wind farms up to the seaward distance of 200 Nautical Miles (within its Exclusive Economic Zone) from the base line.

National Digital Library Of India

- **What is it?** National Digital Library of India (NDLI) is a project of the Ministry of Human Resource Development under the aegis of National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology (NMEICT). It is developed by IIT Kharagpur.
- **Objective:** The objective of NDL is to make digital educational resources available to all citizens of the country to empower, inspire and encourage learning.

Key facts:

- NDL is the Single Window Platform that collects and collates metadata from premier learning institutions in India and abroad, as well as other relevant sources.
- It is a digital repository containing textbooks, articles, videos, audio books, lectures, simulations, fiction and all other kinds of learning media.
- It makes quality learning resources available to all learners and has 1.7 Crore content from more than 160 sources, in over 200 languages.

About NMEICT:

- The National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been envisaged as **a Centrally Sponsored Scheme** to leverage the potential of ICT, in teaching and learning process for the benefit of all the learners in Higher Education Institutions in any time anywhere mode.
- **The Mission has two major components** – providing connectivity, along with provision for access devices, to institutions and

learners; and content generation.

- **The Mission aims** to extend computer infrastructure and connectivity to over 25000 colleges and 2000 polytechnics in the country including each of the departments of 419 universities/deemed universities and institutions of national importance as a part of its motto to provide connectivity up to last mile.
- LAN of up to 400 nodes on average has also been envisaged to be provided to the universities under the NMEICT scheme. The Mission, in addition to utilize the connectivity network of service providers, shall explore the possibility to provide connectivity utilizing Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT), Virtual Private Network (VPN) and EduSat channels.

Suryashakti Kisan Yojana (Sky) Scheme

- **Context:** In an attempt to promote solar energy, the *Gujarat government has announced Suryashakti Kisan Yojana (SKY) scheme* under which farmers would be encouraged to generate electricity and sell their surplus to power distribution companies.

they consumer power according to their requirement, they can sell the surplus back to the distribution companies.

Highlights of the project:

- Under the first phase of project, *the state government would provide financial assistance* to 12,400 farmers out of the state's total 15 lakh farmers to generate an estimated 175 MW of power.
- *The state government and the Centre would jointly share 60% of the cost* of installing a solar generating unit in the fields, while the farmers would need to chip in only 5%. The remaining 35% would be in the form of a loan by the state government at the rate of four to 4.5%.
- *The government would also enter in a 25-year power purchase agreement with the farmers.* Till the farmers repay their loan, the distribution companies would buy electricity from them at the rate of Rs 7 per unit and at Rs 3.5 per unit once the loans are settled. After that, the farmers would get ownership of the solar system.

Significance of the project:

- At present, the farmers consume power purchased from power companies.
- The project will help them set up solar systems in their fields. After

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Pratik Mishra 2020
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Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme

- **Context:** Cabinet approves Mechanism for procurement of ethanol by Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) to carry out the Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme- Revision of ethanol price for supply to Public Sector OMCs.

Significance:

- Remunerative price to ethanol suppliers will help in reduction of cane farmer's arrears, in the process contributing to minimizing difficulty of sugarcane farmers.
- Ethanol availability for EBP Programme is expected to increase significantly due to higher price for C heavy molasses based ethanol and enabling procurement of ethanol from B heavy molasses and sugarcane juice for first time.

Benefits of ethanol blending:

Increased ethanol blending in petrol has many benefits including reduction in import dependency, support to agricultural sector, more environmental friendly fuel, lesser pollution and additional income to farmers.

Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme:

- It was launched by the Government in 2003 on pilot basis which has been subsequently extended to the Notified 21 States and 4 Union Territories to promote the use of alternative and environmental friendly fuels.
- It aims at blending ethanol with petrol, thereby bringing it under the category of biofuels and saving millions of dollars by cutting fuel imports.
- Ethanol Blended Petrol Programme is

being implemented by the Ministry or Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs).

- This intervention also seeks to reduce import dependency for energy requirements and give boost to agriculture sector.

Demand:

- India is the third largest consumer of energy in the world after China and the US. Currently, the country is dependent on imports for about 82.1% of its crude oil requirement and to the extent of about 44.4% in case of natural gas.
- India is expected to need 10 billion litres of ethanol annually to meet the 20% blending target in 2030 if petrol consumption continues to grow at the current pace. At present, the capacity stands at 1.55 billion litres a year.

Concerns and challenges:

- There has been a consistent shortfall in supply of ethanol in the past, mainly on account of the cyclical nature of the sugarcane harvests in the country. There is “lack of an integrated approach in the EBP across its value chain.”

Way ahead:

- The National Policy on Bio-fuels has set a target of 20% blending of biofuels, both for bio-diesel and bio-ethanol. This will require an integrated approach in the Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP).
- The time is ripe for a cogent and consistent policy and administrative framework in the program implementation for the success of EBP.

World Best Universities Ranking

QS World University Rankings 2018: Top 10			
2018	2017	Institution Name	
1	1	MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY (MIT)	US
2	2	STANFORD UNIVERSITY	US
3	3	HARVARD UNIVERSITY	US
4	5	CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY (CALTECH)	US
5	4	UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE	UK
6	6	UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD	UK
7	7	UCL (UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON)	UK
8	9	IMPERIAL COLLEGE LONDON	UK
9	10	UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO	US
10	8	ETH ZURICH (SWISS FEDERAL INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY)	CH

- **Context:** The 15th edition of the QS World University Rankings has been released by global higher education analysts QS Quacquarelli Symonds. QS ranks the world's top 1,000 universities, across 85 countries.
- Being the only international ranking to have received International Ranking Expert Group (IREG) approval, the QS ranking is viewed as one of the three most-widely read university rankings in the world, along with Academic Ranking of World Universities and Times Higher Education World University Rankings.

Global performers:

- Globally, Massachusetts Institute of Technology remains the top university for the seventh consecutive year.
- Stanford University, Harvard University and California Institute of Technology (Caltech) all retain their positions at second, third and fourth

in the world respectively.

- From Asia, National University of Singapore (11) Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (12) and Tsinghua University, China (17) have been ranked the best.

Performance of Indian institutions:

- Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay (IIT-B), Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore, and Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi (IIT-D) are in the top 200.
- The number of Indian universities in the top 1,000 increased from 20 to 24. 9 Indian institutions have been individually ranked in the top-500 as against 6 last year.
- IIT-Bombay is now the top institute in the country rising 17 positions from 2018 to 162. Indian Institute of Science (IISc) Bangalore, rises 20 places to 170th.
- 17 of India's 24 ranked universities improved their rank for Academic Reputation, while 13 improved their rank for Employer Reputation.

Way ahead for India:

- The rankings are an affirmation of faith in the premier Indian higher educational institutions.
- The Human Resource Development (HRD) ministry has been taking several steps to improve the global rankings, especially the world-renowned IITs by providing more funds and launching the Institutes of Eminence scheme under which institutes would be freed from regulatory framework.
- However, there's still work to be done beyond the top universities.

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New Norms For College Teachers

WHAT THE NEW RULES SAY

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Institutions have to seek UGC recognition afresh to offer courses in distance mode ● Applications have to be submitted six months before commencement of academic session. This has practically frozen admission for distance mode programmes for the next six months ● 150 universities barred from offering such courses in distance mode that they do not offer in the conventional mode | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Institutions to display on website course structure, fee, faculty details ● Institutions may allow up to twenty per cent of a course online ● Unique Identification or Aadhaar number of learner to be mandatorily mentioned in certificates ● Standalone institutions not affiliated to any university will not get fresh recognition to offer courses in distance mode |
|---|---|

- **Context:** The University Grants Commission (UGC) has brought out a new set of regulations to alter the conditions for recruitment and promotion of college and university teachers, so as to make universities more focussed on research and colleges on the teaching-learning process.

New norms:

- Research will no longer be mandatory for college teachers for promotion. However, university promotions will offer weightage to research done. College teachers will be graded on teaching rather than research. College teachers can still do research and earn higher grades for it.
- Other than research, college teachers can earn grades for other activities too — like social work, helping in adoption of a village, helping students in extra-curricular activities, contributing teaching material to Swayam, the MOOCS platform for

online material.

- College teachers can become professors now. Till now, a college teacher could not rise above the rank of associate professor, the professor post being limited to university departments.
- To become an assistant professor in a college, the requirement remains the same: Ph.D or NET plus a master's degree. However, for promotion to the post of associate professor, a Ph.D will be mandatory even at the college level.
- Indians who had been awarded a doctoral degree from any of the top 500 global universities would be eligible to teach in Indian universities without the requirement of any equivalence certificate or NET as soon as the regulations are notified.

University Grants Commission (UGC):

- The University Grants Commission of India (UGC India) is a statutory body set up in accordance to the UGC Act 1956 under Ministry of Human Resource Development.
- It is charged with coordination, determination, and maintenance of standards of higher education. It provides recognition to universities in India and disburses funds to such recognized universities and colleges.

India Among Over 90 Nations Without Paid Paternity Leave

- **Context:** According to a new UNICEF analysis, India is among almost 90 countries in the world without national policies in place that ensure new fathers get adequate paid time off with their newborn babies.

Highlights of the report:

- Almost two-thirds of the world's children under one- year-old, nearly 90 million, live in countries where their fathers are not entitled by law to a single day of paid paternity leave.
- India and Nigeria, which have high infant populations, are among the 92 countries do not have national policies in place that ensure new fathers get adequate paid time off with their newborn babies.
- In eight countries across the world, including the United States which is home to nearly four million infants, there was no paid maternity or paternity leave policy.
- Other countries with high infant populations, including Brazil and Congo, all have national paid paternity leave policies, albeit offering relatively short-term entitlements.

Need for paternity leave:

- Evidence suggests that when fathers bond with their babies from the beginning of life, they are more likely to play a more active role in the child's development. Research also suggests that when children positively interact with their fathers, they have better psychological health, self-esteem and life-satisfaction in the long- term.
- Also, positive and meaningful interaction with mothers and fathers

from the very beginning helps shape children's brain growth and development for life, making them healthier and happier, and increasing their ability to learn.

Way ahead:

- Around the world, momentum for family-friendly policies is growing. For example, India has proposed a Paternity Benefit Bill for consideration in the next session of Parliament which would allow fathers up to three months of paid paternity leave.
- UNICEF has urged governments to implement national family-friendly policies that support early childhood development, including paid paternity leave, to help provide parents with the time, resources and information they need to care for their children.

Facts for Prelims:

- UNICEF has launched 'Super Dads' campaign which aims to break down barriers preventing fathers from playing an active role in their young children's development.
- The campaign celebrates Father's Day – recognised in more than 80 countries in June – and focuses on the importance of love, play, protection and good nutrition for the healthy development of young children's brains.

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First Freight Village

Why in news?

India's first freight village is being developed

More On News

- The **objective of the project** is to support economic development in the hinterland of the **multimodal terminal** at Varanasi and reduce logistics cost in the Eastern Transport Corridor and its influence zone.
- The village is being **funded by the World Bank** and it is being implemented by the inland waterways authority of India.
- The village will also have the Varanasi waterways terminal which is being developed under the **Jal Marg Vikas project**.
- Varanasi being a strategic location provides the opportunity to **facilitate the transshipment** of about 30 million tonnes of domestic freight as well as another 9 million tonnes of export import freight.
- Apart from supporting logistics and warehousing segment of the supply chain it would also bring in retailers, warehouse operators and logistics service providers supplying the regional FMCG market, together.

What is Freight Village?

"A freight village is a defined area within which all activities relating to transport, logistics and the distribution of goods, both for national and international transit, are carried out by various operators"

Jal Marg Vikas Project

- The project envisages the development of **waterway** (for commercial navigation) **between Allahabad and Haldia** on Ganga River that will cover a distance of 1620 km.
- The project covers Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal.

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Krishi Kalyan Abhiyan

Why in news?

Recently Krishi Kalyan Abhiyan was launched by Ministry of Agriculture and Farmer Welfare.

- The overall coordination and implementation will be done by **Krishi Vigyan Kendra**.

More about the Abhiyan

- It was launched with an aim to **aid, assist and advice farmers** to improve their **farming techniques** and **raise their income**.
- It has been launched from **1st June 2018 till 31st July 2018** during which various activities to **promote best practices** and **enhance agriculture income** will be undertaken in accordance with an action plan formulated by including various departments of the Ministry such as Department of Agriculture, Cooperation & Farmers Welfare (DAC&FW), Animal Husbandry Dairying & Fisheries (DAHD&F) etc.
- Various activities under the program are –
 - o Distribution of soil health cards to all farmers
 - o 100% coverage of bovine vaccination for Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in each village
 - o 100% coverage of Sheep and Goat for eradication of Peste des Petits ruminants (PPR)
 - o **Artificial insemination** saturation
 - o Demonstration programmes on **Micro- irrigation and integrated cropping practice** etc.
- It will be undertaken in 25 villages with more than 1000 population each in **Aspirational District** as identified in consultation with the Ministry of Rural Development in accordance with the guidelines of NITI Aayog.
- If the number of villages in a district is less than 25 with more than 1000 population then all the villages will be covered.

Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI)

- The Nikkei India Manufacturing PMI fell to 51.2 in May of 2018 from 51.6 in the preceding month and below market consensus of 51.5.
- Growth in output, new orders and employment softened while business sentiment dropped from the previous month's nine-month high.
- Also, purchasing activity declined for the first time in seven months, albeit only fractionally.
- Amid reports of greater demand from the international markets Indian manufacturers reported the strongest gain in new exports order since February.
- On the price front, a build-up of inflationary pressures re-emerged with input cost and output charge inflation rates at the strongest since February, due to the upswing in global oil prices.

the PMI as a good indicator of industrial output, for which official statistics are released later.

What does it mean for financial markets?

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

What is PMI?

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

How is the PMI derived?

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

What are its implications for the economy?

- The PMI is usually released at the start of the month, much before most of the official data on industrial output, manufacturing and GDP growth becomes available.
- It is, therefore, considered a good leading indicator of economic activity.
- Economists consider the manufacturing growth measured by

BAD BANK

- **Context:** The concept of having a ‘bad bank’ to take over the troubled loans of public sector banks (PSBs) is being considered by the government to enable them to get back to business.
- Finance minister Piyush Goyal recently announced that a bankers’ panel would look at the feasibility of setting up a new asset reconstruction company (ARC) or asset management company (AMC) to take over bad loans of PSBs. The panel is headed by Punjab National Bank non-executive chairman Sunil Mehta.

Background:

- The Bad Bank concept was pioneered at the Pittsburgh-headquartered Mellon Bank in 1988 in response to problems in the bank’s commercial real-estate portfolio.
- According to McKinsey & Co, the concept of a “bad bank” was applied in previous banking crises in Sweden, France, and Germany.

How does a bad bank work?

- While the government has not charted out any guidelines on the structure of a bad bank, such an institution would be largely based on the principles of an asset restructuring company (ARC), which buys bad loans from the commercial banks at a discount and tries to recover the money from the defaulter by providing a systematic solution over a period of time.
- Since a bad bank specialises in loan recovery, it is expected to perform better than commercial banks, whose expertise lies in lending.

Why a bad bank is likely to succeed?

- A single government entity will be more competent to take decisions

rather than 28 individual PSBs.

- Capacity building for a complex workout can be better handled by the government which has regulatory control and has management skillsets in public sector enterprises.
- Foreign investors with both risk capital and risk appetite would be more in a government- led initiative, knowing that regulatory risks would stand considerably mitigated in various stages of resolution, including take outs.

What needs to be done now?

- Whether or not the knots in the bad bank idea are sorted out, the government should focus on other reforms as well.
- One, amend the Prevention of Corruption Act to shield bankers and officers from investigative witch-hunts.
- Two, back bankers to take demonstrable action against wilful defaulters. And three, take a hard look at what ails the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code.

INSOLVENCY CODE

- **Context:** Recently, President Ram Nath Kovind gave his nod to promulgate the Insolvency and Bankruptcy code (Amendment) Ordinance 2018.

Significant changes introduced:

1. Homebuyers as financial creditors:

- Homebuyers would now be treated as financial creditors or, in other words, on par with banks, with the power to initiate insolvency proceedings against errant builders.
- Homebuyers shall have the right to be represented in the committee of creditors (CoC), which takes the key decision regarding revival of the company or its liquidation.

2. Definition of a related party:

- The amendment now defines related party in relation to an individual running the firm and they would be barred from bidding for the firm under the resolution process. Prior to the amendment, related party was defined only with reference to a company facing insolvency.

3. Changes in voting share of committee of CoC:

- The amendment has changed the voting share required in CoC meetings. For extending the insolvency process beyond 180 days till 270 days and for appointment of the resolution professional (who oversees the process), now a voting share of 66% is sufficient, compared with earlier requirement of 75%.

Unless a specific approval is required in the Code, all other decisions of the CoC can be taken with 51% voting share against the earlier norm of 75%.

- Withdrawal from the insolvency process is permitted with the approval of 90% of voting share of the CoC.

4. If a financial creditor is a related party:

- If a financial creditor (banks and other financial institution) or his authorised representative is a related party to the company facing insolvency, it shall not have any participation or voting during a meeting of the CoC.
- However, exemption is provided in case the financial creditor has become a related party on account of conversion or substitution of debt to equity shares or instruments convertible into equity shares prior to the date of commencement of insolvency proceedings.

5. Moratorium period:

- For a company under insolvency, a moratorium period is provided during which no parallel proceedings are allowed.
- Whether such moratorium is available to guarantors of the company was a subject of debate. Now the amendment has said that the moratorium is not available to persons who provided guarantee for the loans availed by the corporate debtor.

6. Tenure of an insolvency resolution

professional:

- Under the insolvency process, an interim resolution professional (IRP) is appointed first and then, a resolution professional.
- As per the amendment, the tenure of the IRP would continue till the appointment of the resolution professional (RP), compared with the earlier 30-day fixed tenure. Also, for the appointment of the RP, a written consent from the professional is required in a specified format.

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Banks Board Bureau



- **Context:** The Banks Board Bureau (BBB) has recommended 22 general managers to be elevated as executive directors at various public sector banks. These recommendations are based on interactions held by the Banks Board Bureau with eligible candidates from PSBs towards appointment against vacancies in PSBs for the period 2018-19.
- The Appointments Committee of Cabinet headed by Prime Minister will take the final decision in this regard. There are already some vacancies at executive director level and more would be created during the course of the year.

appointments and assisting banks with capital-raising plans as well as strategies to deal with bad loans.

About Banks Board Bureau (BBB):

- It was set up in February 2016 as an **autonomous body**– based on the recommendations of **the RBI-appointed Nayak Committee**. It was the part of Indradhanush Plan of government.
- Its broad agenda was to improve governance at state-owned lenders. Its mandate also involved advising the government on top-level bank

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Three Year Action Plan: Agricultural Education

Recently, the cabinet has approved the continuation of the Three-Year Action Plan (2017-2020) of the scheme for Agricultural Education Division and ICAR Institutes.

About the Scheme

- The scheme aims to reduce academic inbreeding and addressing faculty shortage, promotes green initiatives, international ranking, alumni involvement, promoting innovations, technology enabled learning, post-doctoral fellowships, agriculture education portal, and scientific social responsibility.
- Moreover, it will facilitate research on gender issues in agriculture and allied fields, through policy and programme.

Need of Agricultural Education

- **Agricultural Productivity-** Effective agricultural education (both for farmers as well as researchers) leads to better economic and technical decision making in agricultural processes, which is further reflected in increase in agricultural productivity.
- **Value Chain of Agriculture-** The entire value chain of agriculture i.e. from farm input to market linkages, suffers from various bottlenecks which can well be addressed by agricultural education.
- **Employment-** Agricultural education is needed in order to absorb the emerging labour force, especially with the emerging arenas of biotechnology, GM food, precision agriculture etc. which require detailed knowledge.
- **Labour value-** Market value of individual in agricultural field in India is lower than many developing countries and agricultural education adds to an individual's productivity and therefore increases the market value of his labour.

Challenges face by Agricultural Education

- **Finance-** Agriculture is a state subject and the statutory responsibility for it vests with the state governments which lack in funds. Moreover, the **establishment cost** of agricultural universities has risen substantially while the operational budget has reduced which constrains institution for innovation.
- **Faculty-** State Agricultural Universities (SAUs) are facing **non-replacement of retired faculty** and high inbreeding of faculty (nearly 51% of faculty members have their degrees from the same university in which they are teaching), which hampers the quality of academic and research programmes.
- **Lack Networking and quality-** It has been noticed that most of the universities are lacking in association and integration with different national and international universities for academic activities.
- **Low quality-** The quality provided in these universities is low which further affects their global ranking.
- **Not a first option-** Negative attitude towards agricultural education due to low returns and limited career opportunities makes agricultural education not a preferred choice amongst students.

Way Forward

- **Public Private Partnership (PPP)-** Government should harness the PPP modal with agricultural universities especially in agribusiness, biotechnology, nanotechnology and many frontier areas, where public sector institutions are weak and not responding to the changing demand.
- **Revisit Curriculum-** Ashok Dalwai Committee on Doubling the farmer Income, highlighted that there is a need to revisit the current agriculture education curriculum to orient it to

promote agriculture as a sustainable practise and profit generating enterprise.

- **Global Standard practices-** Agricultural education is needed to be harmonized with existing and emerging issues related to WTO, ethics of IPR, standard trade practices.
- **Regional Specific Education-** The criteria for new universities should be agro-ecoregion rather than one discipline, as agriculture-related issues are multidisciplinary.
- **Regulatory authority** i.e. ICAR does not have statutory powers or the mandate to regulate agricultural education. Thus, it is important to create a **central statutory authority** for the regulation of higher agricultural education to make the agriculture sector science and technology (S&T) based.
- **Vocational Agricultural Education-** Universities are concentrating mainly on formal education while there is also need for Vocational and non-formal education especially in respect of knowledge and technological empowerment for work force in rural areas.

is involved in strengthening and streamlining of higher agricultural education system to enhance the quality of human resources in agri-supply chain to meet future challenges in agriculture sector in the country.

Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)

- It is the apex body **for co-ordinating, guiding and managing** research and education in agriculture including horticulture, fisheries and animal sciences in the entire country.
- Formerly known as Imperial Council of Agricultural Research **established on 16 July 1929.**
- **Presently,** it is an **autonomous organisation** under the Department of Agricultural Research and Education (DARE), Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.
- With 101 ICAR institutes and 71 agricultural universities spread across the country this is one of the largest national agricultural systems in the world.

The **Agricultural Education Division, ICAR**

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Status Of Power System Transformation 2018

Why in news?

The International Energy Agency (IEA) published **Status of power transformation 2018 report**

Context

- The report presents the findings of the Advanced Power Plant Flexibility (APPF) Campaign, which was supported by two **Clean Energy Ministerial** initiatives: the 21st Century Power Partnership (21CPP) and the Multilateral Wind and Solar Working Group.

What is Power System Flexibility?

- It is defined as the ability of a power system to reliably and cost **effectively manage the variability and uncertainty of demand and supply** across all relevant timescales.
- It includes **ensuring instantaneous stability** of the power system and supporting **long-term security of supply**.
- A lack of system flexibility can reduce the resilience of power systems, or lead to the loss of substantial amounts of clean electricity through curtailment of VRE.

Power system flexibility can be conceptualised as having three “layers”:

- The hardware and infrastructure**, available to provide physical flexibility.
- The policy, regulatory and market frameworks** which incentivise the provision of flexibility.
- The institutional roles and responsibilities of entities** who provide, incentivise, or manage flexibility.

Significance

- It is important topic while considering the increasing intensity and frequency of

high-impact events, and a higher share of **variable renewable energy (VRE)**.

- It is one aspect of **power system transformation (PST)**, which also includes incorporation of VRE generation, growth in distributed energy resources, and the application of demand response and other modern technologies.
- PST is crucial for **ensuring electricity security** by providing uninterrupted availability of energy sources at an affordable price.

Clean Energy Ministerial (CEM)

- It is a high-level global forum to promote policies and programs that advance clean energy technology, to share lessons learned and best practices, and to encourage the transition to a **global clean energy economy**.

21st Century Power Partnership (21CPP)

- It is a multilateral effort of the Clean Energy Ministerial and serves as a platform for public-private collaboration to advance integrated policy, regulatory, financial, and technical solutions for the large-scale deployment of renewable energy in combination with deep energy efficiency and smart grid solutions.

Way forward

- Incorporating regular flexibility assessments** into planning and strategy dialogues is the key.
- Established decision support tools** can be used to assess flexibility requirements, understand the value of proposed changes, and plan for the future.
- Policy makers can help facilitate a **transparent and collaborative**

planning environment that employs global best practices.

- **Well-designed policy, market and regulatory frameworks** are critical to unlock power plant flexibility
- **Mobilising technically available flexibility** in practice may call for changes to operational practices, fuel and power purchase contracts, regulatory incentives and market design.
- Often, no technical changes or capital investments are required to access this plant flexibility. Instead, modifications to system operational procedures or market and regulatory incentives can unlock power plant flexibility.

PARIWARTAN

Why in news?

The Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) has finalised a plan called Pariwartan to revitalise stressed power sector assets.

More on news

- Power sector is under debt of Rs 11.7 trillion of which Rs 3.5 trillion is already under stress.
- Of these, banks have the largest at 53 per cent of the total loans, followed by non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) at 35 per cent and the balance from the state.
- The power sector NPAs have been rising due to various factors such as:
 - **Paucity of funds** due to lack of interest of promoters and state fiscal capacity
 - **Lack of power purchase agreements** by DISCOMS have led to revenue instability among power generators thereby adding to NPAs.
 - **Fuel shortages** in form of shortage of coal and reduced nuclear power generation have added to the problem.
 - **Lack of Demand** due to solar and wind alternatives in addition to slower industrial growth has led to NPA woes.
 - **Transmission and Distribution (T&D) losses** also referred to as Aggregate Technical & Commercial (AT&C) losses are above 20% (2015-16).
- Under Insolvency and Bankruptcy code, stressed assets have drawn bids of Rs 1-2 crore which are much less than Rs 5 crore which is the minimum requirement to build them. As promoters lost interest, the value of these assets is deteriorating due to lack of operations and maintenance.

Pariwartan Scheme

- Under the scheme government has planned to warehouse stressed power projects totalling 25,000 megawatts (MW) **under an asset management and rehabilitation company (AMRC) jointly owned by the financial institutions** (Power finance corporation and lending banks) to protect the value of the assets and prevent their distress sale under the insolvency and bankruptcy code till demand for power picks up.
- These projects will be transferred to the AMRC at net book value, wherein it will own a 51 percent stake in the projects while the remaining 49 percent will be held by the lenders
- REC has identified projects with total debt of around 1.8 trillion rupees to be part of the scheme.
- The scheme is inspired by the Troubled Asset Relief Program, which was introduced in the US during the 2008 financial crisis.
- The scheme is similar to **SAMADHAN (Scheme of Asset Management and Debt Change Structure)** under which the SBI led bankers' consortium took over unsustainable debt of stressed power plants to avoid their liquidation.

RBI Alters ‘Relative’ Definition

- **Context:** Concerned over funds sent abroad under the ‘maintenance of close relative’ category of the Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS), the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has narrowed the definition of relatives to check the flow of funds.

The new definition:

- RBI has aligned the definition of ‘relative’ with the definition given in Companies Act, 2013 instead of Companies Act, 1956. Hence, funds under the ‘maintenance of close relative’ category can be sent only to immediate relatives such as parents, spouses, children and their spouses.

What necessitated this move?

- Outward remittances under maintenance of close relatives shot up to almost \$3 billion in 2017-18 from a mere \$174 million in 2013-14. In fact, funds sent under this category have more than doubled since 2015-16. Overall outward remittances under LRS went up to \$11 billion from \$1 billion in the same period.

About Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS):

- Under LRS, all resident individuals can freely remit \$250,000 overseas every financial year for a permissible set of current or capital account transactions.
- **Permitted:** Remittances are permitted for overseas education, travel, medical treatment and purchase of shares and property, apart from maintenance of relatives living abroad, gifting and donations. Individuals can also open, maintain and hold foreign currency accounts with overseas banks for carrying out

transactions.

Not permitted: However, the rules do not allow remittances for trading on the foreign exchange markets, margin or margin calls to overseas exchanges and counterparties and the purchase of Foreign Currency Convertible Bonds issued by Indian companies abroad. Sending money to certain countries and entities is also barred. Under LRS, people can’t send money to countries identified as ‘non cooperative’ by the Financial Action Task Force. Remittances are also prohibited to entities identified as posing terrorist risks.

Relatively stricter

Funds under the ‘close relatives’ category can now be sent only to kin such as parents, spouses, children and their spouses. Earlier, the term had multifarious interpretations

Year	Outward remittances*	Maintenance of close relatives
FY14	1,093.9	173.9
FY15	1,325.8	174.4
FY16	4,642.6	1,372.1
FY17	8,170.7	2,169.5
FY18	11,333.6	2,937.4

All figures in \$million

* Under LRS

Source: RBI



Board Of Management For Cooperative Banks

- **Context:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has come out with draft guidelines on constituting *a board of management (BoM)* in addition to the board of directors, *for urban cooperative banks (UCBs)*, with the aim of strengthening the governance in these banks.

What you need to know?

- **Need:** As UCBs are accepting public deposits, it is imperative that a separate mechanism be put in place to protect the interests of depositors.
- **Applicability:** Existing UCBs with deposit sizes exceeding Rs100 crore shall put in place the BoM within one year, while others banks may take two years. UCBs with deposit sizes up to Rs100 crore will have BoMs of a minimum of three members, while those with deposit sizes of more than Rs100 crore will have at least five members in the BoMs. The maximum number of members in the management shall not exceed 12.
- **Composition:**
- It will consist of members with special knowledge and practical experience in banking to facilitate professional management and focused attention to banking related activities of UCBs.
- The circular also said that at least 50% of the members of the BoM should have specialisation or practical experience in fields such as accountancy, agriculture, law.
- The chief executive officer of the bank will be an ex-officio member of the BoD and BoM and he will be under the general superintendence, direction and control of the board.
- **Functions:** The BoM will be responsible for credit, risk and

liquidity management of the bank. It will be responsible for the day-to-day functions, including considering loan proposals, recovery of bad loans, borrowings and overseeing audit and inspection functions.

- **Management:** The BoM will report to the BoD, which will continue to oversee the general direction and control of a UCB. RBI shall have powers to supersede the BoM if the functioning of BoM is found unsatisfactory.

Facts for Prelims:

- The move follows the recommendation of a 2010 expert committee, headed by **Y.H. Malegam**, on the licensing of UCBs.

Solar Charkha Mission

- **Context:** President Ram Nath Kovind recently launched the Solar Charkha Mission covering artisans in 50 identified clusters.

About Solar Charkha Mission:

- The Solar Charkha Mission will generate employment in rural areas and contribute to the green economy. The mission will entail a subsidy of Rs 550 crore in the initial two years for 50 clusters and every cluster will employ 400 to 2000 artisans.
- The scheme also aims at linking five crore women across the country to the initiative. The mission is expected to create one lakh jobs during the first two years.

Significance of MSMEs:

- MSME account for around 60% employment in India.
- MSME have registered over 10% growth in recent times which is much more compared to large enterprises.
- This is one sector where people not only exhibit their entrepreneurial skills, become part of large value chains but also become job creators in the process.

Treasury Bill

Context: After reviewing the cash position of the Central Government, the Government of India, in consultation with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to notify the amounts for the issuance of Treasury Bills for the Quarter ending September 2018.

What you need to know about Treasury bills?

- T-bills are short term securities issued on behalf of the government by the RBI and are used in managing short term liquidity needs of the government.
- 91-day T-bills are auctioned every week on Wednesday and 182-day and 364-day T-bills are auctioned every alternate week on Wednesdays.
- Treasury bills are issued at a discount and are redeemed at par.

- Treasury bills are issued only by the RBI on behalf of the Government.
- Treasury bills are issued for meeting temporary Government deficits.
- The Treasury bill rate of discount is fixed by the RBI from time-to-time.
- It is the lowest one in the entire structure of interest rates in the country because of short-term maturity and degree of liquidity and security.

Cross-Border Insolvency

- **Context:** The Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) is planning to introduce a globally accepted and well-recognised cross-border insolvency framework, fine-tuned to suit the needs of aspirational Indian economy. The Government has taken initiative for Cross-Border Insolvency within the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (the Code) to provide a comprehensive legal framework.

Need for cross-border insolvency framework:

- As the size of the Indian economy grows, business and trade have adopted an increasingly international character. Creditors and corporates frequently transact business in more than one jurisdiction. Foreign banks and creditors finance Indian companies and Indian banks have foreign exposure. Also, as part of its Ease of Doing Business and Make in India policies, India seeks to attract foreign companies to set up manufacturing facilities in India.
- Besides, global experience demonstrates that cross-border investment decisions and their outcomes, are considerably affected by the insolvency laws in force in a country. Towards this end, even though the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 has resulted in significant improvement in India's insolvency regime, there is a need to include cross-border insolvency in the Code to provide a comprehensive insolvency framework.

of doing business, provide a mechanism of cooperation between India and other countries in the area of insolvency resolution, and protect creditors in the global scenario.

- Also, it will make India an attractive investment destination for foreign creditors given the increased predictability and certainty of the insolvency framework.

Global scenario:

- On the global scale, the UNCITRAL (United Nations Commission on International Trade Law) Model Law on Cross-Border Insolvency, 1997 (Model Law) has emerged as the most widely accepted legal framework to deal with cross-border insolvency issues while ensuring the least intrusion into the country's domestic insolvency law.
- Due to the growing prevalence of multinational insolvencies, the Model Law has been adopted by 44 States till date, including Singapore, UK and US.

Benefits associated:

- Inclusion of cross-border insolvency framework will further enhance ease

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SEBI To Integrate Departments For Efficiency

Why in news?

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is planning to integrate its surveillance and investigation departments.

Rationale behind this decision

- SEBI lacks coordination between the two departments. The merged department could take over all investigations, which will **reduce**

overlapping and increase SEBI's efficiency.

- Currently, it takes around three months to check if the matter deserves further probe. Merger will **reduce this time frame to 2 weeks**.
- It will **improve coordination and monitoring** in a more efficient manner.

investor is its basic and foremost aim which is to be achieved through its functions of regulation.

- SEBI as the Capital Market Regulator has twin objectives of **regulating as well as developing the market**.
- It creates discipline in the market and ensure high degree of fairness and market integrity.
- It identifies and prohibits certain types of conduct in the markets and provides the Commission with
- disciplinary powers over regulated entities and persons** associated with them.

The surveillance department	Investigation department
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It keeps a close tab on market activity to detect any suspicious activity such as market manipulation and insider trading It ascertains documents from market intermediaries such as stock exchanges, depositories, and clearing corporation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Probes potentially illegal market activities based on inputs provided by surveillance. It also provides referrals to the enforcement department. It has an internal committee that sees if the matter is worth taking up. Then they seek independent opinion on the case.

Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)

SEBI was established on April 12, 1992 in accordance with the provisions of the Securities and Exchange Board of India Act, 1992.

Role of SEBI

- To increase the efficiency of the financial system and securities market so that larger saving could be channelled for productive use in the public sector.
- The Preamble of SEBI Act lays down that **protection of the interest of**

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Urban Cooperative Banks To Transition Into Small Finance

Why in news?

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) allowed voluntary transition of the Urban Co-Operative Banks (UCB) into Small Finance Banks (SFB).

More on news

- The move is an outcome of the recommendations made by the **High Powered Committee** on Urban Cooperative Banks under R Gandhi in 2015 which included:
 - o Converting UCBs with **business size of Rs 20000 Crore** or more into regular banks in a bid to propel their growth.
 - o **Licences** for setting up UCBs be **issued only to financially sound and well-managed cooperative credit societies** with at least five years of track record.
 - o Putting in place a Board of management has to be one of the mandatory licensing conditions for licensing new UCBs and expansion of existing ones.
 - o To operate as a multi-state UCB, the minimum capital requirement would be Rs 100 crore.

Significance of the decision

- **Relaxation of dual control:** UCBs currently face regulation by both the RBI and the respective State governments. By turning into SFBs, they will be regulated only by the RBI.
- **Risk posed to the system:** Some UCBs have acquired the size akin to commercial banks and could pose a risk to the system due to their scale and complexity of business.
 - o In case of commercial banks, the present regulatory and legal framework provides reasonable power to RBI for an early resolution which is not the case with UCBs given their weak regulation.

- o In view of this, the time was opportune to reflect on the appropriate size up to
- o which a UCB may be allowed to grow without undue risk to the system.

Furthering financial inclusion: The move will help commercialisation of UCBs and bringing them into mainstream banking furthering the cause of financial inclusion.

- o Due to the limited capacity to raise capital, lack of corporate governance, lack of a level playing field in regulation and supervision at par with commercial banks, all products/lines of businesses undertaken by commercial banks were not permitted to UCBs.

Small Finance Banks

- They provide basic banking services like accepting deposits and lending to the unbanked sections such as small farmers, micro business enterprises, micro and small industries and unorganised sector entities.
- They were created with an aim to encourage financial inclusion by provision of savings vehicles and supply of credit to small business units.
- The minimum paid-up equity capital for small finance banks shall be **Rs. 100 crore**.
- The promoter's **minimum initial contribution to the paid-up equity capital** of such small finance bank shall at least be **40 per cent** (can be brought down to **26 per cent within 12 years** from the date of commencement of business of the bank).
- They are required to maintain Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) and Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR)
- They are required to **extend 75 per cent**

of its Adjusted Net Bank Credit (ANBC) to the sectors eligible for classification as priority sector lending (PSL) by the Reserve Bank.

Urban Cooperative Banks (UCBs)

- It refers to primary cooperative banks located in urban and semi-urban areas.
- The Urban Cooperative Banks (UCBs) are registered as cooperative societies under the provisions of, either the State Cooperative Societies Act of the concerned State or the Multi State Cooperative Societies Act, 2002.
- The Reserve Bank regulates and supervises the banking functions of UCBs under the provisions of Banking regulation Act, 1949(AACS).

Government Owned NBFCs

Why in news?

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recently **ended the special dispensations** granted earlier for non-banking financial corporations (NBFCs) **owned by the government.**

of loans and advances, acquisition of shares/stocks/bonds/debentures/securities issued by Government or local authority.

- Foreign Investment is allowed up to 100%.

Background

- The Reserve Bank has been given the powers under the RBI Act 1934 to register, lay down policy, issue directions, inspect, regulate, supervise and exercise surveillance over NBFCs.
- The Reserve Bank can regulate and penalize NBFCs for violating the provisions of the RBI Act or the directions or orders issued by RBI under the RBI Act.
- Earlier, only privately owned NBFCs had to maintain a minimum **Capital to Risk Assets Ratio (CRAR)** of 15 percent if Tier-1 capital is 10 percent.

Difference between NBFCs & Banks:

- Provides Banking services to People without holding a Bank license,
- An NBFC cannot accept Demand Deposits,
- An NBFC is not a part of the payment and settlement system and as such,
- An NBFC cannot issue Cheques drawn on itself, and
- Deposit insurance facility of the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation is not available for NBFC depositors, unlike banks
- An NBFC is not required to maintain Reserve Ratios (CRR, SLR etc.)
- An NBFC cannot indulge Primarily in Agricultural, Industrial Activity, Sale-Purchase, Construction of Immovable Property.

Changes introduced

- Now, the CRAR requirements same as that of private NBFCs have been made applicable to **government NBFCs**.
- Government NBFCs have to achieve this **by 2022**.
- Some of the other changes that government NBFCs would now have to comply with include the **treatment of income recognition**, besides full provisioning for all non-performing assets.
- RBI has **specified a roadmap**, stretching till 2021-22, for these lenders to meet the norms on capital adequacy, provisioning, and corporate governance.
- The recent ruling by the RBI will ensure both types of NBFCs stand on an equal footing on compliance with specific RBI rules and will also help in keeping a check on NPAs and bankruptcy.

A Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC)

- It is a company engaged in the business

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Business Correspondents

- **Context:** The government is planning to make all CSCs across the country Business Correspondents of Banks. 2.90 lakh CSCs will be able to work as Business Correspondents (BCs).

Who are Business Correspondents?

- Business Correspondents are **retail agents** engaged by banks for providing **banking services at locations other than a bank branch/ATM**.
- Banks are required to take full responsibility for the acts of omission and commission of the BCs that they engage and have, therefore, to ensure thorough due diligence and additional safeguards for minimizing the agency risk.
- Basically, BCs enable a bank to expand its outreach and offer limited range of banking services at low cost, as setting up a brick and mortar branch may not be viable in all cases. BCs, thus, are an integral part of a business strategy for achieving greater financial inclusion.

What they can do?

- BCs are permitted to perform a variety of activities which include identification of borrowers, collection and preliminary processing of loan applications including verification of primary information/data, creating awareness about savings and other products, education and advice on managing money and debt counseling, processing and submission of applications to banks, promoting, nurturing and monitoring of Self Help Groups/ Joint Liability Groups, post-sanction monitoring, follow-up of recovery.
- They can also attend to collection of

small value deposit, disbursement of small value credit, recovery of principal/ collection of interest, sale of micro insurance/ mutual fund products/ pension products/ other third party products and receipt and delivery of small value remittances/ other payment instruments.

Who can be engaged as BCs? - The banks may engage the following individuals/entities as BC:

- Individuals like retired bank employees, retired teachers, retired government employees and ex-servicemen, individual owners of kirana / medical /Fair Price shops, individual Public Call Office (PCO) operators, agents of Small Savings schemes of Government of India/Insurance Companies, individuals who own Petrol Pumps, authorized functionaries of well run Self Help Groups (SHGs) which are linked to banks, any other individual including those operating Common Service Centres (CSCs).
- NGOs/ MFIs set up under Societies/ Trust Acts and Section 25 Companies.
- Cooperative Societies registered under Mutually Aided Cooperative Societies Acts/ Cooperative Societies Acts of States/Multi State Cooperative Societies Act.
- Post Offices.
- Companies registered under the Indian Companies Act, 1956 with large and widespread retail outlets, excluding Non Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs).

Benefits:

- Corporates with large and widespread retail network bring in larger resources, higher organizational

strength and financial backing needed for a large network of BCs besides providing financial security to the bank.

- Corporates as BC would be more suitable to render banking services in accordance with the bank's internal policies and standards than individuals and other small entities.
- Over years, these companies have developed efficient systems of monitoring and control over the retail outlets/franchises, including cash management, which could be used to advantage. These outlets are already dealing with the local population and are familiar with them.
- The shopkeepers and other retail agents of the large corporates may be more comfortable dealing with the company that they are already used to and familiar with, rather than with the bank.
- Failure of large companies as BCs would mean a reputation risk to the company and endanger its substantive business. As such, the companies could be relied upon to ensure that their agents do not jeopardize their reputation.
- A corporate is likely to continue as BC for a longer period than individuals, thus ensuring continuity of services.

UN MSME DAY 2018

- **Context:** UN MSME Day is celebrated on June 27th across the world.

Background:

- The General Assembly, in 2017, recognizing the need to improve small business access to microfinance and credit, decided to designate 27 June as Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Day. The goal is to encourage member states to facilitate observance of the day by increasing awareness and actions to support small business.
- The resolution was introduced by the delegation of Argentina, co-sponsored by 54 member states and adopted without a vote by the 193-member General Assembly on 6 April 2017.

What is a micro-, small, or medium-sized enterprise?

- The criteria for defining the size of a business differ from country to country. As a reference, the European Commission's definition of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises is established according to the number of employees and the annual turnover or balance sheet:
 - **Micro-enterprise:** fewer than 10 employees and an annual turnover (the amount of money taken in a particular period) or balance sheet (a statement of a company's assets and liabilities) below €2 million.
 - **Small enterprise:** fewer than 50 employees and an annual turnover or balance sheet below €10 million.
 - **Medium-sized enterprise:** fewer than 250 employees and annual turnover below €50 million or

balance sheet below €43 million.

- The choice of MSME definition could depend on many factors, such as business culture, the size of the country's population, industry and the level of international economic integration.

Significance of MSMEs:

- Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises are the backbone of most economies worldwide and play a key role in developing countries.
- According to the data provided by the International Council for Small Business (ICSB), formal and informal Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) make up over 90% of all firms and account on average for 60-70% of total employment and 50% of GDP.
- These types of enterprises are responsible for significant employment and income generation opportunities across the world and have been identified as a major driver of poverty alleviation and development.
- MSMEs tend to employ a larger share of the vulnerable sectors of the workforce, such as women, youth, and people from poorer households. MSMEs can even sometimes be the only source of employment in rural areas. As such, MSMEs as a group are the main income provider for the income distribution at the “base of the pyramid”.

How they contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals?

- Micro-, small and medium sized enterprises are vital in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular in promoting innovation, creativity and decent work for all.
- Efforts to enhance access to finance

for SMEs across key sectors of national economies are an important element of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG targets 8.3 and 9.3 call for enhancing the access of SMEs to financial services. In addition, SMEs are an important element in the implementation of SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) and SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure).

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Amalgamation Of Regional Rural Banks

Why in news?

Union government, in consultation with the NABARD, had decided to go ahead with **phase III of the amalgamation of regional rural banks (RRBs)**, bringing down the number of such entities to 38 from 56 now.

Background

- The first round was in 2005 in which RRBs of the same sponsor bank within a State were consolidated.
- In the second phase of consolidation in 2012, RRBs, which were near each other (even if they belonged to different sponsor banks), were brought together.

Merits

- The consolidation process would enable RRBs to **minimise their overhead costs**, optimise use of technology, enhance capital base and area of operation.
- This will bring about better scale efficiency, higher productivity and robust financial health of RRBs
- Improved **financial inclusion** and **greater credit flow** to rural areas.

Role of Regional Rural Banking for Rural Development:

- Taking the banking services to the doorstep of rural masses, particularly in hitherto unbanked rural areas.
- **Making available institutional credit to the weaker section** of the society who had by far little or no access to cheaper loans and had perforce been depending on the private money lenders.
- **Mobilize rural savings** and channelize them for supporting productive activities in rural areas.
- Provide **finance to co-operative societies**, Primary Credit societies, Agricultural marketing societies.
- **Generating employment opportunities** in rural areas and bringing down the cost

of providing credit to rural areas.

Challenges faced by RRBs

- **Difficulties in Deposit Mobilisation:** On account of their restrictive lending policy which excludes richer sections of the village society, these potential depositors show least interest in depositing their money with these banks.
- **Slow Progress in Lending Activity:**
 - o It is always difficult to identify the potential small borrowers
 - o Most of the small borrowers do not like the bank formalities and prefer to borrow from the informal sources of finance
- **Urban orientation of their staff** which is rarely inclined to serve in rural areas
- **Procedural Rigidities:** The RRBs follow the procedures of the scheduled commercial banks which are highly complicated and time-consuming from the villagers' point of view.
- **Delay in decision making:**
 - o The RRBs are controlled by various agencies, i.e., the sponsoring bank, NABARD, RBI, besides Central Government. Thus, it takes long time to take decisions on some important issues.
- The implementation of **Core Banking Services** involves huge cost for setting up of infrastructure

Way forward

- **Governance reform** should start with making public sector institutions more accountable to market discipline.
- **Government stake should be reduced** and state has to ensure the presence of an interested single promoter-like shareholder.
 - o Then shareholder could look at mergers, acquisitions and other aspects based on market conditions and merits.

- **Policy and procedure of financing**
 - o Simplification & Standardisation of Loan Application
 - o Reduction in Processing Time
 - o Increased attention towards financing of Non-Farm Activities
- **Recovery of loans**
 - o The number of Debt Recovery Tribunals (DRTs) should be increased to fasten the debt recovery
 - o RBI should recommend a **compromise and settlements scheme** for the RRBs so that it may make compromise and settlement instead of resorting to the long drawn legal battle.
- **Organisation**
 - o Development of Human Resources (Staff Training)
 - o **Staff Compensation package** for the staff of RRBs should be brought at par with the other banks.
 - o **Faster Branch Expansion**

Hawala Transactions

Why in news?

Investigating agencies have unearthed huge transactions as part of a probe into an international “hawala” syndicate.

What is Hawala system?

- The word "**Hawala**" means **trust**. It is an **alternative or parallel remittance system**, which works outside the circle of banks and formal financial systems. It is also sometimes referred to as "**Underground Banking**".
- In a hawala transaction, **no physical movement of cash is there**.
- This network is being used extensively across the globe to **circulate black money** and to provide funds for terrorism, drug trafficking and other illegal activities.

Status of Hawala in India

- Hawala has been **made illegal in India**, as it is seen to be a form of money laundering and can be used to move wealth anonymously. The hawala transactions are uncounted since they are not routed through banks.
- In India, FEMA (Foreign Exchange Management Act) 2000 and PMLA (Prevention of Money Laundering Act) 2002 are the two major legislations which make such transactions illegal and are enforced by **Enforcement Directorate**.

Enforcement Directorate (ED)

- It is a law enforcement agency and economic intelligence agency responsible for enforcing economic laws and fighting economic crime in India.
- It is part of the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, Government of India.
- The ‘Enforcement Unit’ of Department of Economic Affairs was renamed as ED in 1957.

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Katrin Experiment



- **Context:** Researchers in Germany with the Karlsruhe Tritium Neutrino experiment have started collecting data to determine the mass of the universe's lightest particle- neutrino. Those are sometimes called “ghost particles” because they're so difficult to detect.

- KATRIN measures the neutrino mass in a model-independent way via ultrahigh precision measurements of the kinematics of electrons from beta-decay.

About Neutrinos:

- Neutrinos are the most abundant massive elementary particles in nature. Due to their minimalistic properties they are key particles for understanding physics on the smallest scale (elementary particle physics) up to the largest scale – the universe (cosmology).
- Neutrinos are the only elementary particles of matter, which do not carry electrical or strong charge and thus are blind to the electromagnetic and the strong interaction and cannot be bound.
- In the context of particle physics they participate only in the weak interaction. This made neutrinos the most prominent candidate to explore with them the properties of the weak interaction.

Background:

- Determining the mass of neutrinos is one of the most important open questions in particle physics and will help scientists better understand the history of the universe.

About KATRIN experiment:

- The KATRIN experiment is currently set up and commissioned on the Campus North of the Karlsruhe Institute for Technology.
- The experiment is a collaboration between national and international partners with currently more than 150 scientists, engineers, technicians and students.

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More Financial Powers To DRDO

Why in news?

The government has recently delegated greater financial powers to Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO).

Need for delegation

- India is currently faced with a strategically-vulnerable position of being **the world's largest arms importer** due to the abysmal performance of DRDO. It **lacks effectiveness and efficiency** due to time and cost over runs.
- Further a major hinderance in its effectiveness is its **lax attitude** along with the **lack of major innovative technological** solutions for the country.
- Its budget continues to hover around 5-6% of the overall defence budget while China spends around 20% of its defence outlay on R&D.

Recent reforms

- Central government has **delegated greater financial powers** to DRDO to neutralise the ill-effects of over centralisation.
- **Bifurcation of the post** of scientific advisor to defence minister cum chief of DRDO to enhance functional efficiency.
- The **powers of the DRDO chief** (secretary, defence R&D) to sanction projects and procurements have now been enhanced from Rs 75 crore to Rs 150 crore.
- The **powers of the seven directors-general** or DRDO cluster heads have gone up from Rs 50 crore to 75 crore.

About DRDO

- It was **formed in 1958 by the merger** of the Technical Development Establishment and the Directorate of Technical Development and Production with the Defence Science Organisation.
- It is under the administrative control of

the

Ministry of Defence.

- Charged with military R&D, it works for **enhancing self-reliance** in Defence Systems and **production of world class weapon** systems and equipment in accordance with the expressed needs and the qualitative requirements laid down by the three services

Way forward

- As suggested by **Rama Rao Committee** (constituted to conduct a comprehensive review of DRDO), in 2008 **DRDO should focus only on “critical technologies”** of **“strategic importance”** and other tasks should be delegated to other agencies for better functioning.
- **Vacancies in DRDO** should be filled within stipulated time to enhance functional performance.
- Focus of DRDO should be on **innovative R&D** rather than on implementation of other less important tasks such as production of pellet guns.

Europe's First Solar Panel Recycling Plant

- **WHERE?** Europe's first solar panel recycling plant was recently inaugurated in France. The new plant is located in Rousset, southern France.

Key facts:

- Waste management firm Veolia signed a contract with solar recycling group PV Cycle France to recycle 1,300 tonnes of solar panels this year.
- The plant in Rousset uses robots to take panels apart and recover glass, silicon, plastics, copper and silver, all of which can be reused to create new panels.

Need for Solar panel recycling plant?

- Solar panels have an estimated lifespan of 25 to 30 years, meaning that many of the first generation built in the 1990s are now being decommissioned.
- The huge growth in solar power in recent years also means that finding a sustainable and circular solution to ageing panels is of prime importance.

Way ahead:

- The International Renewable Energy Agency estimates that by 2050 there will be between 60 to 78 million tonnes of PV panel waste around the world.
- China and the US, as leaders in solar installation, will also need to establish recycling plants to deal with this waste, but that this could unlock significant economic benefits.
- At the moment, however, only the European Union has adopted waste regulations specifically aimed at tackling future solar PV waste.

Defence Ministry Issues New Guidelines For START-UPS

Why in news?

Ministry of Defence has specified **new rules for Indian start-ups** to enable them to take part in military projects.

Significance

- It encourages new companies to undertake research projects to develop or upgrade weapon systems and to work towards **reducing imports**.
- It leverages **cutting-edge research and innovation** of start-ups.

New guidelines

- Under the new rules, start-ups in some certain categories recognised by the Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion (DIPP) will **automatically qualify** to take part in specified defence projects.
- For projects with estimated cost of prototype development phase not exceeding INR 3 Crore, no separate technical or financial criteria will be defined for both ‘startups’ and ‘other than startups’, to encourage their participation.
- For relatively smaller R&D projects, the government has simplified rules by removing several regulations required for participation.
- These new rules apply to the **‘Make II’ category of defence procurement**.
- With these rules specified, The Army, Air Force and Navy will now shortlist projects that can be awarded under the category.

‘Make’ category in Defence Procurement Procedure

- It is a vital pillar for realising the vision behind the ‘Make in India’ initiative, by fostering indigenous capabilities by both public and private sector.

As per **DPP-2016**, there are two sub-categories

of ‘Make’ Procedure:

- Make-I (Government Funded):** It will involve **Government funding of 90%**, released in a phased manner.
- Make-II (Industry Funded):** Under this, private industry funds the research for the product on its own and develops a prototype. There will be **no government funding** for developing the prototype but there is an assurance of orders on successful development and trials of the prototype.

BOOST TO NEW COS

DIPP - Recognised

Startups will qualify for defence projects.



Categories range



from Aeronautics, Nanotechnology and Virtual Reality to Renewable Technology, Robotics, Green Technology and Internet of Things

Armed Services have identified 53 projects under this ‘Make II’ category



3 Startup Moves This Year



March: Draft production policy promised that the government will set up a Rs. 1000 crore fund for startups that would be selected through ‘hackathons’



May: Draft offsets policy described moves to set up a SEBI regulated fund that will promote startups and will permit foreign manufactures to meet obligations that run in billions of dollars



JUNE: New rules for homegrown startups in an attempt to make them focus on cutting edge research and development

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NSG Commandos To Be Drafted In J&K

Why in news?

The centre has decided to deploy National Security Guard (NSG) commandos in J&K to fortify counter terror operations.

More on News

Till now NSG has been involved in handling counter terror operations and only the ones which have been of high intensity such as Mumbai terror attacks or pathankot terror attack. The recent move of involving NSG in J&K will include:

- o NSG will **train J&K police and other paramilitary forces** in room intervention, anti-terror skills, oversee anti-hijack operations at Srinagar airport and deploy its commandoes in intelligence operations.
- o **Use specialised sniper guns**, Koch mp5 machine guns, through the wall radars etc. to handle militant attacks.

About NSG

- It is an Indian special forces unit under the **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)**.
- It was **established in 1984**, following Operation Blue Star and the assassination of Indira Gandhi for combating terrorist activities.
- It is **not categorised under Central Armed Police Force (CAPF)** but has a special forces mandate.
- The NSG personnel are commonly referred to as **Black Cats** because of the black outfit and black cat insignia worn on their uniform.

ISRO Is Planning To Mine Moon

- **Context:** Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)’s second moon mission — the Rs 800 crore ‘Chandrayaan- 2’ — will hunt for deposits of Helium-3 — a waste-free nuclear energy that could answer many of Earth’s energy problems.

Why Helium- 3?

- The isotope of Helium, which is abundant on the moon, could theoretically meet global energy demands for three to five centuries.
- This kind of energy is also expected to be worth trillions of dollars (one expert estimated Helium-3’s value at about five billion US dollars a ton).
- There are approximately 1 million metric tons of Helium-3 embedded in the moon, although only about a quarter of that can realistically be brought to Earth.
- Since the isotope is not radioactive, it could be used in fusion reactors for nuclear energy without dangerous nuclear by-products.

Concerns and challenges:

- Even if ISRO finds helium-3 on the moon, there are obstacles that need to be addressed before it can be utilised. The space agency will have to figure out how it will mine and bring back the isotope to Earth. Building fusion power plants to convert this resource into energy is another issue that has to be looked at.
- Additionally, there is no international treaty on commercial entities allowed to keep what they have mined from space, said the report. Only the US and Luxembourg have passed legislations to this effect.

- He-3 fusion is untested technology. Considering prevailing commitments like the Paris Agreement, it would simply be foolish for India to attempt stewarding a nuclear fusion programme involving heavier isotopes when a prototype hydrogen fusion experiment (ITER) itself has sucked in over Rs 96,550 crore (about 9% of which India contributes) while another billion-dollar facility in the US has been struggling to kickstart fusion chain reactions for over four years now.

About Chandrayaan-2:

- Chandrayaan-2 includes soft-landing on Moon and moving a rover on its surface. It is an advanced version of the previous Chandrayaan-1 mission. It consists of an orbiter, lander and rover configuration.
- The Orbiter spacecraft when launched from Sriharikota will travel to the Moon and release the Lander, which will in turn deploy a tiny Rover to roam the lunar surface — all three sending data and pictures to Earth.
- It is planned to be launched as a composite stack into the earth parking orbit (EPO) of 170 X 18,500 km by GSLV-Mk II.

Way ahead:

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Rare Spider Rediscovered

Why in news?

Recently, a rare spider (both a male and a female spider) was rediscovered from Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary in Western Ghats, Kerala.

More from news

- A team of researchers from Centre for Animal Taxonomy and Ecology (CATE) discovered the spider named **Chrysilla Vollupe** after 150 years which was believed to be extinct.
- The rediscovery is significant for the fact that the female specimen was spotted for the first time and it also points to the need to conduct more explanatory surveys of faunal diversity of India.

About Chrysilla Vollupe

- The Spider belongs to the family of **jumping spider** (Salticidae).
- **Female spider** has blue iridescent bluish scales present in the top of head region of female and orange bands on both sides of the head.
- The spider has **eight black eyes** are arranged in the front and sides of head region. The spider makes a retreat between green leaves of small plants.

Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary

- Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary is an **animal sanctuary** in Wayanad, Kerala, India.
- It was **established in 1973** and is a contiguous to **protected area network** of Nagarhole and Bandipur of Karnataka on northeast and Madumalai of Tamil Nadu on southeast.
- It is part of the **Niligiri Biosphere Reserve** and is one of the Evergreen Forests in India with more than 250mm rainfall.

Blue Flag Certification

Why in news?

13 Indian beaches have been shortlisted for the Blue flag certification.

More on news

- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change had started a pilot project under a **Unified Coastal Areas Management Programme** to develop the Indian beaches according to the Blue Flag standards in December 2017.
- This project aims to
 - improve the aquatic habitat by cleaning the growing pollution and garbage in the Indian beaches.
 - develop ecological tourism with constant progress and development of tourist facilities.
- **Chandrabhaga beach** of Odisha's Konark coast was the first to complete the tag certification process will be **the first in Asia** to get the Blue Flag certification.
- Apart from it, **12 other beaches** across are also being developed by the **Society for Integrated Coastal Management (SICOM)** as **blue flag beaches which include** Maharashtra's Chiwla and Bhogave beaches and one beach each from Puducherry, Goa, Daman and Diu, Lakshadweep and Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- An integrated coastal management scheme, referred as **Beach Management Service (BeAMS)** has also been introduced by the ministry to reduce existing pollutants on beaches and achieve such high international standards.

- The Blue Flag is an environmental award for beaches, sustainable boating tourism operators, and marinas.
- Only local authorities or private beach operators can apply for a Blue Flag for beaches.
- The criteria for Blue Flag beaches cover four main area:
 - water quality,
 - environmental management,
 - environmental education and
 - safety.

Society for Integrated Coastal Management (SICOM)

- It has been established under the aegis of Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate change, Government of India.
- The main objectives of SICOM are as follows:
 - To support implementation of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) activities in India.
 - To implement the World Bank assisted India ICZM Project
 - To provide Research Development (R&D) and stakeholders participation in management of the Coastal areas in India.
 - To undertake any additional work or function as may be assigned by Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change from time to time in the area of Coastal Management and other related activities.

Blue Flag Standards

- The Blue Flag beach standards were established by **Copenhagen-based Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE)** in 1985 in France.

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GOOGLE For Water Resource Management

Why in News?

Recently, Central water commission (CWC) has entered into a Collaboration Agreement with Google for better management of water resources and flood management.

About the move

- CWC and Google will share technical expertise in the fields of artificial intelligence, machine learning, geospatial mapping and analysis of hydrological observation data to collaborate on
 - o Improving flood prediction systems, which will help provide location-targeted, actionable flood warnings,
 - o High priority research project utilizing Google Earth Engine to help visualize and improve flood management.
 - o A cultural project to build online exhibitions on the Rivers of India.

The information in the form of likely extent and depth of inundation would be disseminated with a lead **time of up to 3 days**. For 2018, inundation forecasting would be done on trial basis and the same would be up scaled in near future.

A similar programme launched previously by the government is the **National Hydrology Project** which aims to streamline the **hydro-metrological data** system in country.

National Hydrology Project

World bank assisted programme launched in 2016.

Objective: to improve the extent, quality, and accessibility of water resources information, decision support system for floods.

- Setting up of a system for timely and reliable water resources data acquisition, storage, collation and management.

It provides for establishment of **National Water Informatics Centre (NWIC)** as an independent organization under the control of MoWR, RD&GR.

It assists in promoting ‘efficient and equitable’ use of water, **especially groundwater**, to the village level and provide information on quality of water as well.

Central Ground Water Commission

It is an **attached office** of the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation ((MoWR, RD&GR).

Functions: Control, conservation and utilization of water resources throughout the country, for purpose of Flood Control, Irrigation, Navigation, Drinking Water Supply and Water Power Development.

Fortified Rice

- **Context:** The government is planning to provide fortified rice (enriched with essential vitamins and minerals) to all the poor under National Food Security Act (NFSA) across the country, which would cost about Rs 12,000 to Rs 14,000 crore annually. To begin with the scheme is likely to cover the 115 ‘aspirational’ districts across the country.
- The proposal is being prepared with the support of NITI Aayog under the National Nutrition Mission.

fortification of rice is a major opportunity to improve nutrition.

- Fortified rice contains Vitamin A, Vitamin B1, Vitamin B12, Folic Acid, Iron and Zinc.

Food fortification in India:

- Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has formulated a comprehensive regulation on fortification of foods namely ‘Food Safety and Standards (Fortification of Foods) Regulations, 2016’.
- These regulations set the standards for food fortification and encourage the production, manufacture, distribution, sale and consumption of fortified foods.
- The regulations also provide for specific role of FSSAI in promotion for food fortification and to make fortification mandatory. This sets the premise for the national summit on fortification of food.

What is Rice Fortification?

- Fortification is the practice of deliberately increasing the content of an essential micronutrient, i.e. vitamins and minerals (including trace elements) in a food, so as to improve the nutritional quality of the food supply and provide a public health benefit with minimal risk to health.
- Rice fortification is the practice of increasing the content of essential micronutrients in rice and to improve the nutritional quality of the rice.

Why Rice Fortification?

- Rice is the world’s most important staple food. An estimated 2 billion people eat rice every day, forming the mainstay of diets across large of Asia and Africa.
- Historians have found evidence of rice being eaten in parts of China some 8,000 years ago and it even has the same word as “food” in Chinese. In Bangladesh, home of 160 million people, rice is the main staple food with a daily average consumption of 416 grams per capita.
- Regular milled rice is low in micronutrients and serves primarily as a source of carbohydrate only. The

Cooperation In The Peaceful Uses Of Outer Space

- **Context:** The Union Cabinet was recently apprised of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between India represented by the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) and Oman represented by the Ministry of Transport and Communications on Cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space, in February, 2018 at Muscat (Oman’s port capital).
- This MoU shall enable the following areas of cooperation such as, space science, technology and applications including remote sensing of the earth; satellite based navigation; Space science and planetary exploration; use of spacecraft and space systems and ground system; and application of space technology.

“weapons of mass destruction” is not defined, but it is commonly understood to include nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons.

- The treaty, however, does not prohibit the launching of ballistic missiles, which could be armed with WMD warheads, through space.

The treaty’s key arms control provisions are in Article IV. States-parties commit not to:

- Place in orbit around the Earth or other celestial bodies any nuclear weapons or objects carrying WMD.
- Install WMD on celestial bodies or station WMD in outer space in any other manner.
- Establish military bases or installations, test “any type of weapons,” or conduct military exercises on the moon and other celestial bodies.

Value addition for Prelims and Mains- Treaty on Outer space:

- Space exploration is governed by a complex series of international treaties and agreements which have been in place for years. The first and probably most important of them is the Outer Space Treaty.
- The treaty was initially signed by the United States of America, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union on January 27, 1967 and it came into effect from October 10, 1967.
- The treaty was initially called ‘Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and other Celestial bodies.

Treaty Terms:

- The treaty forbids countries from deploying “nuclear weapons or any other kinds of weapons of mass destruction” in outer space. The term

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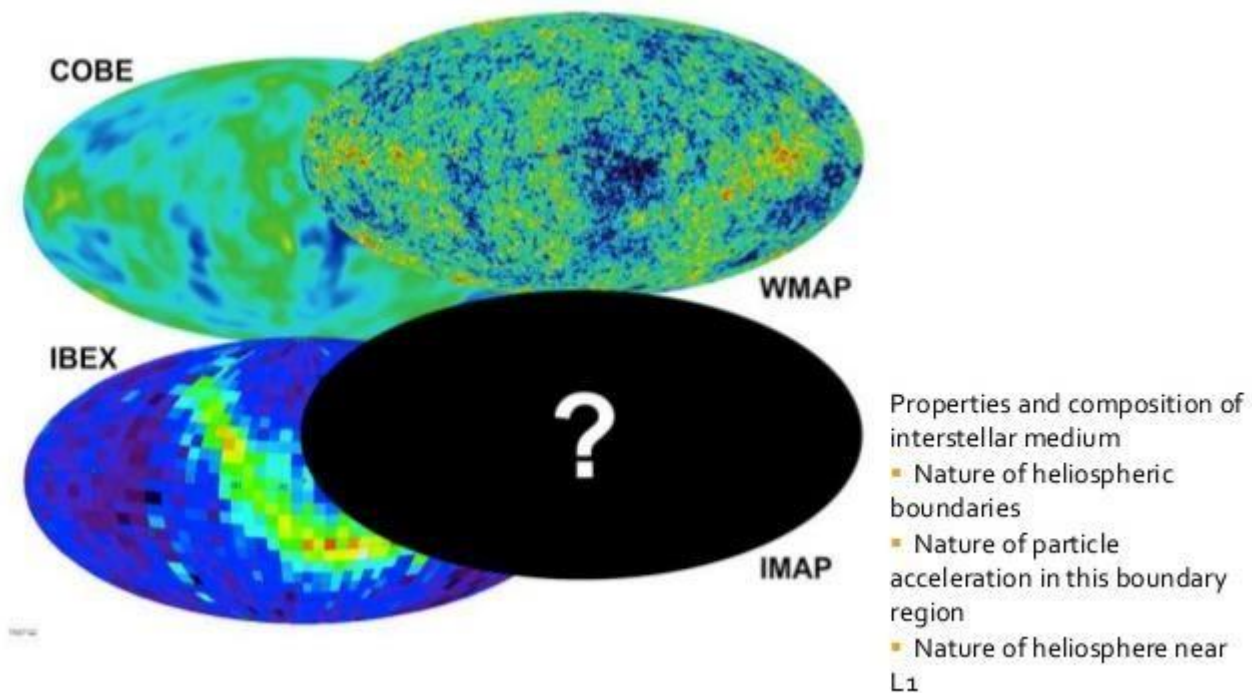
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Interstellar Mapping And Acceleration Probe

IMAP – Interstellar Mapping & Acceleration Probe



What is it? It is a science mission of NASA planned for launch in 2024 that will sample, analyze, and map particles streaming to Earth from the edges of interstellar space.

About IMAP mission:

- The Interstellar Mapping and Acceleration Probe (IMAP) mission will help researchers better understand the boundary of the heliosphere, a sort of magnetic bubble surrounding and protecting our solar system. This is the fifth mission in NASA's Solar Terrestrial Probes (STP) Program portfolio.
- Another objective of the mission is to learn more about the generation of cosmic rays in the heliosphere. Cosmic rays created locally and from the galaxy and beyond affect human

explorers in space and can harm technological systems, and likely play a role in the presence of life itself in the universe.

- The spacecraft will be positioned about one million miles (1.5 million kilometers) away from Earth towards the Sun at what is called the first Lagrange point or L1. This will allow the probe to maximize use of its instruments to monitor the interactions between solar wind and the interstellar medium in the outer solar system.

Why study Heliosphere?

This region is where the constant flow of particles from our Sun, called the solar wind, collides with material from the rest of the galaxy. This collision limits the amount of harmful cosmic radiation entering the heliosphere.

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Ensemble Prediction Systems (EPS)

Why in News?

IMD recently launched the Ensemble Prediction Systems (EPS) to provide probabilistic weather forecasts upto next 10 days.

About EPS

- It has been developed jointly by the **IMD, National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF) and the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology**
- The new system consisting of **eight petaflops high-power computing systems** shall improve upon deterministic forecasts that are prone to high margins of error.
- Under this, **the area of spatial resolution**, which is 23 km presently, **will reduce to 12 km**, enabling the meteorological department to give **district-level warning**.
- With this new model, **India joins the US** with a model that predicts with a 12 km resolution. Only the '**European Center for Medium Range Weather Forecast**' has a better 9km resolution.
- Better forecasting would lead to better management of agriculture and water resources and would help to **promote tourism, solar and wind energy**.

India Meteorological Department

- IMD established in **1875**, is a principal government agency **in all matters related to meteorology, seismology and allied subjects**.
- Along with **Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM) and National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF)**, is under the administrative control of Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES).

South Asia's Hotspots: World Bank Report

Why in News?

Recently the World Bank has released its report titled “**South Asia's Hotspots: The Impact of Temperature and Precipitation changes on living standards**”.

More about report

- It estimates how changes in temperature and monsoon patterns will **affect GDP and living standards in South Asian region**.
- The report identifies “**hotspots**” as the states /districts where these changes will have a **notable effect on living standards**.
- It observed six countries in South Asia **Nepal, Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka** for the study.
- The report looks at two scenarios: **climate-sensitive and carbon-intensive**. Both show rising temperatures throughout the region in coming decades, with **the carbon-intensive scenario showing greater increases**.
- It will be useful for **designing social welfare programmes** by accounting for local socio-economic characteristics and climate-related risks and **reorient strategies and policies** targeted to hotspot inhabitants, the hidden victims of climate change.

Main finding of report

Overall region related findings

- Almost **Half Of South Asia's Population** Now Lives In Areas That Are Projected To Become **Moderate To Severe Hotspots** Under The Carbon-Intensive Scenario By 2050.
- It Has Found That Living Standards In **Some Currently Cold And Dry Mountain Areas Could Improve Marginally**. India, Bangladesh, Pakistan And Sri Lanka Will Be Adversely

Affected By These Changes, While Afghanistan And Nepal Will Benefit As They Are Relatively Cold.

- The Report Finds That Most Of The Expected Hotspots Are Currently Characterized By **Low Living Standards, Poor Road Connectivity, Uneven Access To Markets, And Other Development Challenges**.
- Most Of The Hotspots Included In The Report Are In Inland Areas. I.E. There Will Be **More Warming In Inland And Less Warming In Coastal Areas** Beyond 2050.
- Average Household Consumption In The Region Will **Decline After Average Temperature Exceeds A Peak**.
- Majority Of The Region's Population Lives In Areas Where Temperature Is Already Above The Said Peak.

India specific findings

- Approximately **600 million people in India** today live in locations that would become **moderate or severe hotspots by 2050** under the carbon-intensive scenario.
- India's average temperature is predicted to increase by **1.5-3°C if no measures are taken and by 1-2°C if preventive measures are taken along the lines of the Paris Agreement** by 2050. Rising temperatures and changing monsoon rainfall patterns from climate change could cost India 2.8% of
- **GDP, and depress the living standards of nearly half the country's population by 2050**.
- States in the **central, northern and northwestern parts of India** emerge as the most vulnerable. **Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh**, which are predicted to experience a decline in living standards of more than 9%, are **the top two 'hotspot' States in India**, followed

by Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra.

- Of the top 10 most affected hotspot districts, **7 are in Vidarbha, Maharashtra and the remaining 3 in Chhattisgarh and MP.**
- In the absence of major climate mitigation, **nearly 148 million Indians** will be living in these severe hotspots in 2050.

Recommendations

- No single set of interventions will work in all hotspots. Targeted Policies and actions to address **the specific needs based on local conditions** are required for effective mitigation. **Targeting resources efficiently to the most vulnerable communities and groups** should be a priority.
- **Investing in skills, health, knowledge, better infrastructure, and a more diversified economy** will reduce climate hotspots at the household, district, and country levels.
- **Boosting research and development on new technologies, such as drought-resistant crops,** and other Technological advances, coupled with expanded irrigation systems, will work to make **agriculture less sensitive to climate change** in the long-term.
- Governments should promote private actions on adaptation of new skills for building resilience by policies like **providing weather forecasts and climate risk assessments.**
- For **India specific measures,** targeted interventions for **improving educational attainment, reducing water stress, and improving nonagricultural employment opportunities** can act as a game changer.

DAM SAFETY BILL 2018

Why in news?

- The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal for introduction of Dam Safety Bill, 2018 in the Parliament

Significance of the bill:

- About 75 percent of the large dams in India are more than 25 years old and about 164 dams are more than 100 years old. A badly maintained, unsafe dam can be a hazard to human life, flora and fauna, even India has had 36 dam failures in the past.
- It address all issues concerning dam safety including regular inspection of dams, Emergency Action Plan, comprehensive dam safety review, adequate repair and maintenance funds for dam safety, Instrumentation and Safety Manuals.
- It lays onus of dam safety on the dam owner and provides for penal provisions for commission and omission of certain acts.

Key features of the proposed Bill

- The objective of this Bill is to help develop uniform, countrywide procedures for ensuring the safety of dams and provides for proper surveillance, inspection, operation and maintenance of all specified dams in the country to ensure their safe functioning.
- It provides for constitution of a National Committee on Dam Safety which shall evolve dam safety policies and recommend necessary regulations
- It provides for establishment of **National Dam Safety Authority** as a **regulatory body** which shall discharge functions to implement the policy, guidelines and standards for dam safety in the country.
- The Bill provides for constitution of a **State Committee on Dam Safety** by State Government.

About State Committee on Dam Safety

- It will ensure proper surveillance, inspection, operation and maintenance of all specified dams in that State and ensure their safe functioning.
- Every state having specified number of dams will establish **State Dam Safety Organization** which will be manned by officers from the field dam safety preferably from the areas of dam-designs, hydro-mechanical engineering, hydrology, geo-technical investigation, instrumentation and dam-rehabilitation.

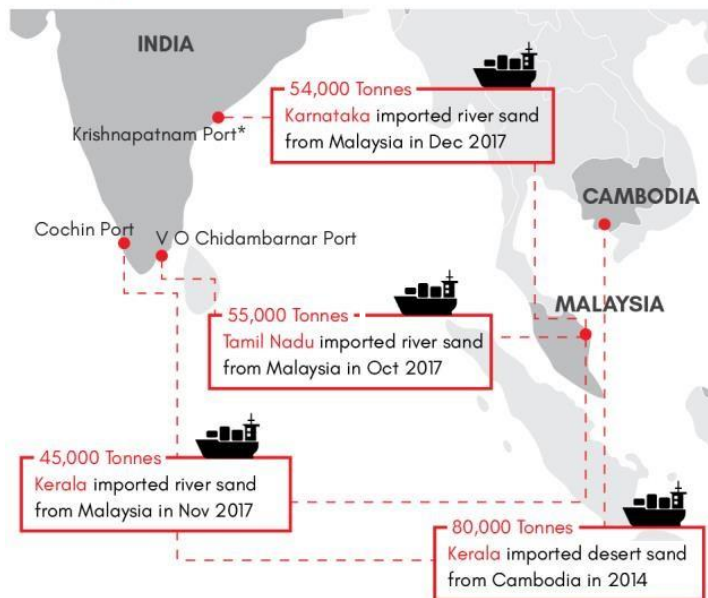
National Dam Safety Authority

- It maintains liaison with the State Dam Safety Organizations and the owners of dams for standardization of dam safety related data and practices;
- It shall provide the technical and managerial assistance to the States and State Dam Safety Organizations;
- It maintains a national level data-base of all dams in the country and the records of major dam failures;
- It shall examine the cause of any major dam failure;
- It shall accord recognition or accreditations to the organizations that can be entrusted with the works of investigation, design or construction of new dams;

Sand Imports

SAND TRAIL

States are tweaking laws in recent months to facilitate sand import



*Karnataka imports through Andhra Pradesh's Krishnapatnam port.

and infrastructure growth and government initiatives like Housing for all, the demand for Sand is set to rise.

Steps taken to facilitate Sand Import

- In 2014, Union Ministry of Commerce and Industries allowed import of sand to increase its availability.
- Karnataka, Kerala amended mineral concession rules laying down the procedure for sand imports to facilitate importers.
- In March, Tamil Nadu issued a tender notice to import 3 million tonnes of river sand from various countries at Rs 548.73 crore over the next two years.
- Sand mining framework launched in March 2018 also prescribed the use of imported sand (as an alternative to sand mining) after it qualifies for quality standards and is free from phyto-sanitary issues.

Why in News?

States are amending laws in recent months to facilitate sand imports to meet the rising demand.

More about the news

- **Huge demand for the natural mineral:**
 - o According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), sand, along with gravels, are already the most extracted minerals—accounting for 69-85% of the minerals mined every year. Demand of sand in India was around 700 million tonnes in FY-2017 and it is increasing at the rate of 6-7% annually.
 - o According to the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the **construction sector** has grown at a Compound Annual Growth Rate of 6 per cent and because of rapid urbanization

Benefits of sand imports in India

- **Can fight sand shortage in most states:** In 2017-18, a survey of 14 major sand producing states by the Ministry of Mines (MoM) estimated that the demand of sand far outstrips supply in all the states, except Haryana, Uttarakhand and Madhya Pradesh. Imported sand though tends to be costly, is suitable for high deficit areas.
- **Addresses ban imposed by courts and NGT:** Bans by the courts or the National Green Tribunal (NGT) have led to the shortage of sand supply in many states, for instance, last year NGT banned sand mining in parts of Maharashtra and Uttarakhand High Court imposed a four-month state-wide ban on sand mining.
- **Tackling illegal quarrying:** there is rampant illegal mining going on in major river beds because of exploitation of

legal loopholes, poor implementation of laws, absence of robust

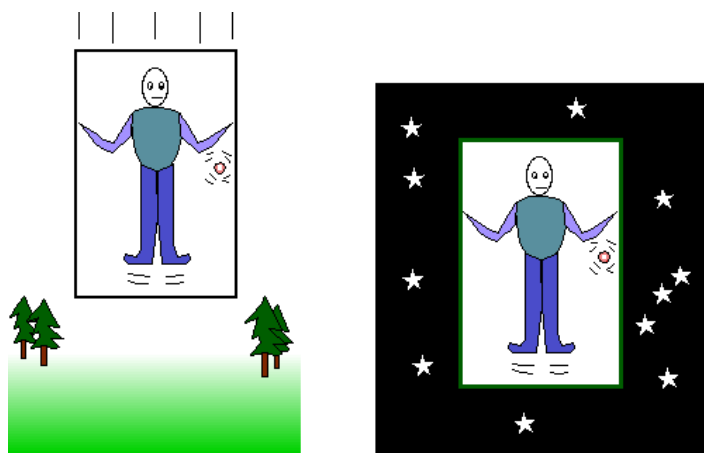
- monitoring mechanisms and nexus between politicians and mafias. The 2017 report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) found that illegal sand mining cost the state exchequer of Uttar Pradesh a massive Rs 477 crore in 2015-16.
- **Can reduce the cost of sand** in long run in the domestic market, hence making affordable housing feasible.
- **Benefits for exporting countries:** Some south-east Asian countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia have ample
- sand available in their country, which if not removed could lead to floods. The sand could be imported to India.

- Sea sand is better, but its salt content result in corrosion of steel in reinforced concrete. River-sand thus become a highly demanded mineral.

Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR) allows states to make rules related to minor minerals, such as building stones, gravel, ordinary clay, ordinary sand and construction sand.

Suggestions and way forward

- **Use of alternative sources** such as construction and Demolition (C&D) wastes and Manufactured Sand (m-sand):
- India generates 25-30 million tonnes of C&D waste every year, but currently processes just 5 per cent of it whereas Singapore recycles 98% using it to meet its construction demand.
- **Extracting Sand from coal overburden and use of Silt from major dams** can also be explored as an alternative.
- As suggested by the Sand mining framework of 2018, there is an urgent need to implement the Sustainable Sand
- **Mining Guidelines of 2016** which among other things had suggested the **use of information technology** to monitor sand mining, creation of **District Survey Reports (DSR)** to estimate sand availability in the mining districts.
- **Desert sand and sea sand not suitable for construction:** In deserts, sand grains are too round because of the heavy winds, making them unable to stick together.

EINSTEIN’S THEORY: EARTH IS A FREE-FALLING ELEVATOR IN SUN’S GRAVITY

Things falling freely in a gravity field all accelerate by the same amount, so they move the same way as if they were in a region of zero gravity — “weightlessness”!

EINSTEIN’S THEORY: EARTH IS A FREE-FALLING ELEVATOR:

- According to Albert Einstein, the earth is a free-falling elevator in Sun’s gravity. He theorised that all objects located in such an elevator would accelerate at the same rate as if they were in a uniform gravitational field or no gravity at all. He also predicted that the properties of these objects relative to each other would remain constant during the elevator’s free-fall.
- In other words, the *general relativity theory* carries the principle of local position invariance (LPI), which holds that in a falling elevator, measures of non-gravitational effects are independent of time and place and the test confirmed the same

- **Context:** Physicists at NIST (National Institute of Standards and Technology) pulled out a 14-year-long experiment to test a key principle underlying Einstein’s famous theory of general relativity – that describes how gravity relates to space and time.

Know about the experiment:

- The test conducted by the NIST physicists is being considered as the most accurate test ever which confirms the ‘earth elevator’ phenomenon. They used the solar system as a laboratory, where they treated Earth as an elevator falling through the Sun’s gravitational field.
- They monitored 12 high-precision atomic clocks spread around the world for 14 years, from 1999 to 2014. The experiment tested whether all parts of the earth would have the same acceleration at the same rate. The clocks remained synchronized for over 14 years, proving the earth elevator theory.

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Resource Efficiency Cell

Context: MoEFCC and TERI have entered a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to set up a resource efficiency cell in the Ministry.

Aims and objectives:

- The main objectives of the Cell are to provide a platform to mainstream resource efficiency in public policy.
- It aims to achieve this through coordinated thinking among the various relevant Ministries and agencies for promoting resource efficiency in the use of materials in the country.
- It also aims to ensure a ‘systems’ thinking based on materials, products and processes, apart from enabling the preparation of an overarching resource efficiency policy for India and coordinated sectoral policies and regulatory mechanisms.

Strategy on Resource Efficiency:

- NITI Aayog in collaboration with the European Union delegation to India have released the Strategy on Resource Efficiency. The strategy aims to promote resource efficiency in India.
- This strategy is the first policy document to emphasize resource productivity in the country. The Strategy emphasizes on Sustainable Public Procurement (SSP) as an action agenda which will be the market transformation tool to transform to a resource efficient economy.
- It is developed with the recommendations from the Indian Resource Efficiency Programme (IREP), launched by the Indian Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and Indian Resource Panel (InRP) in April 2017.

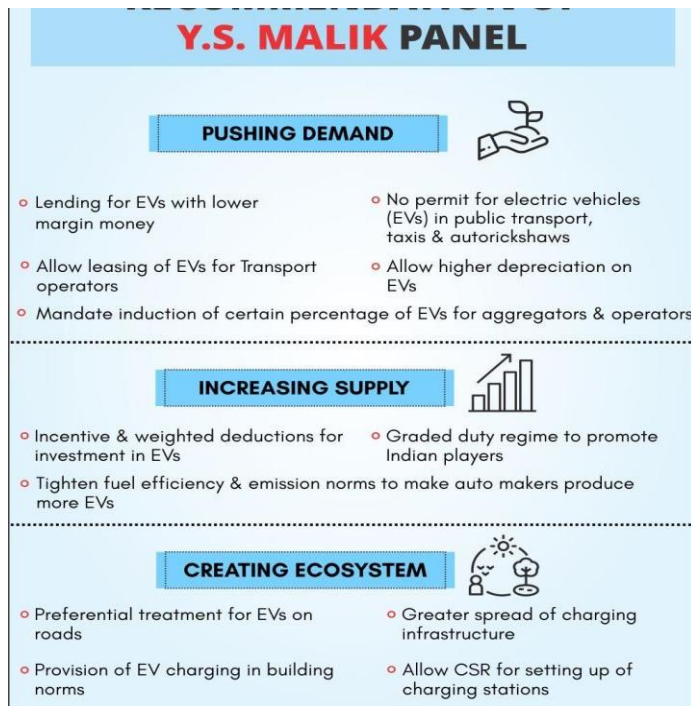
What is Resource Efficiency and why do we need it?

- Resource efficiency very simply put is making more with fewer materials. In practice, through a life-cycle approach, it leads to minimizing impact on environment & the associated societal burdens, transforming ‘waste’ into ‘resources’ fostering circular economy, and strengthening resource security.
- Resource Efficiency and Circular Economy are important goals and central principles for achieving sustainable development. Sustainability is a global priority and SDGs commitment and 11th Five year plan also clearly enunciate importance of Resource efficiency (RE).

Way ahead:

- India’s large population, rapid urbanization and expanding industrial production have led to exploitation of available limited natural resources with concerns regarding resource depletion and future availability becoming more pronounced.
- Ensuring resource security requires and integrated, concerted and collaborative approach in order to fulfill the needs of a vast and growing population.
- Also, the environmental burdens emanating due to resource extraction, utilization and disposal, including land degradation, biodiversity loss, as well as air and water pollution remain of great concern, Enhancing resource efficiency (RE) and promoting the use of secondary raw materials (SRM) is a pertinent strategy to address these challenges and reduce dependence on primary resource.

Electric Vehicles



35% w.r.t. 2005 levels). It will also help to combat increasing air pollution load (PM2.5 & PM10) in Indian Cities as Fossil fuel based transportation is second largest source of carbon dioxide emission.

- Shift towards EVs will help cut oil imports (India has set targets to cut oil imports by 10% by 2022). EVs convert about 59%–62% of the electrical energy to power at the wheels. Conventional gasoline vehicles only convert about 17%–21% of the energy stored in gasoline to power at the wheels.
- Creation of Industries and Infrastructure will create jobs in India both upstream and downstream supply chain.

Challenges

- **Upfront cost of EVs is very high**, about 4-5 times of conventional diesel vehicles. Most critical component which decide EVs cost is Lithium Ion Battery and about 95% of Global Lithium Production comes from China, Chile, Argentina, Australia. India would need to acquire mineral assets/rights in these nations or Make Outside India will have to be explored.
- **Lack of comprehensive policy**: India needs to bring out comprehensive reforms involving all stakeholders for large scale adoption of EVs.
- **Need of robust data reporting system and independent verification tests** to verify compliance with the standards as the entire system depends on self-reporting by the car industry.
- **Lack of research and development**: is a big challenge in up scaling indigenous development. Unlike in other developed countries Indian academic sector is not adequately contributing in developing cutting-edge technologies.
- **Availability of renewable energy**: In

Why in news?

Recently a panel, headed by Road Transport Secretary Y S Malik, has presented a 15 point plan to aid car manufacturers to switch from Internal Combustion Engines (IECs) to Electric Vehicles (EVs).

More on news

- According to panel, the fuel efficiency norms have to be lowered by 20-25 percent over FY 2017-18 data to have approximate induction of 3 to 5% EVs, as against total manufactured vehicles including cars, three-wheeler, and two-wheeler.
- Earlier, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has mandated fuel efficiency norms that require cars to be 30% more fuel efficient by 2022.

Need for electric vehicles

- Use of electric vehicles will help in fulfilling our INDC 2030 goals (cutting CO2 emissions intensity in GDP by 33-

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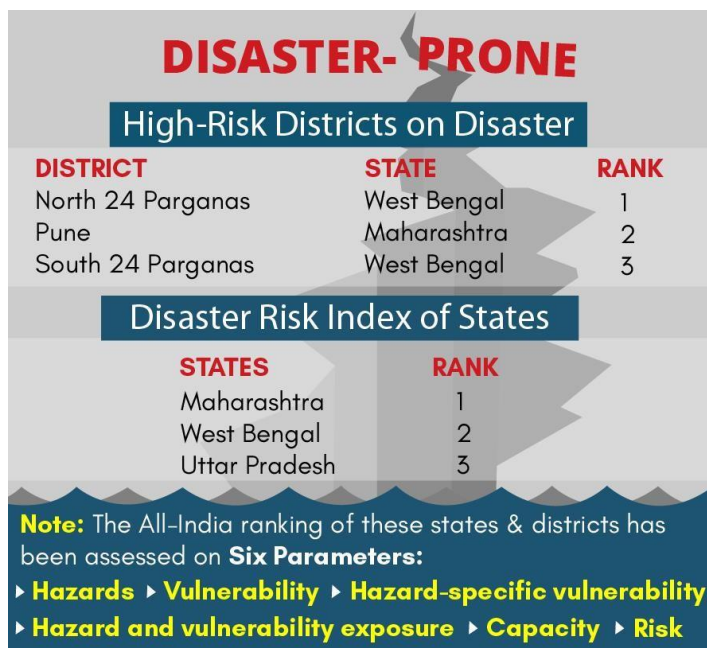
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India, thermal power plants (biggest greenhouse gas emitter) constitute 65-68% of electricity generation, and there is very low share of renewable energy. Hence large scale adoption of EVs could lead to sudden surge in electricity demand which could potentially provoke greater carbon dioxide emissions.

Government steps

- **National Electric Mobility Mission Plan (NEMMP) 2020** with an aim to achieve national fuel security by promoting hybrid and electric vehicles in the country. It set an ambitious target to achieve 6-7 million sales of hybrid and electric vehicles year on year from 2020 onwards.
- **Scheme for Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (Hybrid &) Electric Vehicles in India (FAME)**, as a part of its NEMMP. The scheme has four focus areas: technology development, pilot project, charging infrastructure and demand creation.
- The Union government has decided that from 2030 only electric & hybrid vehicles will be sold.
- The schemes like Make In India & Smart City Mission can be integrated to promote the use of the electric vehicles and achieve such ambitious targets.
- The Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) has called upon industry leaders to make bids to avail its indigenously developed Lithium-Ion Cell Technology.

Electric Vehicles



- natural hazard possibilities due to high vulnerability and low capacity-building.
- It will be used to prepare a composite disaster scorecard (DSC) to have a comprehensive assessment of hazards, vulnerabilities and risks of disasters at different levels, prevention of new risks and mitigation of existing risks, and mainstreaming DRR across different sectors of development.
- The index is in line with India's commitment to the Sendai Framework, where it has to substantially bring down disaster losses in terms of lives and properties.

Why in news?

The Union ministry of home affairs with the support of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have prepared for the first time a **national disaster risk index** for India.

More about the Index

- The disaster risk index would map hazards and vulnerabilities including economic vulnerabilities across 640 districts and all states including UTs.
- The index factors in exposure of population, agriculture and livestock, environmental risk and the steps taken by the administration to mitigate the risks.
- Some states have made significant progress in disaster risk reduction (DRR) by building resilient infrastructure and investing in early warning systems.
- Capacity building by Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Tripura and Himachal Pradesh has lowered their net risk to population and economic losses while States like UP, MP are considered high-risk states despite facing lower

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Environmental Refugee

Why in news?

Recently, World Refugee day was observed on 20th June, 2018, which indicates toward the glaring discrimination being faced by the Environmental Refugee/ Climate Refugee.

Background

- **Definition:** According to **International Organization for Migration**, **Environmental migrants** are persons or groups of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive change in the environment that adversely affects their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad.
- According to **Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre**, every year since 2008, an average of 26.4 million persons around the world have been forcibly displaced by floods, windstorms, earthquakes or droughts.
- **Vulnerable Countries:** Disaster displacement occurs mostly in low and lower-middle income countries, and is expected to increase in the future with the impacts of climate change and more extreme weather.
- According to an **UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR)** report, India has been ranked as the **world's most disaster-prone country** for displacement of residents.

UN Refugee Convention (1951)

- It grants certain rights to people fleeing persecution because of race, religion, nationality, affiliation to a particular social group, or political opinion.
- The rights they are entitled to follow the principles of non-discrimination, non-penalisation, and non-refoulement.
- **Cross-border displaced** who have

migrated due to climate change are not recognised as refugees under the **1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 protocol**, and thus do not qualify for protection under national or international legal frameworks for refugee protection.

Other Challenges faced by migrants

- **Trafficking and forced labour:** Women and children are often an easy target for inhuman treatment.
- **Harassment by police and officials** of states where they have migrated to
- **Exploitation** by local contractors who force them to accept lower wages.
- No access to schools for their children and no health services for the family.
- **Disruption** of cultural and community ties.

ILO right of Migrant

- Freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining,
- Elimination of forced or compulsory labour,
- Abolition of child labour and
- Elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

Issues Faced by Environment Refugee

- **Slow onset events and implications for human rights**
 - o It can negatively impact an array of internationally guaranteed human rights by denying the rights to adequate food, nutrition, livelihood, water, health, and housing.
 - o People especially in vulnerable situations are at the greatest risk of suffering human rights harms as a result of their adverse effects
- **Impact on Cultural Heritage:** The loss of traditional territories land threatens the existence of traditional and cultural

heritage of minority and indigenous groups

- **Impact on Right to work:** Migrant are often abused and discriminated in migrated country during work, which is against International Labour Organization's (ILO) Declaration on the Fundamental Principles and Rights to Work.
- **Cases of Migration Emergencies:** It refers to construction of barriers to entry and practices such as the use of violence, pushbacks, dangerous interceptions, the erection of fences, and administrative sentences that put migrants at risk.
- **Vulnerability of South ASIA:** Region has experienced slow onset changes like desertification, glacial melting, drought, riverbank erosion, sea water intrusion etc.
 - o It is home to 64% of the world's total population that is exposed to floods annually
 - o **India's Vulnerabilities:** India's 6% population, lives 10 metres or less above sea level. Any change in sea level can trigger mass displacement, and other issues like food shortage, salt water intrusion, decline in livelihood, health risk like epidemic, etc.

Way Forward

- **Accepting Principle of non-refoulement:** State must provide human rights protections for all people under its jurisdiction, including migrants in irregular situations.
- **Human rights-based approach:** States must be obligated to respect and protect their commitment through robust implementation of human rights obligations to address the needs and vulnerabilities of those adversely affected by slow onset events.
- **Adopting principle of common but differentiated responsibility (CBDR)** alongwith **polluter pays principle**, and **climate justice approach**, so that most

responsible for climate change should bear the primary responsibility for addressing its impacts.

- **Implementing International convention in soul and spirit** to avoid 2 billion climate refugees by the end of the 21st century.
- **Comprehensive Policy Formulation:** State must frame policy by adopting participatory decision making process in context of climate change to put people at the centre of solutions.
- **Proactive adaptation measures** that incorporate indigenous knowledge which offer agricultural intervention, secure livelihoods and enhance adaptive capacity.
- **According Refugee status to environmental refugees:** People migrating due to environmental disasters should be accorded 'refugee' status in international law for addressing challenges of climate-change induced migration comprehensively.

Nansen Initiative (2012)

- It's a state-led consultative process to build consensus on a protection agenda addressing the needs of people displaced across borders in the context of disasters and the effects of climate change.

Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda for Cross-Border Displaced Persons (2015)

- **Aim:** To enhance understanding, provide a conceptual framework, and identify effective practices for strengthening the protection of cross-border disaster-displaced persons
- **Strategy:** It supports an approach that focuses on the integration of effective practices by States and (sub-) regional organizations into their own normative frameworks in accordance with their specific situations and challenges.
- It identifies effective practices to manage disaster displacement risk in the country

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of origin to prevent displacement by

- reducing vulnerability and building resilience to disaster displacement risk,
- facilitating migration out of hazardous areas before disasters strike,
- conducting planned relocation
- responding to the needs of internally displaced persons

Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD): It was launched in 2016, to implement the recommendations of the **Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda**.

DEAD-ZONE

Why in News?

Scientists have recently predicted that the dead zone in Gulf of Mexico will become larger.

About Dead Zones

- Dead zones (**Hypoxic zones**) are areas of the ocean (**occasionally in lakes and even rivers**) where **oxygen has fallen to such low levels** that most marine life cannot survive.
- Dead zones are **reversible** if their causes are reduced or eliminated.

Causes

- **Rising sea temperatures-**
 - o For each degree of ocean warming, oxygen concentration goes down by 2 percent.
 - o Over the short term, the **higher temperatures slow the rate of ocean circulation**, exacerbating regional oxygen depletion.
 - o It **causes layers of ocean water to stratify** so the more oxygen-rich surface waters are less able to mix with oxygen-poor waters from the deeper ocean.
 - o The higher temperatures are putting more stress on marine species, causing their **metabolisms to speed up** and their **need for oxygen to increase**.
- **Nutrient pollution** from sources such as agriculture and sewage, is responsible for a dramatic rise in “dead zones” in the world’s oceans.

Impacts of Dead Zones

- **Impact on Global Warming-** As Oxygen levels fall, the pace of climate change can accelerate, with low oxygen levels triggering the release of chemicals like nitrous oxide. This greenhouse gas is **300 times more powerful** than carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the

atmosphere.

- **Impact on Corals**-Low oxygen levels of **2 milligrams of oxygen per litre of water or less**, can kill coral reefs.
- **Impact on Human**-Humans also suffer at an economic level as **Chile’s 2016 toxic tides** wiped out 20% of its salmon stock, costing the country \$1 billion in lost sales.

Nitrogen Emission

Why in News?

Recently, Indian Nitrogen Assessment report highlighted the nitrogen emission scenario in Indian Environment.

Highlights of the report

- In India nitrogen emissions grew at 69% from 2001 to 2011 and has **replaced methane** as the second largest Greenhouse Gas (GHG) from Indian agriculture.
- Agricultural soils contributed to over 70% of nitrous oxide (N₂O) emissions, followed by waste water (12%) and residential and commercial activities (6%).
- As fertilizer, nitrogen is one of the main inputs for agriculture, but inefficiencies along the food chain mean about 80% of nitrogen is wasted.
- Annual nitrogen emissions from coal, diesel and other fuel combustion sources are growing at 6.5% a year currently while emission from poultry industry is growing at the rate of 6%.

Facts About Nitrogen

- Nitrogen constitutes 78 percent of Earth's atmosphere and in the form of nitrous oxide (N₂O) it acts as a greenhouse gas (GHG).
- It is used in manufacture of ammonia, fertilizer, nitric acid and also use as refrigerating agent.

Effects of nitrogen pollution

Through the phenomena of **Nitrogen cycle**, it is transferred from soil and water to the atmosphere through **denitrification**. **Denitrification** completes the nitrogen cycle by converting nitrate (NO₃⁻) back to gaseous nitrogen (N₂). Denitrifying bacteria are the agents of this process. These bacteria use nitrate instead of oxygen when obtaining energy,

releasing nitrogen gas to the atmosphere. Excess of Nitrogen in the atmosphere has various impacts-

- **On Economy-** India loses nitrogen worth US \$10 billion per year as fertiliser value (through subsidy).
- **On health-** Its health and climate costs are pegged at US\$ 75 billion per year. It is a major cause of Baby Blue syndrome.
- **On Agricultural Productivity-** Excessive nitrogen in the form of fertilizer **brings down the carbon content** of the soil, result in diminishing returns in terms of crop yield.
- **On Environment:** Excessive eutrophication which turns water body into Dead Zone, substance like nitric acid is a component of acid rain. Further, Nitrogen particles make up the largest fraction of PM_{2.5}, class of pollutants.

Steps taken to control Nitrogen pollution

- **Soil Health Card** provides information to farmers on nutrient status of their soil along with recommendations on appropriate dosage of nutrients for crop.
- **Mandatory neem-coated urea production** to slow down the dissolution of nitrogen into soil, resulting into less nutrient requirement.
- **Bharat Stage Norms** aim to regulate the harmful emission from vehicle. like carbon monoxide (CO), unburnt hydrocarbons (HC), Nitrogen Oxides (NO_x) and Particulate matter (PM).
- **National Air Quality Index (NAQI)** has been implemented in which Nitrogen Dioxide is one of the eight pollutants to be controlled and monitored.

Way forward

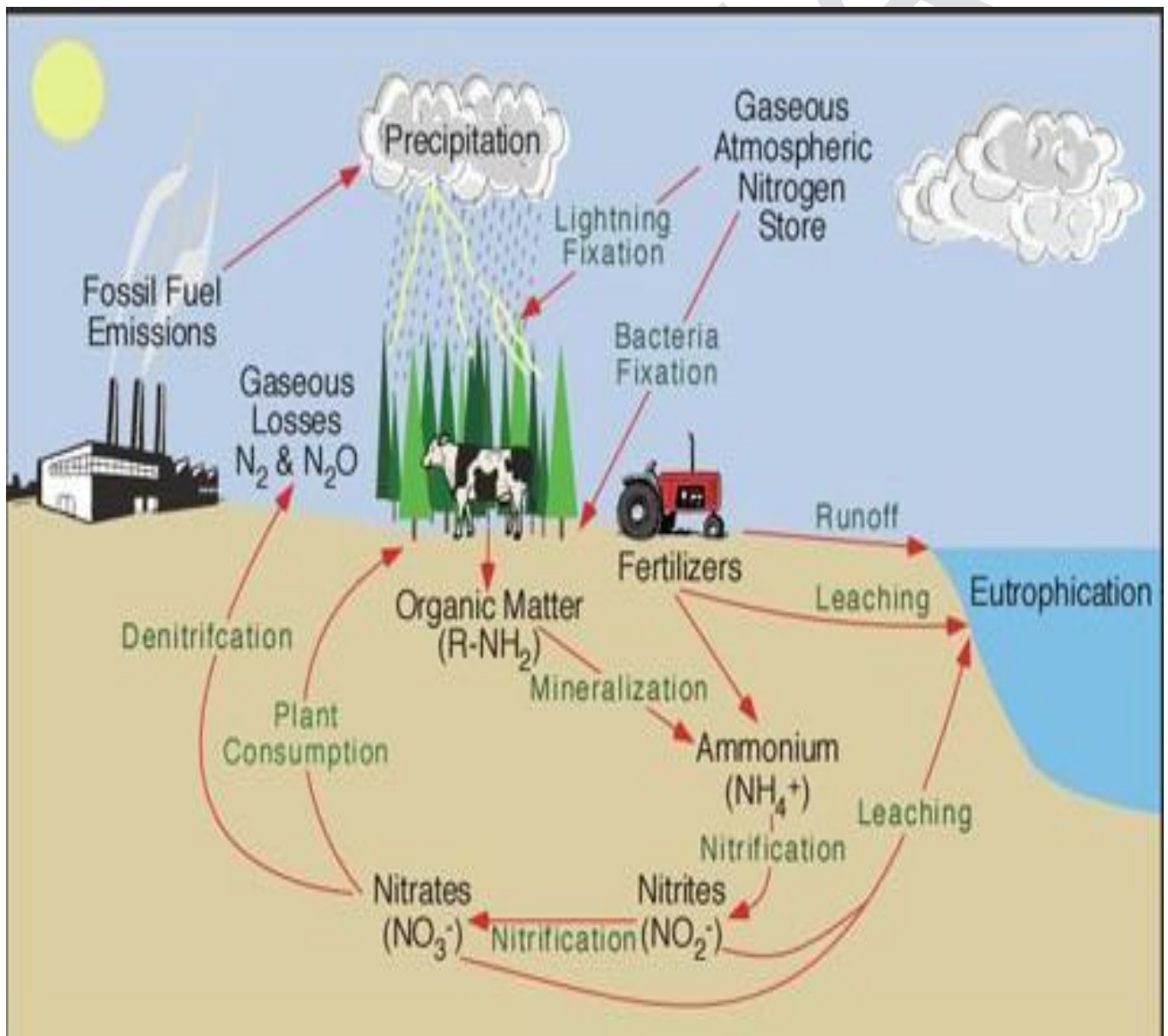
- **Rationalised fertiliser subsidy:** According to the report of the **Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP)**, subsidy on urea

should be reduced, while increasing it on Phosphorus & Potassium to arrest the hugely adverse NPK ratio.

- **Nitrogen Use Efficiency (NUE)** (which indicates the ratio between the amount of fertilizer nitrogen removed from the field by the crop and the amount of fertilizer nitrogen applied) should be increased in order to maintain equilibrium between soil and fertilizer.
- **Recycling of industrial and Sewage waste** for manure could decrease 40% of fertilisers usage in country. It could also lead to production of food more

sustainably and open new economic opportunity in organic manure segment.

- **Efficient Agricultural Practices**-such as precision agriculture (employs modern farming technique to increase food productivity like use of global positioning systems, electromagnetic soil mapping, soil sample collection), planting buffers of tree shrubs (help in absorbing or filtering out nutrients) are needed.



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GANGA PRAHARIS

- **Context:** A group of 427 trained volunteers, called Ganga Praharis, are reaching to each and every house in areas along river Ganga to educate them about the importance of protecting river's bio-diversity. They are spread over Ganga basin states of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar and West Bengal.

About Ganga Praharis:

Who are Ganga Praharis?

- They are new grassroot-level **volunteers** to protect the bio-diversity of river Ganga.
- They are roped-in by Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun as part of the “Biodiversity Conservation and Ganga Rejuvenation” project being sponsored by National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) under the aegis of the Namami Gange programme.

Skills:

- Ganga Praharis are well trained in ecological monitoring of Ganga aqua life, plantation techniques, awareness creation and community mobilization. They are trained through a series of national, state and site level workshops in diverse skills such as ecological surveys, rescue and rehabilitation of aquatic species, awareness meetings, social interactions and green livelihood skills.

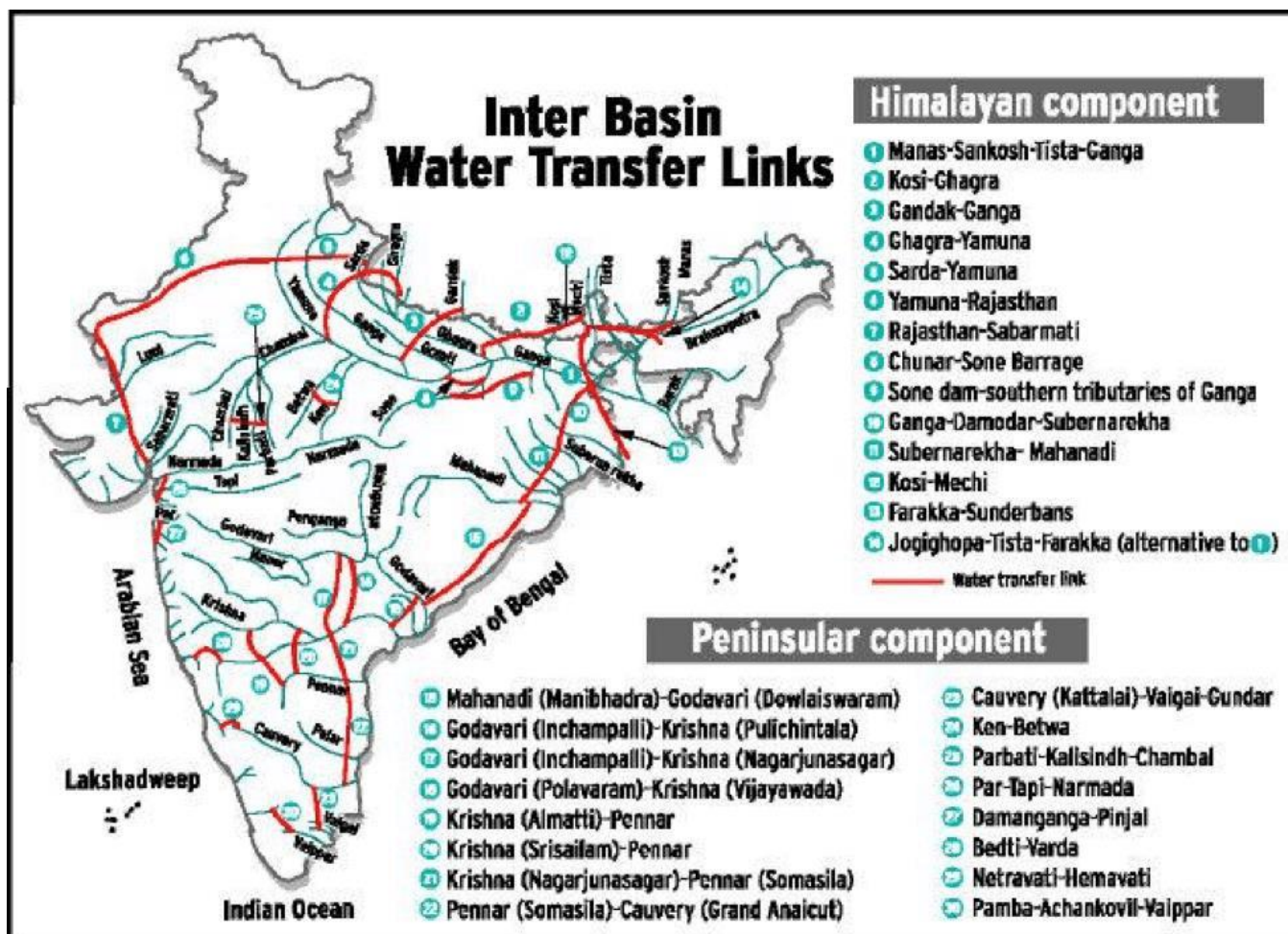
Roles and functions:

- The Ganga Praharis will be linked to various local environmental authorities, non-governmental stakeholders in their respective states and various other national, academic

and research institutions for their capacity development.

- Not only do these Ganga Praharis performing the task of conserving the deteriorating biodiversity of river Ganga, they are also motivating other people to spread the clean Ganga message, thus, contributing in making clean Ganga mission a mass movement.
- The Ganga Praharis will be the role models in inspiring other members of the community to join hands in the efforts for conservation of the biodiversity of river Ganga. Thus, each Prahari shall work on the model of ‘Each One Make Ten’.

Inter-Linking Of Rivers



the year.

- **Boost to agriculture:** The main occupation of rural India is agriculture and if monsoon fails in a year, then agricultural activities come to a standstill and this will aggravate rural poverty. Interlinking of rivers will be a practical solution for this problem, because the water can be stored or water can be transferred from water surplus area to deficit.
- **Disaster mitigation:** The Ganga Basin, Brahmaputra basin sees floods almost every year. In order to avoid this, the water from these areas has to be diverted to other areas where there is scarcity of water. This can be achieved by linking the rivers. There is a two way advantage with this – floods will be controlled and scarcity of water will be reduced.
- **Transportation:** Interlinking of rivers will also have commercial importance on a longer run. This can be used as inland waterways and which helps in faster movement of goods from one place to other.
- **Employment generation:** Interlinking also creates a new occupation for people living in and around these canals and it can be the main areas of fishing in India.

cause a serious threat to the marine life system and will be a major ecological disaster.

- Due to the creation of Canals and Reservoirs, huge amount of area which is occupied by the people will be submerged leading to displacement of people and government will have to spend more to rehabilitate these people.
- The amount required for these projects is so huge that government will have to take loans from the foreign sources which would increase the burden on the government and country will fall in a debt trap.

Concerns associated:

- Interlinking of rivers will cause huge amount of distortion in the existing environment. In order to create canals and reservoirs, there will be mass deforestation. This will have impact on rains and in turn affect the whole cycle of life.
- Usually rivers change their course and direction in about 100 years and if this happens after interlinking, then the project will not be feasible for a longer run.
- Due to interlinking of rivers, there will be decrease in the amount of fresh water entering seas and this will

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Artificial Intelligence For Inclusive Growth

Why in News?

Recently NITI Aayog released a ‘national strategy for artificial intelligence’, to suggest ways to promote adoption of machine learning in key areas of the economy.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- It refers to the ability of machines to perform cognitive tasks like thinking, perceiving, learning, problem solving and decision making.
- It enables computer system to carry out task on their own that otherwise requires human intelligence.

Importance of AI

- AI has the potential to overcome the physical limitations of capital and labour and open up new sources of value and growth.
- AI has the potential to drive growth by enabling:
 - o **Intelligent automation** i.e. ability to automate complex physical world tasks. For e.g.: A recent study found that a Google neural network correctly identified cancerous skin lesions more often than expert dermatologists did.
 - o **Labour and capital augmentation:** enabling humans to focus on parts of their role that add the most value, complementing human capabilities and improving capital efficiency.
 - o **Innovation diffusion** i.e. propelling innovations through the economy.
- **Role in social development and inclusive growth:** access to quality health facilities, addressing location barriers, providing real-time advisory to farmers and help in increasing productivity, building smart and efficient cities and infrastructure to meet the demands of rapidly urbanising population are some of the examples that can be effectively solved through

- AI.

Focus Areas for AI Intervention: NITI Aayog has identified **five focus sectors** that are envisioned to benefit the most from AI in solving societal needs:

- ☐ Healthcare
- ☐ Agriculture
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Smart Cities and Infrastructure
- ☐ Smart Mobility and Transportation

Key Challenges to the Adoption of AI in India

- **Lack of broad based expertise** in research and application of AI: Global AI Talent Report 2018 presents a gloomy picture of India in terms of PhD educated researchers, lack of experts in AI.
- **Absence of collaborative approach** to adoption and application of AI.
- **Lack of Trained professionals:** only around 4% of Indian AI professionals are trained in emerging technologies such as deep learning.
- **Absence of enabling data ecosystems** such as access to intelligent data,
- High resource cost and low awareness for adoption of AI
- **Privacy and security** including a lack of formal regulations around anonymisation of data.

2-Tier Research Architecture proposed by NITI Aayog to address India's AI Aspirations

Centre of Research Excellence (CORE)

It is focused on developing better understanding of existing core research and pushing technology frontiers through **creation of new knowledge**.

International Centers of Transformational AI (ICTAI)

It is entrusted with a mandate of developing and deploying **application-based research**. **Private sector collaboration** is envisioned to be a key aspect of ICTAIs.

(Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) need to be increased.

Application of Artificial Intelligence in the focus sectors



HEALTHCARE

- Early Detection
- Access to quality health Care
- Making Healthcare more affordable
- Training Research



AGRICULTURE

- Enhancing Farmer's Income
- Increasing Farm Productivity
- Reducing the wastage
- Weather forecasting
- Soil health Monitoring and Restoration
- Precision Farming



EDUCATION

- Improved access and quality of Education.



SMART CITIES and INFRASTRUCTURE

- Urban Planning.
- Effective solutions for crowd management.
- Develop resilience against Cyber Attacks.



SMART MOBILITY and TRANSPORTATION

- Smarter and safer modes of transportation.
- Improve traffic and congestion problem.
- Reduce Traffic Deaths.
- Optimizing the Parking

- **Robust Intellectual Property Framework** – is required to ride the AI innovation wave.
- **More funding should be deployed in AI** and incentives should be provided for researchers.
- **Early Adoption of AI**- be it the research in technology infrastructure, the start-up community developing applications and corporations deploying solutions for their business needs, early adoption will be key determinant in ensuring leadership in AI.
- **AIRAWAT (AI Research, Analytics and knowledge Assimilation platform)** to be utilised effectively to support advancement of AI-based developments.

Way Forward

- Achieving the goal of #AIforAll requires **long term and engaged institutional collaboration** between all the stakeholders including the citizens.
- NITI Aayog paper highlights the **potential for India to become an AI 'garage'**, or solutions provider, for 40% of the world.
- **Allocation of Resources in STEM**

Artificial Intelligence For Inclusive Growth

Why in News?

- Recently, Central Electro Chemical Research Institute (CECRI), under Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR) and RAASI Solar Power Pvt Ltd have signed a Memorandum of Agreement for transfer of technology for India's first Lithium Ion (Li-ion) Battery project.

More on News

- Currently, Indian manufacturers source Lithium Ion Battery from China, Japan and South Korea among some other countries.
- India is one of the largest importers and in 2017, it imported nearly 150 Million US Dollar worth Li-Ion batteries.

About lithium Ion Battery

- These are rechargeable batteries having high energy density and commonly used in consumer electronics.
- It uses intercalated lithium compound instead of metallic lithium as its electrode and is able to store 150 watt-hours electricity per kg of battery.
- Rechargeable lithium-ion batteries cycle 5000 times or more compared to just 400-500 cycles in lead acid.

Importance

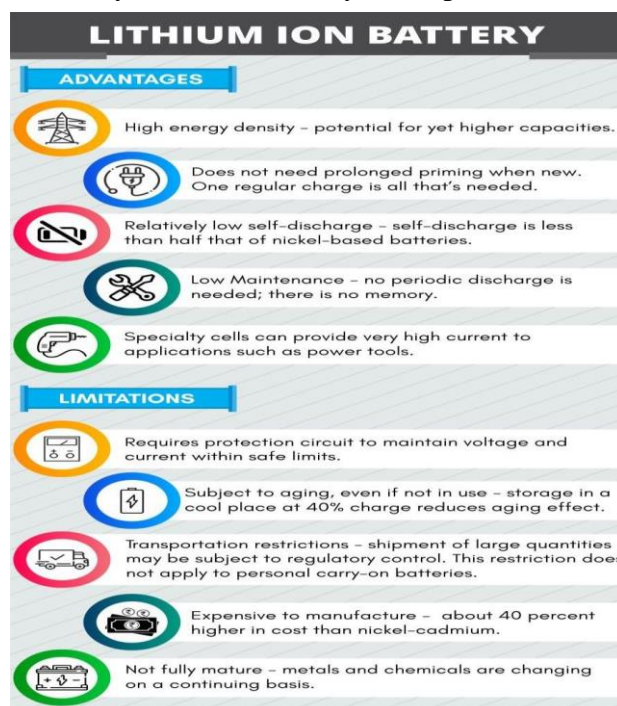
- They have applications in Energy Storage System – from hearing aid to container sized batteries to power a cluster of villages, Electric Vehicles (2-wheeler, 3-wheeler, 4-wheeler and Bus), Powering Robots in Processing Industry, etc. Lithium-ion batteries can power any electrical application without the need of physical wires-means wireless.
- They have a potential to enable cost reduction, coupled with appropriate supply chain and manufacturing technology for mass

production.

- Technology related to Lithium ion battery can assist in National Electric Mobility Mission, make in India and increasing the share of Clean Energy in the energy basket by generating.

About the Graphene Based Supercapacitors

- It is being produced by the waste/discarded lithium ion battery.
- Graphene oxide collected from lithium ion battery showed high specific capacity at low current and it is novel energy storage system that combined high energy and power density.
- The process involves conversion of graphite into graphene oxide by oxidation and subsequent exfoliation which is then further converted into reduced graphene oxide.
- Supercapacitor are now being used explicitly, in wind turbine pitch control, rail, automobile, heavy industry, telecom system and memory backup.



Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccine

Why in news?

WHO recently for the first time recommended the use of quadrivalent influenza vaccine.

97,000 H1N1 cases and over 7,100 deaths in India according to the Integrated Disease Surveillance Project (IDSP) data.

More on news

- **Sanofi Pasteur's injectable influenza vaccine** (FluQuadri) has been recommended for use in the 2018-2019 northern hemisphere influenza season.
- WHO till recently used to recommend trivalent vaccines as they were most produced ones.
- The quadrivalent vaccine will contain four influenza virus strains (two A subtypes and two B subtypes — H1N1 and H3N2, and Victoria and Yamagata respectively).
- While a trivalent influenza vaccine contains both A subtype viruses, it has only one of the B subtype virus, the quadrivalent vaccine offers greater breath of protection as it includes both B subtype viruses.
- The viruses used in the vaccine are killed and this eliminates the possibility of the virus in the vaccine itself causing infection.
- Quadrivalent vaccine was approved for active immunisation of adults of age 18 to 64 years in 2017 by the
- **Drug Controller General of India (DCGI).**

Influenza

- Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses.
- The virus is transmitted easily from person to person via droplets.
- Influenza tends to spread rapidly in seasonal epidemics.
- It is characterized by sudden onset of high fever, aching muscles, headache and severe malaise, non-productive cough and sore throat.
- Since 2011, there have been about

Vaccines

- Vaccines contain antigen (which generates the protective immune response) that may be a weakened or killed form of the disease-causing organism, or fragments of the organism.
- They can be broadly classified as live or inactivated.
- **Live vaccines** are made using 'wild' viruses or bacteria that have been attenuated, or **weakened**, before being included in the vaccine.
 - After immunisation, the weakened vaccine viruses or bacteria replicate (grow) in the vaccinated person. This means a relatively **small dose** of virus or bacteria can be given in order to stimulate an immune response.
 - Live attenuated vaccines do not usually cause disease in vaccine recipients who have a healthy immune system. When a live attenuated vaccine does cause 'disease', e.g. chickenpox vaccine, it is usually more mild than 'wild' disease.
 - Because these vaccines are so similar to the natural infection that they help prevent, they **create a strong and long-lasting immune response**.
- Inactivated vaccines use the killed version of the germ that causes a disease.
 - Inactivated vaccines usually don't provide immunity (protection) that's as strong as live vaccines.
 - Since the vaccine antigens cannot replicate (grow) in the vaccinated person or cause disease, it can be safely given to a person with an impaired immune system response.
 - Inactivated vaccines **usually require**

multiple doses. Some inactivated vaccines may also require periodic supplemental doses to increase, or ‘boost’ protection against disease.

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World Oceans Day- 8 June

- **Context:** World Ocean Day is celebrated every year on June 8th.
- **Action focus for 2018:** preventing plastic pollution and encouraging solutions for a healthy ocean.
- **Background:** The concept of a ‘World Oceans Day’ was first proposed in 1992 at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro as a way to celebrate our world’s shared ocean and our personal connection to the sea, as well as to raise awareness about the crucial role the ocean plays in our lives and the important ways people can help protect it.
- The **UN General Assembly** recognized the important contribution of sustainable development and management of the resources and uses of the oceans and seas to the achievement of international development goals, including those contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, and designated 8 June as World Oceans Day.
- **SDG:** The Ocean Conference was convened to support the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.



WORLD DAY TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION AND DROUGHT: 17 JUNE

- **Context:** The World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought is observed every year to promote public awareness of international efforts to combat desertification. The day is a unique moment to remind everyone that land degradation neutrality is achievable through problem-solving, strong community involvement and co-operation at all levels.
- **2018 Theme:** “Land has true value – invest in it.”

The Gender Action Plan:

- The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) recently created a new plan to support and enhance gender-responsive policy needs.
- The Gender Action Plan (GAP) that will increase and strengthen the participation and leadership of women at all levels of decision-making and local implementation of the UNCCD, including drought management as well as sand and dust storms and land degradation neutrality interventions, with the aim to reach gender parity by 2030.

Desertification and the Sustainable Development Goals:

- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development declares that “we are determined to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations”.
- Specifically, Goal 15 states our resolve to halt and reverse land

degradation.

What is Desertification?

- Desertification is the degradation of land in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas. It is caused primarily by human activities and climatic variations. Desertification does not refer to the expansion of existing deserts.
- It occurs because dryland ecosystems, which cover over one third of the world's land area, are extremely vulnerable to overexploitation and inappropriate land use. Poverty, political instability, deforestation, overgrazing and bad irrigation practices can all undermine the productivity of the land.

Facts for Prelims:

- **The WDCD2018 global observance** will be hosted by the Government of Ecuador. The country promotes sustainable land management as one of the pillars of bio-economy.
- **About UNCCD:** Established in 1994, the United Nations to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management. The Convention addresses specifically the arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, known as the drylands, where some of the most vulnerable ecosystems and peoples can be found.

Plastic Ban In Maharashtra

- **Context:** Maharashtra government recently began enforcing a ban on plastic, a decision it announced in March. The government had given the manufacturers, distributors, and consumers a period of three months to dispose their existing stock and come up with alternatives to plastic usage.

What all plastic products are covered under the ban?

- Under the notification products manufactured from plastic and thermocol have been covered under the ban. As a result usage of plastic bags with a handle and without handle, disposable cups, and plates, spoons, forks, glasses, and containers is prohibited in the state. Plastic packaging used to wrap and store the product is also included in the ban.
- Apart from this plastic straw, non-woven polypropene bags, pouches and any other plastic used to store, package and transfer food items will no longer be permitted in the state. Besides, it has banned the use of plastic and thermocol for decoration purposes.

Plastic items excluded from the ban:

- Plastic used for packaging medicines and drugs.
- Food grade virgin plastic used for packaging milk.
- Compostable packaging bags used for horticulture and agriculture purposes.
- Plastic bags used for exporting goods.
- Plastic used at the manufacturing stage.
- Plastic used for handling of solid waste.

Who will implement and monitor the ban?

- Officials from Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB) and district and local administration have been authorised to implement it. For regulating this law at tourist locations, tourism police, or Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation has been made responsible.
- The government has also formed an association comprising of plastic manufacturers, ministry officials and environmental experts to oversee the implementation of the ban.

Way ahead:

- While environmentalists welcomed the cabinet's decision, the plastic industry has slammed the government calling it “retrograde step.”
- With its huge dependence on plastic and lack of alternatives to the banned products, many also wonder if the plan would be a success.

Facts for Prelims:

- On World Environment Day, June 5, India was the host nation, with the theme for this year being ‘Beat plastic pollution.’

Science-Based Targets

Why in news?

Sixteen Indian companies have recently committed to set science-based targets.

More on news

- The **Science-Based Targets Initiative** Is A Global Team Comprised Of People From All Partner Organisations – The United Nations Global Compact, CDP, WWF And World Resources Institute.
- Targets Adopted By Companies To Reduce Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions Are Considered “Science-Based” If They Are In Line With The Level Of Decarbonization Required To Keep Global Temperature Increase Below 2 Degrees Celsius Compared To Pre- Industrial Temperatures.
- Unique To This Initiative Is The Criterion That Companies Need To Commit To Setting Supply Chain Or ‘Scope 3’

targets.

- o That is, if more than 40 per cent of a company’s emissions occur in its supply chain, then the company has to commit to reducing those emissions as well as its direct emissions.
- In March 2018, Mahindra Sanyo Steel became the first Indian company to set its science-based target. Globally, it is also the first steel company to set a target.
- India has committed to generate at least 40 per cent of its electricity from non-fossil fuel sources and decrease carbon emission intensity of GDP by 33 to 35 per cent by 2030.
- Indian companies and multinationals operating in India will play a big role in achieving this target.

Augmenting Writing Skills For Articulating Research (AWSAR)

Why in news?

Recently, AWSAR was launched to reward PhD scholars and post-doctoral fellows.

About AWSAR

- The scheme has been initiated by **National Council of Science and Technology Communication (NCSTC)**, Department of Science & Technology (DST) to encourage, empower and endow popular science writing through newspapers, magazines, blogs, social media etc. by young PhD scholars and post-doctoral fellows during the course of their higher studies.
- Under the scheme best articles which would be selected would be provided monetary incentives.
- **Significance:**
 - o Increase supply of informed science writing
 - o Encourage the students to write about their work and help them secure the resources tap the potential of young scholars
 - o Inculcate scientific temperament in the masses.
 - o Improve the future science communication and popularize science in India.

Dry Sorbent Injection (DSI)

Why in News?

NTPC is opting for dry Sorbent Injection (DSI) system for controlling sulphur dioxide (SO₂) emissions.

More About the News

- CPCB has asked coal-fired thermal plants to comply with the environmental norms by December 31, 2019 and NTPC's power plant in Dadri is the first in the India to opt for DSI System.

About DSI

- Dry Sorbent Injection (DSI) system is a pollution control system for the reduction of SO_x (SO₂, SO₃), HCl and **heavy metals like mercury**.
- It is a dry process in which a sorbent (a material used to absorb or adsorb liquids or gases) is injected into the coal fired boiler where it interacts with various pollutants like SO_x, HCl and the **resultant dry waste is removed via either an electrostatic precipitator (ESP) or a fabric filter baghouse**.
- It offers various advantages in comparison to traditional acid gas scrubber technology such as: lower capital cost, wide range of favourable operation conditions, and much lesser time for completing installation and commissioning.

Sources of SO₂

- **Anthropogenic**-Burning of fossil fuels such as coal, oil and natural gas.
- **Natural- Volcanic eruptions, hot springs**, it can even be produced by the **reaction of hydrogen sulphide** with the oxygen in the air. (Hydrogen sulphide is released from **marshes and regions in which biological decay** is taking place.)

Artificial Leaf To Reduce Carbon Footprint

Why in news?

Indian Institute of Sciences’ researchers has developed an **artificial leaf** recently.

About Artificial Leaf or Quantum Leaf

- It will help in reducing carbon footprint as it absorbs carbon dioxide in the atmosphere to generate fuel and oxygen in the process, simulating the process of photosynthesis.
- While most plants **convert less than one per cent** of the available solar energy into chemical energy, the leaf can **convert about 20 per cent of the incident solar energy into chemical energy**. Also, it is **100 times more efficient than a natural leaf** in absorbing carbon dioxide during the process.
- It is composed of **completely biocompatible, earth abundant, semiconductor nano crystals** called **Quantum dots** which act as catalyst to convert absorbed **CO₂ into bicarbonate and then ‘formate’** (derivative of formic acid) that can be used as **bio fuel**.
- It uses copper aluminium sulphate and zinc sulphide as semiconductors.
- It can act as a **source of renewable energy**, while **significantly reducing the carbon footprint from the atmosphere, releasing more oxygen in the process**. Hence the development is being viewed as **one of potential solutions in tackling global warming and climate change**.
- The bio fuel generated is not only **100% combustible** but the **carbon dioxide emitted** in the combustion of the fuel can be **recycled by the quantum leaves** too.

- It has a discrete quantized energy spectrum.
- It contains a small finite number of **conduction band electrons, valence band holes, or excitons**.
- They are typically between **10 and 50 nm in size**
- They glow a particular color after being illuminated by light.
- The color they glow depends on the size of the nanoparticle. The smaller the nanoparticle, the higher the energy difference between valence band and conduction band, which results in a deeper blue color. For a larger nanoparticle, the energy difference is lower, which shifts the glow toward red.

Quantum Dot:

- It is a **semiconductor nano crystal** which is made of specific materials.

Plan To Prevent Asteroid Attack

Why in news?

NASA has released a document, titled "National Near-Earth Object Preparedness Strategy and Action Plan".

More on news

- It is a 10-year plan which will enhance NEO Detection, Tracking, and Characterization Capabilities and develop Technologies for NEO Deflection and Disruption Missions.
- It also calls for increased international cooperation to prepare for potential global impact threats.
- It shall work to strengthen U.S. emergency procedures and protocols, familiarizing state and local management personnel with the unusual nature of the threat.
- NASA's catalogue contains over 18000 NEOs with 8000 NEOs as >140m wide, the size at which mass casualties would occur. NASA has documented roughly 96% of the objects large enough to cause a global catastrophe.
- An asteroid or comet collision is a “**low probability but high consequence**” event as larger objects offer the world years of notice about when an orbit would intercept Earth. 40 m is about the average size an object must be to make it through the atmosphere without burning up.
- Double Asteroid Redirection Test (**DART**) mission will be the most prominent demonstration of the kinetic impact technique to change the motion of an asteroid in space. Its primary objective is to demonstrate it on small binary near-Earth asteroid (65803) called Didymos
- NASA is a key member in both the International Asteroid Warning Network (**IAWN**) and the asteroid Space Mission Planning and Advisory Group, endorsed

by the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (**UN-COPUOS**) as the combined response for all space-capable nations to address the NEO impact hazard.

Related terms

- **Comet** is a small, icy object that orbits the sun and has a long "tail" of gas.
- **Asteroids** are rocks whose orbits lie mostly between Jupiter and Mars.
- **Meteors** are streak of light seen when a space rock enters earth's atmosphere and starts burning.
- **Meteorites** are those meteors which don't entirely burn and hence hit the earth.
- **IAWN** was established (2013) to create an international group of organizations involved in detecting, tracking, and characterizing NEOs
- The **UN-COPUOS** was set up by the General Assembly in 1959 to govern the exploration and use of space for the benefit of all humanity: for peace, security and development.

Exoplanet Discovered By India

Why in news?

Recently Indian scientists discovered a sub-Saturn or super-Neptune sized exoplanet.

More about the news

- The discovery was made by measuring the mass of the planet using the indigenously designed PARAS (PRL Advance Radial-velocity Abu-Sky Search) spectrograph integrated with a 1.2m telescope at Gurushikar Observatory in Mount Abu.
- The name of the host star is EPIC 211945201 or K2- 236 and the planet will be known as EPIC 211945201b or K2-236b.
- It put India into a select league of countries which has discovered planets around stars.
- The discovery is of importance for understanding the formation of such super-Neptune or sub-Saturn planets that are closer to the host star.

About Exoplanet

- An exoplanet or extrasolar planet is a planet outside our solar system around a different host star than sun.
- Since 1988 more than 3500 exoplanets have been discovered across 2600 planetary systems.
- Of the 3500, some are ice giants, some are gas giants and some are super Earths.
- Some of the exoplanetary system are Trappist-1 planetary system, kepler-11 planetary system, TrES-4.
- Kepler 90 is the first star system to have as many planets as our solar system.

Spectrograph: It is an instrument that separates light into a frequency spectrum and records the signal using a camera.

India's First Robotic Telescope

Why in news?

Recently, India's first robotic telescope – Global Relay of Observatories Watching Transients Happen (GROWTH)-India, began its operation at the Indian Astronomical Observatory (IAO) in Hanule in Ladakh.

GROWTH-India

- It is a **fully robotic telescope** which has been funded by the Science and Engineering Board (SERB) of the Department of Science and Technology.
- It is a 70cm telescope and the primary objective of the project is the **time domain astronomy**.
- It is mostly an **imaging telescope** and the **spectroscopy** (analysis) will happen at Himalayan Chandra Telescope (HCT).
- It will be **remotely operated** from IIA's Centre for Research and Education in Science and Technology near Bangalore. The facility also houses the control room for remote operations of the Himalayan Chandra Telescope and is the data hub of the telescope.
- The first targets for the telescope were chosen from the **Messier catalogue** (a catalogue of nearby, bright astronomical sources accessible from the northern hemisphere) which allowed various image quality tests.

About GROWTH Initiative

- It is a part of **multi-country collaborative** initiative known as Global Relay Observatories Watching Transients Happen (GROWTH) to observe transient events in the universe.
- The initiative will focus on **three scientific themes** in the field of time-domain astronomy – cosmic explosions (supernova), small near-earth asteroids and the electromagnetic identification of gravitational wave sources.
- It is a fully robotic optical research telescope which has been designed to

capture cosmic events occurring in timescales much shorter than light years like years, days and even hours.

- United States of America, United Kingdom, Japan, Germany, India, Taiwan and Israel are part of the initiatives.

What are transient events?

- These are short lived burst of energy in a system caused by a sudden change of state.
- The events are caused due to several factors such as relatively benign flares of stars, accretion of matter on compact objects, stellar merger and explosions.
- All these result in a flash in the sky for a period and then slowly fade away.
- Through these electromagnetic signatures, astronomers try to gain an insight into the cosmic objects as well as physical processes that govern their evolution.

What is Time Domain Astronomy?

It is the study of how astronomical objects change with time. Changes may be due to movement or physical changes in the object itself. Examples include pulsar variability, and the variability of accreting black holes, variable stars, and the Sun.

Himalayan Chandra Telescope

- It is a 2-m Telescope at IAO, Hanule, Ladakh.
- It is remotely operated using dedicated satellite communication link from the Centre of Research & Education in Science and Technology.

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ROBINSECTS

Why in News?

Scientist has developed robots for pollination; called as Robinsects or Nova- Crafters, based on the concept of ‘Biomimetics’.

More on News

Colony collapse disorder and decreasing number of pollinators such as insects, birds, wasps etc. are threatening world food security, and biodiversity.

About the Robinsects

- Robinsects/Nova-Crafters are GPS and Artificial Intelligence enabled small robotics hovers/drones which are programmed to carry out the pollination.
- Algorithms are being developed to help the robot locate flowers, and its robotic arm, topped with a set of soft brush tips—designed to act like a bee’s hairs—will gently reach out to each flower and pollinate it.

Biomimetics: Biomimetics, also known as bionics, biognosis, or biomimicry, is the use and implementation of concepts and principles from nature to creating new materials, devices and systems.

Colony collapse disorder- It is the phenomenon that occurs when the majority of worker bees in a colony disappear and leave behind a queen, plenty of food and a few nurse bees to care for the remaining immature bees and the queen.

Reason for decreasing pollinators- Inappropriate use of herbicide, pesticides, spreading of non-native species and disease, electromagnetic radiation from mobile tower and climate change.

GS - IV

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Artificial Intelligence

What is artificial intelligence?

Artificial intelligence (AI) is an area of computer science that emphasizes the creation of intelligent machines that work and react like humans. The research in AI has focused chiefly on the components of intelligence which includes learning, reasoning, problem solving, perception, speech recognition and using language. Systems that use artificial intelligence technologies are becoming increasingly autonomous in terms of the complexity of the tasks they can perform, their potential impact on the world and the diminishing ability of humans to understand, predict and control their functioning. Since, they can learn from their own experiences and can perform actions beyond the scope of those intended by their creator, they add a dimension of ethics to it.

Ethical Issues involved in AI

- **Transparency:** When AI is involved in cognitive works with social dimensions, such as decision of an AI enabled car during an accident (resolving famous **Trolley Problem of ethics**), it is important that the AI algorithm developed for it is transparent.
- **Biasedness:** The algorithms used in artificial intelligence are discrete and, in most cases, trade secrets. They can be biased, for example, in the process of self-learning, they can absorb and adopt the stereotypes that exist in society or which are transferred to them by developers and make decisions based on them.
- **Predictability:** The algorithms taking over social functions must be predictable to those they govern. The local, specific behavior of the AI may not be predictable apart from its safety, even if the programmers do everything right.
- **Accountability:** If an AI system fails at its assigned task, who should be made responsible for it?
- **Safety Issues:** AI machines can use their intelligence in specific domains for which they are designed. They might not work in a situation which has never been envisioned. This can create safety issues for others.
- **Maneuverability:** The AI algorithms can be manipulated by people who want to take advantage e.g. criminals willing to carry a gun in airplane can find a loophole in machine vision system and can exploit the flaws in it compromising lives of all other.
- **Moral Status:** Currently AI systems have not been given any moral status. Therefore, they can be copied, deleted, changed or terminated as the programmers are pleased. But, future AI systems can have both **sentience** and **sapience**. Discriminating them will tantamount to racism.
- **Lack of consciousness:** There is possibility that a future AI system is sapient but does not have sentience or consciousness in it. In that case should they have a moral status like other sentient beings.
- **Super-intelligence:** A sufficiently intelligent AI system can redesign itself or can create a better successor system and so on leading to intelligence explosion. Whether this super-intelligence will be good or evil to human kind will depend upon its technological capabilities and ethicality. Though the probability of creating technologically advanced being is high, how can one create an AI system which when executes becomes more ethical than the original programmer?

Way-forward for AI

- Although current AI systems offer few ethical issues, they need to be more predictable and transparent when social

roles are involved.

feel pain and suffer.

- The French strategy can be adopted which proposes to develop transparent algorithms that can be tested and verified, determining the ethical responsibility of those working in artificial intelligence, creating an ethics advisory committee, etc.
- Resolutions can be brought to regulate Robotics, and code of ethical conducts can be brought for Robotic engineers, as well as Research ethics committees.
- Four ethical principles can be followed in Robotics Engineering such as:
- **Beneficence:** robots should act in the best interests of humans
 - **Non-maleficence:** robots should not harm humans
 - **Autonomy:** human interaction with robots should be voluntary, and
 - **Justice:** the benefits of robotics should be distributed fairly

Conclusion

- AI systems should be made legally liable for their actions through making their programmers and users accountable. But, this may hamper innovation. Therefore, a balanced approach is needed and for that we must know what goals we are pursuing in the development of artificial intelligence and how effective will it be.

Trolley Problem

This is a well-known thought experiment in ethics which raises a number of important ethical issues related to AI. It says that if a runaway trolley is going down the railway lines and five people are tied to the track ahead. You are in front of a lever which can switch the trolley to a different set of track. However, there is another person tied to that track. will you pull the lever or not?

Sapience: a set of capacities associated with higher intelligence, such as self-awareness and being a reason-responsive agent.

Sentience: the capacity for phenomenal experience or qualia, such as the capacity to

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‘Mission Shaurya’

- **Context:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently met a group of ten tribal students from Maharashtra who were a part of a team of the ‘Mission Shaurya’ initiative of the Adivasi Vikas Vibhag of the Maharashtra State Government.

What is it?

Under Mission Shaurya expedition, 10 tribal students from “ashram shalas” (residential schools) in Chandrapur district of Maharashtra conquered Everest.

It was a joint initiative of the state Tribal department and Chandrapur Collectorate to scale Everest.

POLICE MEDALS FOR SPECIAL OPERATIONS

- Union Home Ministry has instituted ‘Home Minister’s Special Operation Medals’ to honour officers of state police, central paramilitary forces and other security organisations engaged in special operations.
- **The three medals are** — Antarik Suraksha Medal, Asadharan Aashuchan Padak and Utkrisht & Ati-Utkrisht Seva Medal.
- While the Home Minister’s Special Operation Medal and Asadharan Aashuchan Padak will be awarded on August 15, Antarik Suraksha Medal and Utkrisht & Ati-Utkrisht Seva Medal will be announced on Republic Day.

SAMPARK PORTAL

What is it? It is a digital platform to connect five lakh job seekers with recruiters. It will be useful in creating a skill pool of workers and connecting trained youth with job opportunities.

UDYAM SANGAM-2018

What is it? Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME) launched Udyam Sangam- 2018 on June 27, 2018 to celebrate the 2nd United Nations Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Day. It is an important effort in developing effective eco-systems for MSME sector.

‘CHIPKO’ MOVEMENT IN DELHI

Context: To save about 16,500 fully grown trees from being chopped down in the city, locals and social organisations have come together to hold a campaign on the lines of ‘Chipko’ movement for tree protection in Delhi.

WORLD FOOD PRIZE 2018

- **Context:** Dr. Lawrence Haddad and Dr. David Nabarro will receive the 2018 World Food Prize for their individual and complementary global leadership in elevating maternal and child undernutrition.

World Food Prize:

- The World Food Prize is considered one of the most prominent global awards for individuals whose breakthrough achievements alleviate hunger and promote global food security.
- It carries \$250,000 cash prize. The Prize is presented each October on or around UN World Food Day (October 16).
- Norman E. Borlaug, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970 for his work in global agriculture, envisioned a prize that would honor those who have made significant and measurable contributions to improving the world's food supply.

DORNOGOVI PROVINCE

- **Why in news?** Mongolia has launched construction of its first strategically important oil refinery funded by India in southern Dornogovi province.
- The strategically important oil refinery will make Mongolia independent from energy imports and stabilise fuel and commodity prices in its domestic markets.

BHARAT 22 EXCHANGE TRADED FUND (ETF)

governance, finance, banking,

- **Context:** The government has announced the first Further Fund Offer (FFO) of Bharat 22 Exchange Traded Fund (ETF). This is in pursuance of its disinvestment policy targeting an initial amount of Rs.6,000 crore.

BHARAT 22:

- Bharat 22 consists of 22 stocks of CPSE's, PSB's & strategic holding of SUUTI. Bharat 22 is a well Diversified portfolio with 6 sectors (Basic Materials, Energy, Finance, FMCG, Industrials & Utilities).
- The Bharat 22 Index will be rebalanced annually. ICICI Prudential AMC will be the ETF Manager and Asia Index Private Limited (JV BSE and S& P Global) will be the Index Provider.

SKOCH AWARD

- **Context:** Ministry of Women & Child Development has received the 'Best Performing Social Sector Ministry' SKOCH Award for its Achievements and Initiatives.

technology, corporate citizenship, economics and inclusive growth.

Skoch Consultancy Services is a think tank dealing with socio-economic issues with a focus on inclusive growth.

Key facts:

- The Skoch Awards celebrate human excellence and agents of change in Indian society. They are the highest independently instituted civilian honours in India.
- Only end-user departments and domain ministries may apply including State undertakings.
- The Skoch Awards have become the only independent benchmark of best practices in India in the fields of

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CANADA BECOMES SECOND NATION IN THE WORLD TO LEGALIZE MARIJUANA

- Canada has become the second nation in the world the first G7 nation to legalize marijuana.
- Uruguay was the first country to legalize marijuana's production, sale and consumption in December 2013.

GUJARAT GETS WORLD'S 1ST CENTRE FOR HUMANITARIAN FORENSICS

- International Centre for Humanitarian Forensics (ICHF) was recently inaugurated at the Gujarat Forensic Sciences University (GFSU).

Key facts:

- This will be the world's first international centre for humanitarian forensics.
- It is a joint venture of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Regional Delegation for India, Bhutan, Nepal and the Maldives, and GFSU.
- It was inaugurated at the Gujarat Forensic Sciences University (GFSU).
- This centre will help in proper management of bodies in times of crisis.
- **Gujarat Forensic Sciences University (GFSU)** is a state university in Gandhinagar, Gujarat. It is the first university in the world solely dedicated to forensic and investigative science.

4TH INTERNATIONAL YOGA DAY 2018

- The International Yoga Day is celebrated every year on June 21. It was first introduced by the United Nations on June 21, 2015. The main aim is to create an awareness worldwide on the importance of staying fit and healthy.
- *This year, the theme* is ‘Yoga for peace’.
- *Why was June 21 selected to be International Yoga Day?* June 21 is the longest day of the year in the Northern Hemisphere and has special significance in many parts of the world. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had proposed this date at the United Nations General Assembly 2014.

100TH SMART CITY

- Shillong, the capital city of Meghalaya has been selected as 100th Smart City after evaluating the proposal submitted by it.
- So far, 99 smart cities have been selected in four rounds of competition and with Shillong, selection of 100 cities has been completed under the Smart Cities Mission.

CHRYSTALLA VOLUPES



What is it? It is a spider belonging to the family of jumping spiders (Salticidae).

Why in news? Scientists recently rediscovered this species, which was believed have become extinct, from Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WWS) located in the Western Ghats region of Kerala. It was previously discovered in Periyar Lake in Gujarat in 1868. But subsequently it had vanished.

INSTITUTIONS IN NEWS- DRI

- The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence is the apex anti-smuggling agency of India, working *under the Central Board of Indirect Taxes & Customs, Ministry of Finance*, Government of India.
- It is tasked with detecting and curbing smuggling of contraband, including drug trafficking and illicit international trade in wildlife and environmentally sensitive items, as well as combating commercial frauds related to international trade and evasion of Customs duty.

INSTITUTIONS IN NEWS- DRI



Key facts:

- World's tallest girder railway bridge is being built in the North East as part of the upcoming 111-kilometres long Jiribam-Tupul-Imphal railway line.
- Bridge No.164 is being built across the valley of river Ijai near Noney and has been designed to take a maximum train speed of 120 kmph.
- The Jiribam–Tupul–Imphal railway line cuts across the lower Himalayan ranges necessitating series of tunnels through the hills and tall bridges across the deep valleys. The line will connect Manipur's state capital Imphal to Jiribam which is on the western-most boundary of the state. Jiribam is an area that adjoins the Cachar district of Assam. As of now Manipur's capital Imphal has no railway connectivity.
- It is located in Seismic Zone-V, making it highly vulnerable to earthquakes.

YEAR OF DISABLED SOLDIERS

- **WHAT is it?** To honour soldiers who have been disabled in line of duty, while serving the Nation and to celebrate the undying spirit of ‘Soldiering’, Indian Army is observing the year 2018 as the ‘**Year of Disabled Soldiers in Line of Duty**’.
- **WHY?** The primary focus is towards alleviating the sufferings of these soldiers, who have done their duty with utmost dedication to the Nation and have been disabled for the life.
- **HOW?** The endeavour this year is to provide a **onetime financial assistance to disabled soldiers** who have been boarded out from service on medical grounds and are rendered non-employable due to their medical or physical conditions.

MT DEOTIBBA

Why in News? An all women Naval mountaineering team recently summited Mount Deotibba.

About Mt Deotibba: Mt Deotibba is the second highest peak (6001M) in the Pir-Panjal range in Himachal Pradesh.

APACHE HELICOPTERS



Context: The US has approved a deal to sell six AH-64E Apache helicopters to India for \$930 million as well as Hellfire and Stinger missiles to bolster the country’s ability to defend its homeland and deter “regional threats”.

About Apache helicopters:

- The AH-64 Apache is a multi-role combat helicopter and is used by the US Army and a number of international defence forces.
- It is equipped with all-weather and night- fighting features apart from an advanced weapons system.
- The Apache has advanced laser, infrared, and target acquisition designation, including other systems, to locate, track and attack targets.
- It also has stealth characteristics, advanced sensors and beyond-visual-range missiles.

HURRICANE BUD

Context: Hurricane Bud is expected to hit the Pacific coast of Mexico.

“WATER PRODUCTIVITY MAPPING OF MAJOR INDIAN CROPS”

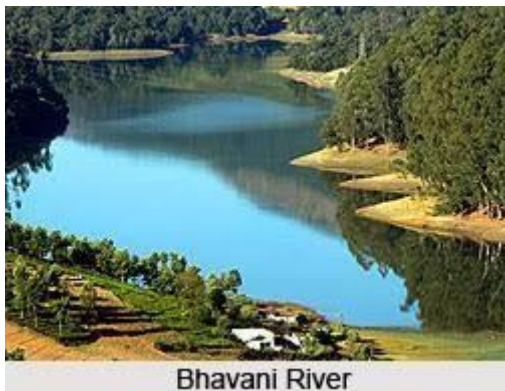
- **What is it?** It is a book published by NABARD.
- The book is based on study of 10 important crops. The ten important crops include rice, wheat, maize, pulses, oilseeds, sugarcane, cotton and potato etc.
- The book suggests to realign cropping pattern keeping in view water scarcity of irrigation, ration irrigation supplies in canal irrigation system, improve micro-irrigation and invest in water harvesting and artificial recharge and encourage participatory irrigation management through water user association and farmer’s producer organisation.

WORLD DAY AGAINST CHILD LABOUR – 12 JUNE 2018

- The International Labour Organization (ILO) launched the World Day Against Child Labour in 2002 to focus attention on the global extent of child labour and the action and efforts needed to eliminate it.
- **Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals** calls on the global community to: “Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.”

Theme this year: “Generation Safe & Healthy”.

RIVER BHAVANI



Bhavani River

Why in News? Flood alert has been sounded to people living along River Bhavani banks in Mettupalayam taluk, Tamil Nadu.

About Bhavani river:

- Bhavani River, is a tributary of the River Cauvery originating from the South West Corner of the Nilgiri hills of the Western Ghats in Tamil Nadu. It drains Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka.
- It is the second longest river in Tamil Nadu. It enters Kerala through Palakkad district. It passes through the Silent Valley National Park in Kerala.
- Twelve major rivulets including West and East Varagar rivers join Bhavani draining the southern Nilgiri slopes.

RAIL MADAD

- **What is it?** It is a recently launched App by Indian Railways which aims to expedite & streamline passenger grievance redressal. It is a part of RPGRAMS (Railway Passenger Grievance Redressal and Management System), which has been developed by Northern Railway (Delhi Division).

Salient features of Rail Madad application are:

- Rail MADAD (Mobile Application for Desired Assistance During travel) registers a complaint with minimum inputs from passenger (option of photo also available), issues unique ID instantly and relays the complaint online to relevant field officials for immediate action. The action taken on complaint is also relayed to passenger through SMS, thus fast tracking the entire process of redressal of complaints through digitisation.
- Rail MADAD also displays various helpline numbers (e.g., Security, Child helpline etc) and provides direct calling facility for immediate assistance in one easy step.

DEOCHA-PACHAMI COAL BLOCK

- **Context:** The Centre has handed over the Deocha-Pachami coal mines to the West Bengal government.

Facts:

- It is said to be second largest coal block in the world.
- The coal block is located in Birbhum district in West Bengal.
- Power to auction non- coal mines: As per the new mining law — the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2015 — which came into effect from January 2015, the non-coal mines have to be auctioned by the respective state governments.

TRIPURA’S “STATE FRUIT”



President Ram Nath Kovind has declared Tripura’s queen variety pineapple as “state fruit”.

MAKA TROPHY

round best performance in sports at Inter-University, National and International competitions.



Context: With a view to rationalize and simplify the selection of top performing university in sports for award of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (MAKA) Trophy, the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports has approved the revised guidelines for MAKATrophy.

- Under the revised guidelines, the applications from the universities, which were hitherto used to be invited and scrutinized by the Association of Indian Universities (AIU), will now be invited and scrutinised by the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports/Sports Authority of India.
- **Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (MAKA) Trophy:** Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Trophy was instituted in 1956- 57 as a running trophy by the Ministry of Education, Govt. of India. This running trophy is awarded by the President of India each year to a University which has all

KALESHWARAM PROJECT AND UPPER PRAVARA (NILWANDE-II) PROJECT

- **Context:** Ministry of Water Resources has accepted two major irrigation projects from states.
- The Kaleshwaram Project of Telangana: It involves diversion of Godavari water for irrigation and drinking water purposes.
- The Upper Pravara (Nilwande-II) Project of Maharashtra: It involves diversion water for irrigation and drinking water purposes.

CHANGI BASE

- **Context:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently visited the Changi Naval Base in Singapore.
- **About Changi naval base:** Changi Naval Base (CNB) is the latest naval facility of the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN) and was built to replace Brani Naval Base.

OP NISTAR

- **What is it?** It is an evacuation of Stranded Indians from Socotra, Yemen.
- **What happened?** 38 Indian nationals were stranded on the Yemeni island of Socotra in the aftermath of cyclone Mekenu.

HUMSAFAR EXPRESS

Context: Indian Railways has introduced a new Humsafar Jodhpur Bandra express.

Humsafar express: Humsafar would be fully air-conditioned third AC service with an optional service for meals. Humsafar Express coaches have mobile charging points and reading lights for each passenger along with easy upper berth climbing arrangement. The coaches also have facilities such as baby nappy changing pads and tea/coffee-makers, among other features.

FINANCIAL LITERACY WEEK

- **What is it?** To emphasize the importance of financial literacy, **RBI** is observing Financial Literacy Week in the month of June.
- **Focus:** It will focus on creating awareness among customers of banks about financial products and services, good financial practices and going digital.
- **Theme:** Consumer protection.