

Easy to PICK – “UPSC Monthly Magazine” May-2018

MAY

2018

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Swachh Survekshan 2018

Context:

The Swachh Survekshan 2018 results have been announced. It was organized by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), under the aegis of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban), assessed 4203 Urban Local Bodies. Compared to the previous surveys, this year's exercise allocated substantial weightage to the feedback from citizens based on their daily experience.

The on-field survey for Swachh Survekshan was conducted by an independent agency and the data for ranking of the cities collected from 3 sources:

- **Service Level Progress:** To verify whether systems and processes are in place in Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) to implement Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban) in the most efficient way.
- **Direct Observation:** To verify and assess general cleanliness in the cities by making random field visits in different parts of the city and public conveniences (Community/Public Toilets).
- **Citizens Feedback:** To collect feedback directly from citizens and monitor the performance of Swachhata App, a citizens grievance Mobile App.

Performance of various cities:

- Indore has emerged as the cleanest city, followed by Bhopal and Chandigarh. Indore was the cleanest city last year as well.
- Jharkhand has been adjudged as the best performing state, followed by Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh.
- Cleanest State Capital/UT: Greater Mumbai.
- India's 'Cleanest big City': Vijaywada (Andhra Pradesh).
- India's 'Fastest Mover' big City: Ghaziabad (Uttar Pradesh).

- India's Best City in 'Citizens Feedback': Kota (Rajasthan).
- India's Best City in 'Innovation & Best Practices': Nagpur (Maharashtra).
- India's Best City in 'Solid Waste Management': Navi Mumbai (Maharashtra).
- India's Cleanest Medium City: Mysuru (Karnataka).
- India's 'Fastest Mover' Medium City: Bhiwandi (Maharashtra).
- India's Best City in 'Citizens Feedback': Parbhani (Maharashtra).
- India's Best City in 'Innovation & Best Practices': Aligarh (Uttar Pradesh).
- India's Best City in 'Solid Waste Management': Mangalore (Karnataka).
- India's Cleanest Small City: New Delhi Municipal Council.
- India's 'Fastest Mover' Small City: Bhusawal (Maharashtra).
- India's Best City in 'Citizens Feedback': Giridih (Jharkhand).
- India's Best City in 'Innovation & Best Practices': Ambikapur (Jharkhand).
- India's Best City in 'Solid Waste Management': Tirupati (Andhra Pradesh).

Previous surveys:

- In 2016, Swachh Survekshan was conducted in 73 cities having a population of one million or more and capital city of States/ UTs and Mysore had bagged the award of being the cleanest city of India.

In 2017, the scope of Swachh Survekshan was enlarged to cover 434 cities having a population of one lakh or more and Capital city of states/ UTs and Indore was awarded as cleanest city of India.

Madhya Pradesh Gets India's First Smart Cities Control Centre

Context:

- In a major step towards realising the centre's smart city mission (SCM), the Madhya Pradesh government on Tuesday launched the country's first Integrated Control and Command Centre (ICCC) for all seven smart cities of the state in Bhopal.

About the ICCC:

- ICCC is a cloud-based Universal Internet of Things (UIoT) platform developed by Hewlett Packard Enterprise (HPE). It can run multiple city command centre operations through its multi-efficiency capabilities.
- ICCC would integrate a multitude of citizens' services applications and sensors running across selected cities of Madhya Pradesh. It would enable the authorities to monitor the status of various smart civic amenities in real-time through the sensors connected to it.
- The GPS sensors installed in public transport buses, dial 100 vehicles, 108 ambulance services, smart poles, smart lights, traffic management cameras, public bike sharing, solid waste management, meteorological department updates, smart maps etc. would be linked to this centre, enabling the authorities to monitor the status of the civic amenities in real-time.

Facts for Prelims:

- Bhopal, Indore, Ujjain, Gwalior, Jabalpur, Satna, and Sagar are the seven smart cities under Smart City Mission in Madhya Pradesh.

About Smart City mission- Key facts:

Under the scheme that was launched in 2014,

around 100 cities in the country will be developed.

- Selection of cities:** The selection is based on the scores cities get for carrying out urban reforms in areas including sanitation and governance. Cities that score the highest will be picked for the project, to be implemented over a 10-year period.
- Development:** These cities will be developed to have basic infrastructure through assured water and power supply, sanitation and solid waste management, efficient urban mobility and public transport, IT connectivity, e-governance and citizen participation. Bottom-up approach has been the key planning principle under Smart City Mission.
- Funding:** Under the scheme, each city will get Rs 500 crore from the Centre for implementing various projects. An equal amount, on matching basis, will have to be contributed by the state or urban local bodies. The mission will provide central funding of Rs 48,000 crore to the selected cities.
- Implementation:** The implementation of the Mission at the City level will be done by a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) created for the purpose. The SPV will plan, appraise, approve, release funds, implement, manage, operate, monitor and evaluate the Smart City development projects. Each smart city will have a SPV which will be headed by a full time CEO and have nominees of Central Government, State Government and ULB on its Board.

Tholu Bommalata

Why in news?

Tholu Bommalata', the shadow puppet theatre tradition of Andhra Pradesh, has been declining.

More about the Tholu Bommalatam

- It literally means "the dance of leather puppets" (tholu – leather and bommalata – puppet dance).
- The puppets are large in size and have jointed waist, shoulders, elbows and knees.
- The puppets are mostly made of skin of antelope, spotted deer and goat. Auspicious characters are made of antelope skin and deer skin.
- They are coloured on both sides. Hence, these puppets throw coloured shadows on the screen.

Puppeteers narrate stories from the twin-epics of Ramanayana and Mahabharata with animated movement of arms and hands to give a three-dimensional effect.

Other shadow puppets

- Ravanachhaya, Odisha
- Chamadyache Bahulya, Maharashtra
- Togalu Gombeyaata, Karnataka
- Tolpava Kuthu Vellalchetti, Kerala

Irish abortion referendum



Context:

- In its recent referendum, Ireland voted decisively to repeal one of the world's more restrictive abortion bans, sweeping aside generations of conservative patriarchy and dealing the latest in a series of stinging rebukes to the Roman Catholic Church. The vote repeals the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution.

What is the eighth amendment?

- The eighth amendment is a clause inserted into the Irish constitution after a referendum in 1983. It recognises an equal right to life for both mother and unborn child, effectively prohibiting abortion in almost all cases.

Why was it introduced?

- Abortion had been illegal in Ireland since the Offences Against the Person Act of 1861. But with reform under

way around Europe and many countries opting to permit abortions on request until 12 weeks or more, anti-abortion campaigners in Ireland sought the greater security of a constitutional amendment.

What does the law say now?

- Two further referendums were held in 1992, resulting in the 13th amendment, which allows women to travel in and out of Ireland to have an abortion (pro-repeal campaigners say 170,000 have done so), and the 14th, which authorises information about abortion services overseas. In 2013, the law was changed to permit abortions when doctors feel a woman's life may be at risk from pregnancy complications or suicide. Otherwise, a doctor unlawfully performing an abortion faces prosecution and up to 14 years in jail.

Way ahead:

Repeal of the 8th amendment would allow the government to legislate on abortion. The proposed legislation will bring Ireland into line with the majority of European countries, allowing for abortion on request up to the 12th week of pregnancy (subject to medical regulation). After 12 weeks abortion would only be available in cases of fatal foetal anomaly, if the pregnant woman's life was at risk or if her health was at risk of serious harm. Cases after 12 weeks would have to be approved by two doctors.

Women Safety Division in MHA

Context:

- MHA has created a new Division to address issues of women safety comprehensively.

About the Women Safety Division:

- The division, headed by a joint secretary level officer, would deal with all aspects of women's safety in coordination with the relevant ministries, departments and state governments.
- Besides dealing with crimes against women, the new division will deal with crimes against SCs and STs, crimes against children and elderly persons, the anti-trafficking cell, matters relating to prison legislation and prison reforms, all schemes under the Nirbhaya fund, Crime and Criminal Tracking and Network System and the National Crime Records Bureau.
- In order to address offences against women, particularly rape, in a time-bound manner, the division would focus to enhance capacity of the existing administrative, investigative, prosecution and judicial machinery, along with appropriate measures for rehabilitation of victims and bringing attitudinal changes in society.

Sadharan Brahmo Samaj

Why in News?

Recently, governing bodies of eight colleges of **Sadharan Brahmo Samaj (SBS)**, has been dissolved by the West Bengal government.

- moral and spiritual experiences.
- It is involved in various educational, social, medical and other welfare activities.

More on News

- The government stated that SBS is not a “**separate minority religion**”, the related colleges administered by it should be treated as “non-minority Government-aided Colleges.

About Sadharna Bhramo Samaj (SBS)

- It is a general community of worshipers of one God, formed in May 1878, trace back its roots to **The Brahmo Samaj**.
- It was formed by the followers of Keshav Chandra Sen (Brahmo Samaj India) after he violated the Brahmo Marriage Act by marrying his 13 year old daughter with Maharaja of Cooch-Bihar.
- Anandamohan Bose was its first President.
- In 1891, it opened the **Das Ashram**, a welfare institution of untouchables, and the Brahmo Girls School of Calcutta, and also founded small hospitals, orphanages, a leper asylum.
- Its basic **principles** are-
 - o It believes in the existence and personality of God,
 - o It believes in the immortality of the human soul.
 - o It does not **believe in** any **particular book** or collections of books as the one infallible revelation of divine truth, love, and final authority.
 - o It does not believe in **specific incarnation** the Deity.
 - o **It accepts, respects, and uses of** scriptures of the world, (not as infallible) as ancient records of the

Adopt A Heritage

Why in news?

Recently, the Red Fort has been leased out to Dalmia group.

More about such lease

- The monument has been adopted under 'Adopt a Heritage' Scheme of **Ministry of Tourism**, wherein a company utilises its **CSR** to develop and upkeep the monument.
- The **legal status of the monument does not change** after adoption.
- The company does not collect any money from the public unless allowed by the government, and profits, if any, are used to maintain and upgrade tourism facilities.

Arguments for involving private enterprises

- The ASI is responsible for the upkeep of these monuments. However, it faces various issues like lack of funds and expertise, inability in policing entry and warding off encroachers, etc.
- **Outsourcing** is already being done to restore monuments e.g. The Agha Khan and the Dorabji Tata Trusts were recently involved in the restoration of the Humayun's Tomb.
- Corporates frequently sponsor the development and upkeep of **sites across the world**, especially in Europe e.g. in restoration of the Colosseum, Trevi Fountain, management in Angkorvat Temple, etc.
- Along with the government, corporates can be allowed to take some responsibility with proper **monitoring and safeguards**.

Arguments against their involvement

- The heritage of a country is national. It should be available to everybody and should not represent the agenda or interests of a private company.

- Many of the sites advertised for adoption are religious or of religious importance, pushing them further into the consumption-ruled private market can be seen questionable.

Adopt A Heritage: Apni Dharohar Apni Pehchan

- It is a **joint initiative** of Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Culture, ASI and State/UT Governments.
- It aims to involve **public sector companies, private sector companies and corporate citizens/individuals** to take up the responsibility for making heritage and tourism more sustainable through development, operation and maintenance of world-class tourist infrastructure and amenities at the Indian heritage sites.
- The program **outlines concrete responsibilities** for the private companies, such as creating new infrastructure, new amenities and new levels of cleanliness, maintaining the existing operations, making the monument more popular, and taking better care of tourists.
- The firm will, among others, have a responsibility to better advertise the site but will also be able to advertise itself through the site.
- The companies are selected through **Vision Bidding** (i.e. company with best vision for the heritage site gets the opportunity), and are called **Monument Mitras**.
- The Project envisages **limited 'access'** to non-core areas and **'no handing over of monuments'** are involved.

Protocol Under WHO Framework Convention On Tobacco

Why in News?

Cabinet has given approval for India to accede to the Protocol under **WHO Framework convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC)** to eliminate unlawful trade in tobacco products.

confidentiality, training, technical assistance and cooperation in scientific and technical and technological matters.

Background

- The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) is the **first international public health treaty** negotiated under the auspices of the WHO.
- The **objective of this Convention** and its protocols is to **protect present and future generations** from the devastating health, social, environmental and economic consequences of tobacco consumption and exposure to tobacco smoke.
- India is a party to WHO FCTC.

Details of the Protocol

- One of the key **tobacco supply reduction strategies** contained in Article 15 of WHO FCTC envisages **elimination of all forms of illicit trade and tobacco products**, including smuggling, illicit manufacturing and counterfeiting through-
 - **Supply chain control measures** to be adopted by the parties viz. licensing of manufacture of tobacco products and machinery for manufacturing of tobacco products, due diligence to be kept by those engaged in production, tracking and tracing regime, record keeping, security, etc.
- The protocol **lists out offences**, enforcement measures such as **seizures and disposal** of seized products.
- It calls for **international cooperation in information sharing**, maintaining

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Women Entrepreneurship Platform

Context:

- NITI Aayog and actor Sushant Singh Rajput have decided to collaborate towards promoting the Women Entrepreneurship Platform launched by the NITI Aayog.

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.

As an enabling platform, WEP is built on three pillars- Iccha Shakti, Gyaan Shakti & Karma Shakti where:

- Iccha Shakti represents motivating aspiring entrepreneurs to start their business.
- Gyaan Shakti represents providing knowledge and ecosystem support to women entrepreneurs to help them foster entrepreneurship.
- Karma Shakti represents providing hands-on support to entrepreneurs in setting-up and scaling up businesses.

Background:

- According to Mastercard Index of

Women Entrepreneurs, India scored an overall 41.7 points, ranking 49 among 54 economies globally with comparatively low in Women Business Ownership percentages.

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.

INSV Tarini

Context:

- INSV Tarini has completed a historic global Circumnavigation. **This is the first-ever Indian circumnavigation of the globe by an all-women crew.**

Significance:

- The expedition titled ‘**Navika Sagar Parikrama**’ is in consonance with the National policy to empower women to attain their full potential. It has showcased ‘**Nari Shakti**’ on the world platform and helped change societal attitudes and mindset towards women in India by raising visibility of their participation in challenging environs.

About the Journey:

- During her **254 day long voyage**, the vessel has covered over 22,000 Nautical miles, visiting five countries – Australia, New Zealand, Falkland Islands (UK), South Africa and Mauritius.
- During the course of her voyage, the **vessel has met all criteria of circumnavigation**, viz. crossing the Equator twice, crossing all Longitudes, as also the three great capes (Cape Leeuwin, Cape Horn and Cape of Good Hope).
- The expedition was covered in six legs, with halts at 5 ports: Fremantle (Australia), Lyttleton (New Zealand), Port Stanley (Falklands), Cape Town (South Africa) and Port Louis (Mauritius).

recently in February 2017.

- It has Raymarine navigation suite and an array of satellite communication systems for perfect navigation anywhere in the world. It showcases the ‘Make in India’ initiative on the International forum.



INSV Tarini:

- INSV Tarini is a 56 foot sailing vessel built in India by M/s Aquarius Shipyard Pvt Ltd, Goa. It was inducted into the Indian Navy

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71st Assembly Of WHO

Why in news?

The World Health Organization’s 71st World Health Assembly was recently held.

programme budget.

- It is held annually in Geneva, Switzerland.

Highlights of the assembly

- The meet’s primary focus this year is **universal health coverage**
- It has developed a new strategic plan for the next five years to help the world achieve the Sustainable Development Goals – with a particular focus on SDG3- ensuring healthy lives and promoting wellbeing for all at all ages by 2030.
- It sets three targets to ensure that by 2023-
 - o 1 billion more people benefit from universal health coverage;
 - o 1 billion more people are better protected from health emergencies; and
 - o 1 billion more people enjoy better health and wellbeing.
- WHO estimates that achieving this “triple billion” target could save 29 million lives.
- Digital health resolution initiated by India was adopted as its first resolution on digital health.
- The Assembly also adopted a resolution to help countries tackle snake bites.

World Health Assembly

- It is the **decision-making body** of WHO, attended by delegations from all WHO Member States and focuses on a specific health agenda prepared by the Executive Board.
- The **main functions** of the World Health Assembly are to determine the policies of the Organization, appoint the Director-General, supervise financial policies, and review and approve the proposed

Bharosa

Context:

- Aimed at empowering vulnerable and marginalised women by imparting skills training, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will soon set up a skill development centre at ‘Bharosa,’ an integrated support centre for distressed women and children in Hyderabad.

Bharosa:

- ‘Bharosa,’ an initiative of Hyderabad City Police, is a state-of-the-art centre to support women and children who are victims of violence. Since its inception in 2016, a total of 3,560 victims have approached ‘Bharosa’ centre with a range of problems.
- ‘Bharosa’ provides under one roof, 24X7 services related to police, medical, legal, prosecution, psycho-therapeutic counselling and relief and rehabilitation services in completely private counselling rooms to maintain confidentiality and privacy.
- The centre is equipped with well-trained staff and modern gadgets, including facilities like video conferencing, so that the victims need not go to the court.

Development Report.

Important functions:

- It provides expert advice, training and grants support to developing countries, with increasing emphasis on assistance to the least developed countries. It promotes technical and investment cooperation among nations.
- To accomplish the SDGs and encourage global development, UNDP focuses on poverty reduction, HIV/AIDS, democratic governance, energy and environment, social development, and crisis prevention and recovery.

About UNDP:

- Headquartered in New York City, UNDP advocates for change and connects countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life.
- The status of UNDP is that of an executive board within the United Nations General Assembly.
- The UNDP Administrator is the third highest-ranking official of the United Nations after the United Nations Secretary-General and Deputy Secretary-General.
- The UNDP Human Development Report Office also publishes an annual Human

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Domestic Violence Act applies after divorce too

Context:

- The Supreme Court has upheld a ruling that the Domestic Violence Act, intended to safeguard women against marital abuse, will apply even after divorce. The court observed that the act extends to all man-woman relationships, and also protects divorced women from their former husbands.
- The apex court has upheld Rajasthan High Court's interpretation that 'domestic relationship' is not confined to the "relationship as husband and wife or a relationship in the nature of marriage, but it includes other relationship as well such as sisters, mother, etc."

should not be shackled by confining only for the protection of women living in marriage.

What is Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005?

- It is an act to provide for more effective protection of the rights of Women guaranteed under the Constitution who are victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.
- Domestic Violence Act 2005 is the first significant attempt in India to recognise domestic abuse as a punishable offence, to extend its provisions to those in live-in relationships, and to provide for emergency relief for the victims, in addition to legal recourse. It extends to the whole of India except the State Jammu & Kashmir.
- It aims to protect women from physical, sexual, verbal, emotional and economic abuse at home.

Way ahead:

- Domestic violence can continue even after divorce and the reach of the Act

Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY)

Why in news?

Union Cabinet has approved the continuation of PMSSY beyond 12th Five Year Plan to 2019-20.

About PMMSY

- It is a **Central Sector Scheme** under Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and was announced in 2003, with two components:
 - o Setting up of AIIMS-like institutions; and
 - o Up-gradation of existing State Government Medical College (GMCs)
- It aims **to correct the imbalances in the availability of affordable tertiary healthcare facilities** in different parts of the country in general, and augmenting facilities for **quality medical education** in the under-served States in particular.

One Stop Centres (OSCs)

Context:

- 100 additional One Stop Centres have been approved by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in the States of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Nagaland, Odisha, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.

About One Stop Centres (OSCs):

- Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), has formulated a Centrally Sponsored Scheme for setting up One Stop Centres (OSC), to be ***funded from the Nirbhaya Fund***. The scheme is being implemented through States/UTs from 1st April 2015.
- These Centres will be established across the country to provide integrated support and assistance under one roof to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces in a phased manner.
- The purpose of these OSCs is to facilitate integrated services for women affected with violence such as police assistance, medical aid, psycho-social counselling, legal aid/counselling, temporary stay for 5 days etc. such that aggrieved women can avail services under one roof and The OSCs are established in existing buildings and in new constructed buildings in a standard format.

Supreme Court asks high courts to fast-track trial under POCSO Act

Context:

The Supreme Court has issued a slew of directions to all high courts of the country regarding trial in sexual assault cases involving children.

Guidelines:

- All high courts must ensure that the cases of sexual assault of children are fast-tracked and decided by special courts.
- High courts should instruct the trial courts not to grant unnecessary adjournments during trial of cases under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.
- High courts may constitute a committee of three judges to regulate and monitor the trials of sexual assault cases of children.
- The State police chiefs should constitute special task forces to investigate cases.

Background:

- Nearly 32% of cases filed under the POCSO Act, which deals with sexual abuse of minors, were pending police investigation at the end of 2016 while 89% were pending trials.

POCSO Act:

- The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO Act) 2012 was formulated in order to effectively address sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children.
- **Role of police:** The Act casts the police in the role of child protectors during the investigative process. Thus, the police personnel receiving a report of sexual abuse of a child are given the responsibility of making urgent arrangements for the care and protection of the child, such as obtaining emergency medical

treatment for the child and placing the child in a shelter home, and bringing the matter in front of the CWC, should the need arise.

- **Safeguards:** The Act further makes provisions for avoiding the re-victimisation of the child at the hands of the judicial system. It provides for special courts that conduct the trial in-camera and without revealing the identity of the child, in a manner that is as child-friendly as possible. Hence, the child may have a parent or other trusted person present at the time of testifying and can call for assistance from an interpreter, special educator, or other professional while giving evidence. Above all, the Act stipulates that a case of child sexual abuse must be disposed of within one year from the date the offence is reported.
- **Mandatory reporting:** The Act also provides for mandatory reporting of sexual offences. This casts a legal duty upon a person who has knowledge that a child has been sexually abused to report the offence; if he fails to do so, he may be punished with six months' imprisonment and/ or a fine.
- **Definitions:** The Act defines a child as any person below eighteen years of age. It defines different forms of sexual abuse, including penetrative and non-penetrative assault, as well as sexual harassment and pornography. It deems a sexual assault to be “aggravated” under certain circumstances, such as when the abused child is mentally ill or when the abuse is committed by a person in a position of trust or authority like a family member, police officer, teacher, or doctor.

Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandan Yojana (PMVVY)

Why in news?

Investment Limit for Senior Citizens has been doubled under Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandan Yojana (PMVVY). The time limit for subscription has also been increased from May 4, 2018 to March 31, 2020.

About PMVVY

- It has been **launched by Ministry of Finance** to provide an assured pension based on a guaranteed **rate of return of 8% to 8.3% per annum** for ten years, with an option to opt for pension on a monthly / quarterly / half yearly and annual basis.
- It will enable to provide a **larger social security cover to the Senior citizens** (aged 60 years and above) and enable upto Rs.10,000 Pension per month for them.
- The investment limit (purchase price) was kept between Rs 1.5 lakh and 7.5 Lakh (now 15 Lakh) per family. A **loan facility** is also available after completion of 3 policy years. The maximum loan that can be granted shall be 75% of the Purchase Price.
- The deposits made in the scheme are exempt from income tax. However, the interest earned on the deposit is not exempt from income tax.
- The scheme is implemented by LIC, and GoI compensates LIC through subsidy if return generated is less than the guaranteed return.

Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram (PMJVK)

Why in news?

The **Multi-sectoral Development Programme (MsDP)** under Ministry of Minority Affairs has been restructured and renamed as **Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram (PMJVK)**.

PMJVK or Restructured MsDP:

- The criteria for identification of Minority Concentration Towns (MCTs) and Cluster of Villages has been rationalised and is based on 2011 census:
 - Earlier only those Towns which were found backward in terms of both in **Basic Amenities and Socio-economic parameters** were taken up as MCTs. Now, the Towns which were found backward in **either or both** of the criteria have been taken up as MCT.
 - Now the population criteria for selection of cluster of villages has been **lowered to 25% population** of minority community (which was earlier at least 50%).
- **Funding of the scheme** would be from budgetary provision of the Ministry of Minority Affairs. The recurring/maintenance expenses will be borne by the State Government/UTs/Organization.
 - **80%** would be earmarked for projects related to **education, health and skill development**.
 - **33 to 40%** would be specifically allocated for

women centric projects.

- The PMJVK would now cover **five more States/UTs** namely Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Nagaland, Goa and Pondicherry (total 32 States/UTs).
 - Minority Concentration Areas of 61 districts out of 115 Aspirational districts have been covered under PMJVK.

- Unit area of implementation has been further broadened by including **Minority Concentration Districts Headquarters** in addition to the minority concentration Blocks, Minority Concentration Towns and cluster of minority concentration villages.

- The area to be covered under PMJVK would be **57% more** (308 districts) as compared to the existing MsDP (196 districts).
- **Monitoring Mechanism:**
 - An online module along with **geo-tagging** has been included.

MsDP

- It has been identified as one of the **Core of the Core Schemes** under National Development Agenda of NITI Aayog.
- The programme was launched in the year 2008-09 in 90 identified Minority Concentration Districts (MCDs) having at least 25% minority population.
 - It was designed to address the developmental gaps/deficits in identified backward minority concentration areas by **topping up of existing Centrally Sponsored Schemes** of various Central ministries/departments without any change in the norms, guidelines and the funding pattern.
 - The projects considered are additional class rooms, laboratories, school buildings, hostels, toilets, buildings for Polytechnics, ITIs, Community Health Centres, Primary Health Centres / Sub-centres, Anganwadi Centres, Rural Housing etc.
 - It also provides for taking up innovative projects which are not covered by any of the existing CSS of various ministries and these are funded in the ratio of 60:40 (90:10 for NE and Hilly States) between the Centre and States.

Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav-2018

Context:

- To celebrate the idea of unity in diversity, the Ministry of Culture is organising the the Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav in Tehri, Uttarakhand. *The paired state for Uttarakhand under the Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat matrix is Karnataka*, and while troupes from all over the country will be performing, special emphasis is being given to Karnataka.

Facts for Prelims:

- The Ministry of Culture is organising the event under the Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat matrix.
- Tehri Lake Festival where one can explore the water sports, organized by the Uttarakhand Tourism every year, will be subsumed within the Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav.

Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat:

- The Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat programme was launched by the Prime Minister on 31st October, 2016 to promote engagement amongst the people of different states/UTs so as to enhance mutual understanding and bonding between people of diverse cultures, thereby securing stronger unity and integrity of India.

About RSM:

- Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav** was conceived by the **Ministry of Culture** in the year 2015, when the Ministry decided to organize it with an intent to showcase the rich cultural heritage of the Country in all its rich and varied dimensions, viz Handicrafts, Cuisine, Painting, Sculpture, Photography, Documentation and Performing Arts- Folk, Tribal, Classical and Contemporary- all in one place.

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Lalit Kala Akademi

Context:

- President Ram Nath Kovind has appointed Mumbai-based sculptor Uttam Pacharne the chairman of Lalit Kala Akademi.

Lalit Kala Akademi:

- The Lalit Kala Akademi or National Academy of Art is India's National Academy of Fine Arts.
- It is an autonomous organization, established at New Delhi in 1954 to promote and propagate understanding of Indian art, both within and outside the country.
- It does so through providing scholarships, a fellow program, and sponsoring and organizing numerous exhibitions in India and overseas.

Nathu La

Context:

- Nathu La pass has been reopened for the annual Kailash Mansarovar Yatra.

Background:

- China had shut down the Nathu La pass in Sikkim and denied entry to the Kailash Mansarovar (located in Tibet) pilgrims last year due to the standoff in Doklam between troops of India and China at the border on account of security reasons.

Kailash Mansarovar Yatra:

- Kailash Mansarovar Yatra (KMY) is known for its religious importance, cultural significance and arduous nature.
- The annual pilgrimage holds religious importance for Hindus, Jains and Buddhists.
- The Yatra is organized by the government of India in close cooperation with the Government of the People's Republic of China. State Governments of Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Delhi, and Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam Limited (KMVN) are other major Indian partners of the Ministry in organizing the Yatra.

Facts for Prelims:

- Mansarovar Lake** is located at an altitude of 14,950 ft (4,558 m) is said to be the highest freshwater lake in the world. It is located in the Tibet Autonomous Region, China, 940 kilometres from Lhasa. To the west of it is Lake Rakshastal and to the north is Mount Kailash.
- Nathu La** is a mountain pass in the Himalayas. It connects the Indian state of Sikkim with China's Tibet Autonomous Region. It is also one of

the four officially agreed BPM (Border Personnel Meeting) points between the Indian Army and People's Liberation Army of China for regular consultations and interactions between the two armies, which helps in defusing stand-offs.

- There are five BPM points** along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) at Bum La and Kibithu in Arunachal Pradesh, Daulat Beg Oldi and Chushul in Ladakh, and Nathu La in Sikkim.

Burden Of Stunting In India

Why in news?

Recently, a research ‘Understanding the geographical burden of stunting in India’ was published by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).

More about the research

- The paper has tried to understand the geographical burden of stunting across districts, using data from the National Family Health Survey 4 (2015-2016).
- In India, 38.4% (63 million) of children under five are stunted. It accounts for about a third of the world’s total population of stunted preschoolers.
- Stunting prevalence varies considerably across districts ranging from 12.4% to 65.1%. 239 of the 640 districts have stunting levels above 40%.
- High-stunting districts are heavily clustered in the northern and central states of India. They are home to 80% of the stunted children in India. In comparison, all the southern states put together account for about 13% of the stunted children in India.

Steps taken by Government

- **National Nutrition Mission** with a target to bring down stunting in children from 38.4% to 25% by 2022.
- **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme:** ICDS covers the nutrition needs of children of 6 months -6 years age, pregnant and lactating mothers.
- **Nutrition Rehabilitation Centres (NRCs):** special units for the treatment of children with severe acute malnutrition.
- **Other health and nutrition related schemes:** Food security act, National Health Mission, Mid-Day Meal scheme, and Pradhan Mantri Surakhit Matritva Yojana.

Conclusion

Government needs to meet constitutional obligation under **Article 47** which states that it is the “duty of the State to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living and to improve public health”. The steps towards nutrition would also help in achievement of SDG goal 2 – “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition”.

Following steps can be taken by government:

- **Systematic data collection** as lack of disaggregated stunting data at the district level has been a challenge for policy and programme strategies in a decentralized governance system.
- **Institutional mechanism:** A **food and nutrition commission** should be established, headed by the Prime Minister.
- **Fortified foods:** It can be incorporated into a mid-day meal, public distribution shops and anganwadi centres. Micronutrients should be adequately emphasised. Therapeutic feeding can be undertaken for children with severe acute malnutrition.
- **Collaboration with civil society:** NGOs should be promoted to educate women about family planning and child nourishment.
- **Change in approach towards malnutrition:** There is need to go beyond the current focus on health and nutrition and target social inequalities. Very high-stunting districts could eliminate 71% of the gap with low-stunting districts if they are able to improve on specific issues of gender and inequality.

International Food Policy Research Institute

- It was established in 1975 to provide research- based policy solutions that

sustainably reduce poverty and end hunger and malnutrition

- It is a research center of CGIAR (Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research), a worldwide partnership engaged in agricultural research for development.
- Its releases **Global Food Policy Report** annually.

Child Stunting

- It is defined as low height for age among children less than five-year-old.

Underlying causes behind various determinants of stunting

- **Poverty:** It hinders the accessibility of adequate food.
- **Lack of Awareness:** about nutritional needs of infants and young children.
- **Social strains on Women:** Early marriages of girls leads to teenage pregnancies resulting in low birth weight of the new- borns, poor breastfeeding practices and poor complementary feeding practices.
- **Male domination:** In most Indian families, women even take food after the male members where they get less nutritious food.
- **Lack of health infrastructure** leads to poor access to health.
- **Lack of availability of safe drinking water** hinders proper digestion and assimilation of food and also cause water and food borne diseases.
- **Poor sanitation and environmental conditions** leads to spread of many diseases that sap children's energy and stunts their growth.
- **Other causes:** illiteracy in women and large household size. These factors also explain differences in stunting prevalence between low and high burden districts

Women Safety In India

Why in news?

- Recently, Ministry of Home Affairs has created a new division to address issues related to women safety in comprehensive manner in coordination with relevant Ministries/ Departments and State Governments.

Women safety in India

- Women safety involves various dimensions such as Sexual harassment at workplace, rape, marital rape, dowry, acid attack etc.
- The United Nation's 'Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces' programme, which started in 2010, recognized that cities all around the world were becoming unsafe for women.
- The latest NCRB data for the year 2016 shows that
 - Overall crimes against women have risen by just about 3%, whereas incidents of rape have gone up by 12%.
 - Majority of cases categorized as crimes against women were reported under 'Cruelty by husband or his relatives' (32.6%). This draws a bleak picture of women safety in private places or home.

Challenges in addressing women safety

- Lack of reporting:** It is seen as a major roadblock for creating a safe atmosphere for women.
- Slow criminal justice system:** The investigation and disposal of cases take long time thereby encourage offenders.
- Inadequate implementation:** Many employers are yet to establish Internal complaints committee which is a clear violation of law.
- Poor gender sensitization** of law enforcing agencies like police, judiciary etc.

- Various social factors** like level of education/illiteracy, poverty, myriad social customs and values, religious beliefs, mindset of the society etc. also pose a challenge.
- Frivolous complaints:** This is seen mostly in context of domestic violence act.
- Exclusion by Technology:** Technology though helpful to enhance public safety in certain ways, but **its scope is limited so far as they exclude women without access to smartphones.**
- Hinders women development:** For example- Sexual harassment at workplace is one of the most important causes of low labour force participation rate of women in India. Male dominated nature of India's public sphere is being recognized but not challenged.

Some steps taken by government

- For sexual harassment at workplace-** VISHAKA guidelines by Supreme Court which provide measures to be taken by employers, Sexual Harassment of Women at workplace (prevention prohibition and redressal) Act 2013 by parliament, SHE Box by Ministry Of Women and Child Development for online complaint.
 - For rape cases:** Proposal of *Justice Verma Committee* was accepted to treat juvenile between 16-18 years age as an adult for committing heinous crimes. Recently, the government has brought amendments in PoCSO act 2012 in which Rape of girl child below 12 years will be punished by death penalty
 - For domestic violence:** Domestic violence act 2005 and Section 498A of IPC deals with
- Other initiatives:**
SWADHAR: A Scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances, GPS tracking, 'panic buttons'

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- etc.
- Government is also planning to set up a dedicated **National Mission on women safety to ensure specified actions by Ministries and Department**

Way forward

- **Strengthening criminal justice machinery:** Strict enforcement of laws, setting up of fast track special courts, strengthening of prosecution machinery, strengthening of Alternate Dispute resolution mechanism like Lok Adalat, implementing **Draft National Policy for Women 2016** in letter and spirit etc.
- **Encourage women to step up and speak** to the relevant committee in the organization in case of any issues such as harassment and improper conduct and situation. Women should also be trained for self-defence.
- **Gender sensitisation** of the law enforcement agencies, especially the police and the judiciary through periodic training as well as instituting gender-sensitization trainings in corporates
- **Development of a community-based strategy** to tackle domestic violence and community policing initiatives such as Mahila Suraksha Samiti and Women State Committee to check crimes
- **Adopting zero tolerance policy** towards any form of harassment at the workplace. It should be embedded in
- an organization's various policies and principles, such as the code of conduct.
- Civil society in collaboration with all sections of society should organize several grass root movements. Many movements like 'Pinjra Tod' and 'One Billion Rising' are contributing significantly via bottom up approach for the cause of women safety.
- **Moral education:** Moral overhauling of the mindset of masses should be attempted through awareness and education

This new Division will also deal with:

- Crimes against SCs & STs.
- Crimes against children, elderly persons.
- Anti-trafficking Cell.
- Matters relating to Prison legislation and prison Reforms.
- All schemes under NIRBHAYA fund.
- Crime and Criminal Tracking & Network System (CCTNS).

Common reasons for failure to report safety concerns

- **Lack of understanding:** Most women perceive that the behavior is not serious enough for them to take the next step and complain.
- **Lack of faith in complaint process:** as they think the process can be embarrassing & difficult.
- **Social stigma:** Fear of being looked down upon in the society.
- **Fear of retaliation:** by the harasser.
- **Fear of repercussions** in promotions and career growth.
- **Non-inclination of family to report** such incident as the offenders are known to victim most of the times.

Tholu Bommalata



Context:

- Tholu Bommalata, the traditional puppetry art form of Andhra Pradesh, has lost its sheen. Now, there are only a few artisans to carry forward the art.

Background:

- Years ago, the art was active in the four districts of Rayalaseema, especially in the border villages of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. However currently, there are only 6-8 troops left in all those areas that are still taking up the leather puppetry as the prime livelihood.

About Tholu Bommalata:

- Tholu Bommalata is the shadow puppet theatre tradition of the state of Andhra Pradesh. Tholu Bommalata

literally means “the dance of leather puppets”.

- The puppeteers make up some of the various entertainers who perform all night and usually reenact various stories from Hindu epics such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata.
- Its performers the part of a group of wandering entertainers and peddlers who pass through villages during the course of a year and offer to sing ballads, tell fortunes, sell amulets, perform acrobatics, charm snakes, weave fishnets, tattoo local people and mend pots.

Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies (CIHTS)

Context:

- Prime Minister of India recently honoured the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies (CIHTS) as part of celebrations to mark Buddha Purnima. The PM also highlighted ₹360 crore allocation made for the development of the Buddhist circuit.

About CIHTS:

- CIHTS is a centrally funded institute that was started in 1967 following a discussion between Dalai Lama and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in the early 1960s.
- It was started with a view to educating the young Tibetan Diaspora and those from the Himalayan border regions of India, who have religion, culture and language in common with Tibet.
- Originally the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies (CIHTS), began to function as a constituent wing of the Sampurnananda Sanskrit University, and eventually emerged as an autonomous body in 1977 under the Ministry of Culture.
- It is located at Sarnath, Varanasi.

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Cauvery Management Scheme

Context:

- The Supreme Court has ordered the Central government to implement its draft Cauvery Management Scheme after finding it in consonance with its February 16 judgment. The court also found the draft scheme in conformity with Section 6A of the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act.

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”.

About the Cauvery Management Scheme:

- The Cauvery water management scheme will deal with the release of water from Karnataka to Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry.
- It will be implemented by the Cauvery Management Authority (CMA). CMA will be the sole body to implement the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal award as modified by the apex court. The Centre would have no say in it except for issuing administrative advisories to it.

What's the dispute?



- The dispute began with Karnataka's demand of 'equitable sharing of the waters' after it expanded farming activities in the Cauvery basin.
- It claimed that the previous agreements, which happened between erstwhile Madras Presidency and Kingdom of Mysore in 1924, were highly skewed to what is present day Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu used to get about 602 TMC of the total water, leaving only about 138 TMC for Karnataka.

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

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twisted wild gorges until it reaches Hogenakal Falls. There the Mettur Dam was constructed for irrigation and hydel power.

- The Kaveri's main tributaries are the Kabani (Kabbani), Amaravati, Noyil, and Bhavani rivers.

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Colombia To Join NATO

Why in news?

Colombia will be the next country to formally join the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**. It has also been approved as a member by OECD.

More about the news

- Colombia has become the only Latin American nation in the NATO alliance.
- It will be given the status of “**Partner across the globe**” in the group.
- Being a global partner **Colombia need not necessarily have to take part in military action** and yet will be **fully accredited as a member** in NATO.

Who are the “Partners across the globe”?

- NATO cooperates with a range of countries **which are not part of formal group**. They are often referred to as “**Partners across the globe**” or simply “**Global Partners**”
- These countries develop cooperation with NATO **in areas of mutual interest, including emerging security challenges**, and some contribute actively to NATO operations **either militarily or in some other way**.
- Other countries in the alliance with status of “**partners across the globe**” are **Afghanistan, Australia, Iraq, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mongolia, New Zealand and Pakistan**.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

- It is also called as the North Atlantic Alliance, an **intergovernmental military alliance between three United Nations Security Council (United States, France and United Kingdom) permanent members and 26 other North American and European countries**.
- The alliance was established by the North

Atlantic Treaty 1949.

- It constitutes a **system of collective defence** whereby its independent member states agree to mutual defence in response to an attack by any external party.
- Its Headquarters are located in **Haren, Brussels, Belgium. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)**
- It aims to promote policies that will improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.
- It has 35 members which include many of the world’s most advanced countries but also emerging countries like Mexico, Chile and Turkey.
- India is not a member of this.

Inter-State Council (ISC)

Context:

- Inter-State Council Standing Committee under the chairmanship of Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh completes its deliberations on Punchhi Commission report.

- Chief ministers of union territories and administrators of UTs as members.
- Six union ministers of cabinet rank in the union council of ministers nominated by the prime minister are also members.

Background:

- The recommendations in Volume VI of the Punchhi Commission report are related to Environment, Natural Resources and Infrastructure. The recommendations in Volume VII are related to Socio-economic Development, Public Policy and Good Governance.

Punchhi Commission:

- Punchhi Commission notified in 2005 submitted its report in 2010.
- The recommendations of the Punchhi Commission, which are contained in seven Volumes pertain to History of Centre-State Relations in India; Constitutional Governance and Management of Centre-State Relations; Centre-State Financial Relations and Planning; Local Self-Governments and Decentralized Governance; Internal Security, Criminal Justice and Centre-State Cooperation; Environment, Natural Resources & Infrastructure and Socio-Economic, Development, Public Policy and Good Governance.

About the inter-state council: What is it?

- The Council is a recommendatory body to investigate and discuss subjects, in which some or all of the states or the union government have a common interest.

Key facts:

- Article 263 of the Constitution of India provides for the establishment of an Inter-State Council.
- It considers recommendations for the better coordination of policy and action, and also matters of general interest to the states.
- The inter-state council is not a permanent constitutional body for coordination between the states and union government. It can be established ‘at any time’ if it appears to the President that the public interests would be served by the establishment of such a council.

The Council shall consist of:

- Prime minister who is the chairman.
- Chief ministers of all states who are members.

CHINA- BURKINA FASO SIGN DEAL

Why in news?

China and Burkina Faso signed an agreement to establish diplomatic relations after the West African nation cut ties with Taiwan.

Background

- Burkina Faso followed suit of Sao Tome, Panama and Dominican Republic of severing diplomatic ties with Taiwan to keep up with evolution of the world and the socio-economic challenges of their country and region.
- Taiwan now has only one diplomatic ally left in Africa — the kingdom of Swaziland — and has official relations with just 18 countries worldwide, many of them poor nations in Central America and the Pacific.
- The move is yet another victory for Beijing in its campaign to isolate the island.

China-Taiwan Relations

- China and Taiwan **split in 1949** after a civil war won by the Chinese Communists. The two sides often use economic support and other aid to bargain for diplomatic recognition.
- Taiwan continues to be Beijing's **most sensitive territorial issue** and is claimed by China as its own province under '**One China Principle**', with no right to state-to-state relations.

What is the 'One China' principle?

- It is a Chinese principle meaning- There is only one China in the world. Taiwan is an inalienable part of Chinese territory. The government of People's Republic of China is the sole legitimate government representing the whole of China.
- The principle **affirms Chinese sovereignty** over Taiwan and is the cornerstone of bilateral diplomatic relations between Washington and

Beijing.

- Any country that wants to establish political and diplomatic relations with China must agree to adhere to this principle and not recognize Taiwan as an independent country.
- In practice, the principle is a **stabilization mechanism** that **preserves the status quo** over Taiwan's political status while allowing it to function as an independent economic, civic and administrative entity.
- Since 1979, Taiwan has had to negotiate its 'international living space' but it has largely honoured the 'One China' principle.

What is One-China policy?

- It is **fundamentally U.S. policy** (or say countries that adhere to it) acknowledging that China has made certain claims over Taiwan, but that **the U.S. does not recognize Chinese claim** of sovereignty over Taiwan. (However, China does not differentiate between the policy and the principle.) India has also followed the "One China Policy" for decades, and places restrictions on the official-level exchanges with Taipei.

Finance Commission

Context:

The Fifteenth Finance Commission has constituted an Advisory Council to advise and assist the Commission.

The role and functions of the Advisory Council will be:

- To advise the Commission on any issue or subject related to the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Commission, which may be of relevance.
- To assist in the preparation of any paper or research study which would enhance the Commission's understanding on the issues containing in its ToR.
- To help in broadening the Commission's ambit and understanding to seek best national and international practices on matters pertaining to fiscal devolution and improving the quality and reach and enforcement of its recommendations.

About the Finance Commission: What is a Finance Commission?

- It is a body set up under **Article 280** of the Constitution. Its primary job is to **recommend** measures and methods on **how revenues need to be distributed between the Centre and states**.

Composition of Finance Commission:





- The Constitution provides that Finance Commission shall consist of a Chairman and four other members to be appointed by President. The Chairman or members are eligible for reappointment. The Constitution authorizes Parliament to make provisions related to qualifications, conditions of service of members or powers of Finance Commission. So

Parliament enacted Finance Commission Act in 1951 to determine provisions related to qualifications or disqualifications, conditions of service or miscellaneous powers to perform functions provided under constitution.

Qualifications:

The Chairman shall have vast experience in Public affairs and other four members shall be selected among persons who a) have qualifications as par with a judge of HC, b) has special knowledge of Finance and Accounts of govt, c) have vast experience in financial matters and d) have special knowledge of economics.

IRAN Nuclear Deal

AFTER TRUMP DECISION: WHAT CHANGES, WHAT REMAINS			
 US sanctions	BEFORE 2015 DEAL No Iranian goods and services imports, virtually no trade and investment by Americans in Iran	UNDER THE ACCORD Billions of dollars of Iran funds held in foreign banks unfrozen, nuclear-related sanctions lifted	AFTER US PULLOUT Nuclear-related punitive sanctions will be restored. President Donald Trump has announced
 N - Programme	Iran had capability to build weapons; may have needed only a few months to make bomb fuel	Iran's ability to secretly build nuclear weapons was severely compromised or eliminated	All restrictions remain in place
 Inspections	Some monitoring under NPT requirements, but it was far less intrusive than under the deal	International monitoring of uranium mines, centrifuge production	For now, inspections will continue
 EU sanctions	Extensive international sanctions, including oil embargo and limits on banking, isolated Iran	UN sanctions tied to Iran's nuclear work terminated, EU ended an oil embargo	EU sanctions remain suspended or terminated

Why in news?

USA has decided to withdraw from 2015 Nuclear Agreement with Iran and reinstate sanctions upon it.

Background

- The Iran deal, also known as **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)**, is an agreement reached in 2015 between Iran and six world countries - US, China, Russia, Britain, France and Germany, plus the EU (i.e. P5+Germany+EU).
- **Under the agreement Iran agreed** to completely eliminate its stock of medium enriched uranium, reduce the stock of low enriched uranium by 98% and reduce almost by 2/3rd its gas centrifuges for 13

years.

- It further sets out rigorous mechanisms for monitoring restrictions placed on Iran's nuclear programme.
- Until 2031, Iran will have to comply with any IAEA access request. If it refuses, the commission can decide on punitive steps, including the re-imposition of sanctions through a majority vote.
- The reason sighted by the USA for withdrawal is that the deal does not target- Iran's ballistic missile programme, its nuclear activities beyond 2025 and its role in conflicts in Yemen and Syria.
- In current scenario, the nuclear deal itself won't be scrapped as long as Iran and the other signatories remain committed to it.

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Likely effects of withdrawal on the world

- One of the biggest concern is a likely **rise in oil prices** which could further lead to **volatility in financial markets**.
- 37% of Iranian oil reaches European destinations. The trade relations have expanded several folds after JCPOA. Exiting the agreement would **tarnish Washington’s credibility** in the world especially with European countries and can weaken the NATO alliance.
- This would render life very difficult for the populace who might, in the absence of other avenues, take to the streets **against the regime**.

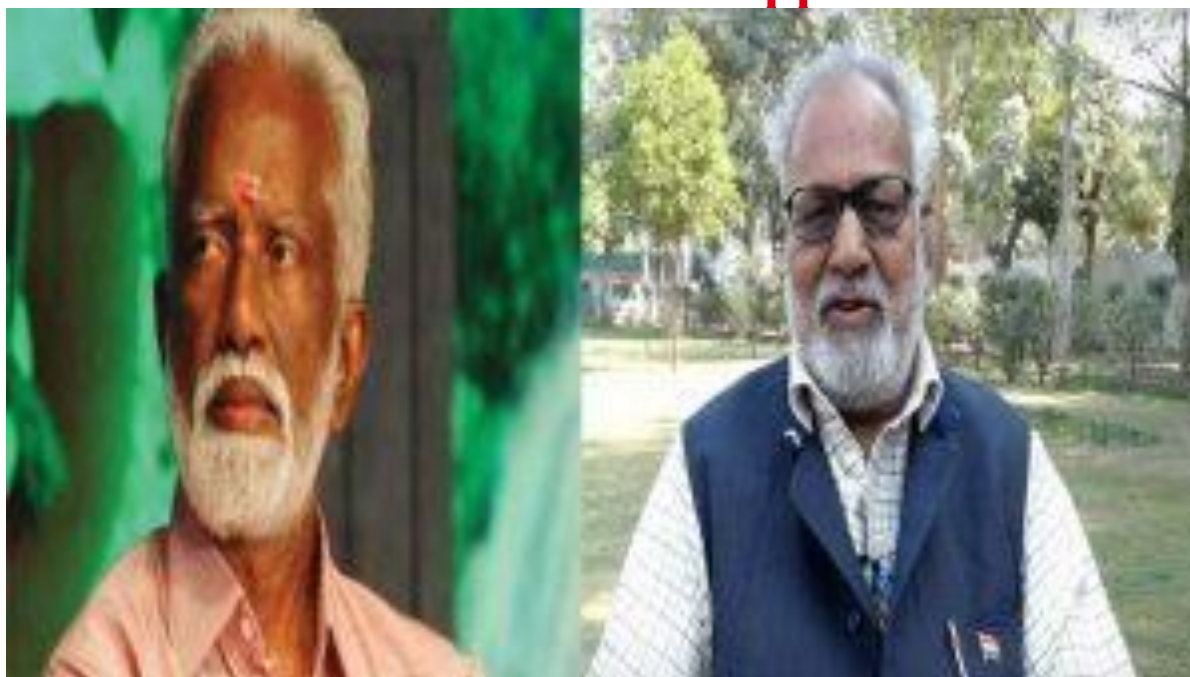
Impact of decision on India

- **Chabahar Port-** This will impact the work on the project which is crucial for India in terms of better connectivity with Afghanistan and other Central Asian countries.
- **Bilateral trade in oil-** During previous sanctions, USA pressed Delhi to curtail its economic relations with Iran, specifically in the area of purchasing oil. Iran is presently India’s third biggest supplier (after Iraq and Saudi Arabia), and any increase in prices will hit both **inflation levels** as well as the **Indian rupee**.
- **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation-** Iran’s inclusion in the SCO as proposed by China may position it as an anti-American group which may further impact Indo-US relations.
- **International North-South Transport Corridor** (a ship, rail, road route between India and Central Asia, passing through Iran), is crucial for connecting India with Central Asia and Russia. New U.S. sanctions will affect these plans, especially if any of the countries along the route or banking and insurance companies dealing with the INSTC plan also decide to adhere to U.S. restrictions on trade with Iran.

- **NSG-** Like France (EU), USA is also a strong backer of India’s NSG membership. India’s commitment towards JCPOA may complicate the matter as US might push India for support.
- **Non-oil trade** with Iran may not be impacted as much, as New Delhi and Tehran have instituted several measures in the past few months, including allowing Indian investment in rupees, and initiating new banking channels, between them.

USA recently withdrew from various other forums like the U.N. Climate Change treaty (Paris Accord), and the Trans-Pacific Partnership with East Asian trading partners. Such behavior essentially means that India must handle its relations with USA a bit more strategically, as India believes in Rule based Order.

New Governors Appointed



Context:

- Ganeshi Lal and Kummanam Rajasekharan have been appointed as Governors of Odisha and Mizoram respectively by the President of India.

Governors of States in India:

Governor is the head of the Executive power of any state in India, just like the President who is the head of the executive power in the Union. But, Governor is the nominal head of a state, unlike the Chief Minister who is the real head of a state in India. According to an amendment in the Constitution of India, brought about in 1956, the same person can be the Governor of two or more states.

Appointment and removal: The governors and lieutenant-governors are appointed by the president for a term of 5 years. The term of governor's office is normally 5 years but it can be terminated earlier by: Dismissal by the president on the advice of the prime minister of the country, at whose pleasure the governor holds office or Resignation by the governor. There is no provision of impeachment, as it

happens for the president. Article 157 and Article 158 of the Constitution of India specify eligibility requirements for the post of governor.

Powers: Like the President of India, the Governor of any state in India is vested with certain executive, legislative and judicial powers. He or she also possesses certain discretionary or emergency powers. But one major difference in the powers enjoyed by the President and those enjoyed by the Governor is, the Governor does not have any diplomatic or military powers.

Gilgit-Baltistan

Context:

- Pakistan’s top civil and military leaders have decided to give greater administrative and financial authority to Pakistan-administered Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.

- Gilgit-Baltistan is home to five of the “eight-thousanders” and to more than fifty peaks above 7,000 metres (23,000 ft). Three of the world’s longest glaciers outside the polar regions are found in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Where is Gilgit Baltistan located?

- It is located in the northern Pakistan. It borders China in the North, Afghanistan in the west, Tajikistan in the north west and Kashmir in the south east. Gilgit-Baltistan is treated as a separate geographical entity by Pakistan. It has a regional Assembly and an elected Chief Minister.
- Gilgit-Baltistan shares a geographical boundary with Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, and India considers it as part of the undivided Jammu and Kashmir, while Pakistan sees it as a separate from PoK. The USD 46 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) also passes through this region.

India’s opposition:

- India has termed as “entirely unacceptable” any possible attempt by Pakistan to declare the Gilgit-Baltistan region, bordering the disputed Pakistan-administered Kashmir, as the fifth province.



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INDIA-INDONESIA

Why in news?

The Indian Prime minister recently visited Indonesia.

More about the visit

- Both sides have agreed to elevate the bilateral relationship between the two countries to the level of

Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

- The need for "free, open, transparent, rule-based (UNCLOS), peaceful, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific region" was emphasized.
- A **shared Vision on Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific** was announced to harness the opportunities and the following was agreed to-
 - o Enhancing Trade and Investment Cooperation:
 - o Expanding cooperation in disaster risk management:
 - o Fostering tourism and cultural exchanges, etc.
- A link will be established between Andaman Nicobar and Aceh to tap the economic potentials of both areas.

Significance of India- Indonesia relations

- **Securing sea lanes of communication-** Strategic location of Indonesia at the transition of Indian and Pacific Ocean is very important to secure the major sea lanes of communication considering the South East Indian ocean is the hotbed of piracy and smuggling of people, arms, drugs and money; illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; and the movement of terrorists etc.
- **Strategic importance:** Recently Indonesia agreed to give access to the strategic island of **Sabang**, close to the Malacca Strait for Indian investment. This would help India to become a **net security provider in the Indian ocean**

region.

- **Countering China:** China's increasing assertiveness in the region has required for greater cooperation among various players in the region.
- **India's Act East policy:** Indonesia's support will bolster its Act East Policy as it is the largest country in southeast Asia both population wise and economically. Also, India's vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for all in the Region) matched with Indonesia's Global Maritime Fulcrum.
- **Trade and investment:** In 2017, trade between the two countries was USD 18.13 billion. India and Indonesia have agreed to triple bilateral trade to USD 50 billion by 2025. Both countries can play critical role towards promotion of blue economy and fast tracking RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership).
- **Countering terrorism:** Both the countries face threats of increasing religion-based terrorism. Thus, both the Country had agreed to establish interfaith dialogues to address this issue.

Challenges in India Indonesia relations

- **Strong presence of China in the region:** Indonesia has friendship treaty with China of cold war time, hence it would not go to an extent which could concern China even after comprehensive strategic partnership.
- **Cold war era hostility:** After independence India had good relations with Indonesia as both the countries were founder of Non-alignment movement, however it deteriorated later as India tilted towards USSR and Indonesia towards USA. During Indian's war with Pakistan, Indonesia had supported Pakistan.
- **Demarcation of maritime border**

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between the two countries in the Andaman sea has not been completed. However, during the visit, both have reiterated to settle it soon

- **Poor Connectivity:** The potential of India Indonesia relations has been unrealized due to poor connectivity. The direct air connectivity was launched only recently.

Way forward

- India and Indonesia can provide **complementary models for coexistence of religious minorities** with majoritarian communities in Asia based on their own tradition of coexistence. The **interfaith dialogue forum** should be promoted for it.
- India can strengthen Indonesia's democratic credentials by advocating its admission in a revived India-Brazil-South Africa forum.
- India may also invite Indonesia in the Quadrilateral security dialogue which includes Japan, USA and Australia, which focuses on the security aspects in the Indo-Pacific region.

Kishanganga Project

Context:

- The 330 MW Kishanganga Hydropower Project was recently inaugurated by the Prime Minister in northern Kashmir's Gurez. The PM also laid down the foundation stone for Pakal Dul hydro power project.

(1000 MW), Ratle (850 MW), Kishanganga (330 MW), Miyar (120 MW) and Lower Kalnai (48 MW) – being built/planned in the Indus river basin, contending these violate the treaty.

The Kishanganga Hydroelectric project:

- It is an \$864 million dam which is part of a run-of-the-river hydroelectric scheme that is designed to divert water from the Kishanganga River to a power plant in the Jhelum River basin.
- It is located 5 km north of Bandipore in Jammu and Kashmir. It also lies to the north of Wular Lake.
- The state of Jammu and Kashmir would be provided with 12 percent of the power generated by the project.

Pakal Dul hydro power project:

The 1,000 megawatt Pakal Dul hydroelectric power project on Marusadar River, a tributary of Chenab River, in Jammu and Kashmir will provide 12% free power to the state. The project will not only be the largest hydroelectric power project in the state but also the first storage unit.

Opposition by Pakistan:

- Pakistan has raised several objections to the Kishanganga Project in the past. Pakistan has complained that the Kishanganga Project affects its own Neelum Jhelum Hydropower Plant. However, India maintains that the project would not have any impact on rivers flowing into the neighbouring country.
- Construction on the dam was temporarily halted by the Hague's Permanent Court of Arbitration in October 2011 due to Pakistan's protest of its effect on the flow of the Kishanganga River (called the Neelum River in Pakistan). In February 2013, the Hague ruled that India could divert a minimum amount of water for power generation.
- Pakistan has been flagging concern over designs of India's five hydroelectricity projects – Pakal Dul

Nepal: first country in South-East Asia validated for eliminating trachoma

Context:

- The World Health Organization (WHO) has validated Nepal for having eliminated trachoma as a public health problem – a milestone, as the country becomes the first in WHO’s South-East Asia Region to defeat the world’s leading infectious cause of blindness.

Background:

- Trachoma was the second leading cause of preventable blindness in Nepal in the 1980s.
- In 2002, the Government of Nepal stepped up efforts to eliminate the disease with the establishment of a national trachoma programme.
- From 2002 to 2005, following the implementation of sustained control activities, the prevalence of active (inflammatory) trachoma fell by 40%.

About Trachoma:

- **What is it?** Trachoma is a chronic infective disease of the eye and is the leading cause of infective blindness globally. Trachoma is a disease of poor environmental and personal hygiene and inadequate access to water and sanitation.
- It affects the conjunctiva under the eyelids. Repeated infections cause scarring leading to in-turning of the eyelashes and eyelids. This further causes damage to the cornea and blindness.

TRACK-II DIPLOMACY

Why in News?

India and Pakistan recently held a Track -II Dialogue in Islamabad.

More on News

- One of the oldest **Track-II initiatives** (referred as Neemrana dialogue) between India and Pakistan and was first held in 1991-92, in Neemrana Fort (Rajasthan).
- Current meeting was held from April 28th to April 30th, 2018, in Islamabad and the two sides discussed issues related to **Kashmir, Siachen, terrorism, cross-border firing, Sir Creek** and also **Afghanistan** but both sides did not make any official statements on the event.
- Last such Track-II dialogue between India-Pakistan was held three years back on 10th July 2015, on the side- lines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) **Summit in Ufa, Russia.**

About Track II Diplomacy

- It is also known as Backchannel Diplomacy, in which private individuals (such as former diplomats, military veterans, academicians etc.), meeting **unofficially**, can find their way to common ground that official negotiators can't and the talks under it are not codified as official statements.
- **Strengths** of Track II Diplomacy
 - o Track Two parties are not subdued by political or constitutional power; therefore, they can express their own viewpoints on various issues.
 - o It **involves grassroots and middle leadership** who are in direct contact with the conflict.
 - o This diplomacy is not affected by electoral cycles.
- **Weaknesses** of Track II Diplomacy
 - o Its participants have **limited ability to influence foreign policy** and

political power structures because of their lack of political influence.

- o Track Two interventions can take **too long to yield results.**
- o It has limited ability to influence change at the war stage of a conflict.
- o Its participants **rarely have resources** necessary for sustained leverage during negotiations and for the implementation of agreements.

Track I Diplomacy

Track One Diplomacy is official government diplomacy whereby communication and interaction is between governments.

ASEAN India Film Festival

Context:

- India is hosting the ASEAN India Film Festival. The Film Festival will be a platform for people of the film industry of member countries to explore areas of cooperation in the domain of “cinema and cultural cooperation.

Key facts:

- The Film Festival will be non-competitive. The tagline of the Festival is proposed to be ‘Friendship through Films’.
- The Directorate of Film Festivals is organising ASEAN India Film Festival in collaboration with the Ministry of External Affairs (ASEAN Multilateral Division) as part of the series of events to commemorate the 25 years of ASEAN and India relations.

Aim of the Festival:

As a vehicle of Cultural Exchange, the Directorate of Film Festival aims to provide access to new trends in filmmaking by providing the platform for an exchange of ideas, culture and experiences in the field of cinema.

Participants:

- The ASEAN film festival will have countries which have immense and colourful cultural diversity but share common historical thread. This will be showcased through screenings of films, alongside exchange of ideas, discussions between the film personalities and interactive sessions with the audience.

About ASEAN:

- The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a regional intergovernmental organization

comprising ten Southeast Asian countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam) which promotes Pan-Asianism and intergovernmental cooperation and facilitates economic, political, security, military, educational and socio-cultural integration amongst its members and other Asian countries, and globally.

- Its principal aims include accelerating economic growth, social progress, and sociocultural evolution among its members, alongside the protection of regional stability and the provision of a mechanism for member countries to resolve differences peacefully.
- ASEAN is an official United Nations observer, as well as an active global partner. It also maintains a global network of alliances, and is involved in numerous international affairs. Communication by member states takes place in English.

INDIA-US PACTS

Why in news?

Ministry of Defense is re-examining Communications, Compatibility, Security Agreement (COMCASA) and Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation (BECA) agreements with US.

Background

- Three **proposed defense foundational agreements** between the United States and India—the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (earlier referred to as CISMOA), and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geospatial Intelligence—have been in negotiations for years.
- So far, India has **signed only LEMOA**. While efforts to conclude remaining two pacts are being renegotiated recently.

Why India should sign these agreements?

- Each of these agreements expands U.S.-India defense cooperation in a fairly modest manner, without
- necessitating a revolution in either side's approach to the partnership.
- COMCASA creates the conditions for the Indian military to **receive modern, secure and net-enabled weapons systems** such as precision armament, air-to-air missiles, space systems and navigation systems that are critical components in platforms like fighter aircraft and unmanned aerial systems. Hitherto India has had to purchase more expensive commercial communications equipment, raising the overall acquisition price of a platform.
- The absence of COMCASA and BECA agreements has **affected the functionality of U.S. platforms sold to India** (such as P-8I aircraft) and limits interoperability and data

sharing between their militaries.

- Apart from this, these agreements are largely about building a **foundation of trust**.

Why India has not signed these agreements?

- **Strategic Concerns**
- These agreements pave the way for a military alliance and force India to **compromise its strategic autonomy**.
- It **may antagonize China**, leaving India in a disadvantageous position vis-a-vis its border disputes with Beijing.
- It can **jeopardize historically close security relationship** with Russia and ongoing projects. Also, the agreement will make it **difficult to integrate India's Russian origin weapon systems on US Platform**.

Operational Concerns

- Implementation of the COMCASA-
- **Could reveal locations of Indian military assets** to Pakistan or other countries. Further, the use of American C4ISR systems could **compromise India's tactical operational security**, enabling the US to keep track of Indian warships and aircraft as the coding and keying systems will be the same.
- Would be **too burdensome for the Indian military**, given U.S. procedures.
- There is **no clear need for these agreements**, given the recent ascendancy of bilateral defense cooperation and the use of workaround agreements, such as the recently renewed Fuel Exchange Agreement.

CLMV Conclave**Context:**

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- ASEAN is an official United Nations observer, as well as an active global partner. It also maintains a global network of alliances, and is involved in numerous international affairs. Communication by member states takes place in English.

General Data Protection Guidelines (GDPR)

Why in news?

The GDPR became applicable to all the European Union member states from May 2018.

What is GDPR?

- It is **comprehensive privacy and data security legislation** by the EU, to protect personal data of its people (residents and citizens, called as data subjects, in the Regulation) and to help them control how this data is collected, processed, shared and stored.
- It mandates companies (called as data controllers and processors) to take “**freely given, specific, informed and unambiguous**” consent from the data subjects, regarding movement and use of this data. Thus, GDPR also **regulates exportation of this data outside the EU**.
- Further, ‘**record**’ of consent is required to be maintained under the new regime.

Highlights of the GDPR

- It creates **European Data Protection Board (EDPB)**, along with member states’ Data Protection Authorities (DPA), to regulate and implement GDPR and resolve disputes. It also requires firms to appoint **Data Protection Officers (DPO)** wherever applicable.
- **Data protection principles:** Personal data should be processed as per following six principles:
 - o Processed lawfully, fairly and transparently
 - o Collected only for specific legitimate purposes
 - o Adequate, relevant and limited to what is necessary
 - o Must be accurate and kept up to date
 - o Stored only as long as is necessary
 - o Ensure appropriate security, integrity and confidentiality
- **Governance and accountability:** It

requires maintenance and enforcement of internal data protection policies and procedures, along with documentation of data breach and investigations. **Data protection impact assessments (DPIAs)** are a must for high-risk processing operations.

- **Data protection “by design” and “by default”:** This means that the design of future business operations and management workflows relating to data should be GDPR-compliant; and default collection mode must be to gather only the personal data that is necessary for a specific purpose. Data storage must use highest-possible privacy settings by default and should use **pseudonymisation or anonymization**.
- **Right to erasure of personal data:** GDPR requires organizations to completely erase data from all repositories when: (i) data subjects revoke their consent; (ii) partner organization requests data deletion, or (iii) service or agreement comes to an end. However, data **can be retained for certain legal reasons** as per few exceptions; it also provides for right to be forgotten, right to rectify data, right to data portability, etc.
- Companies are required to **report the data breach** within 72 hours to the nominated national DPA. These breaches must be disclosed to the individuals as well.
- **Exemptions/ restrictions:** Following cases are not covered by the regulation:
 - o Lawful interception, national security, military, police, justice
 - o Statistical and scientific analysis
 - o Deceased persons, subject to national legislation
 - o Employer-employee relationships (covered as per a separate law)
 - o Processing of personal data by a natural

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person in the course of a purely personal or household activity

- o Conversely, an entity has to be engaged in "economic activity" (as per EU laws) to fall under GDPR.
- **Firms based outside the EU**, that provide services or goods to the EU are also subject to the GDPR. These companies may need to appoint a representative in the EU.
- It includes a **separate Data Protection Directive** for the police and criminal justice sector that provides rules on personal data exchanges at national, European, and international levels.
- Failure to comply invites penalties as huge as **€20m or up to 4% of global annual revenues**.
- It emphasizes on **simplification** of information and processes so that public can comprehend these and take actions with ease.
- **ePrivacy Regulation** for online data activities, are yet to be finalised by the EU.

Implications for India and beyond

- It **impacts work practices of technology sector**, online retailers, software companies, financial services, online services/SaaS, retail/consumer packaged goods, B2B marketing etc.
- For Indian firms: Europe is a significant market for Indian IT/BPO/technology/pharma sectors and hence, GDPR compliance becomes priority for all Indian organisations having business there.
 - o **Challenges-** According to an **Ernst & Young study**, only 13% of Indian companies are prepared for GDPR. These provisions would be a challenge for **smaller firms and young start-ups** demanding huge costs of compliance or otherwise loss of business.
 - o **Opportunity-** At the same time, there

is **an opportunity** for new consultancy and advisory firms to set up their operations and help other firms with GDPR compliance across the world. Also, compliance can be turned into a **competitive advantage** vis-à-vis other Asian firms.

- **India and the EU relations:**
 - o One of the routes to transfer personal data outside the EU is when the EU has designated a country as providing an adequate level of data protection. Given that the EU has not accorded '**data secure country**' status to India, operations between Indian and Europeans firms may get difficult. This also has implications for **India-EU BTIA (Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement)**.
 - o GDPR provides that a legal order/judgement by a third country asking action on part of data controller/processor may not be recognized in absence of an international agreement such as the **Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT)**. This is of concern since Germany refused to sign MLAT with India in 2015, citing its objections to India's death penalty provisions.
- **Blockchain technologies:** Decentralized nature of these technologies can help protect personal data better. Simultaneously, anonymity offered by crypto-currencies based on these technologies may contradict the compliance norms under the GDPR.
- **For consumers world over:** They will demand better laws to protect their data via campaigns against bad practices of other governments and companies that harvest on personal data without consent, thus violating Right to privacy.

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India's second IT corridor in China

Context:

The National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) has launched its second IT corridor in China to cash in on the burgeoning Chinese software market which remained elusive despite the presence of top Indian technology firms.

Key facts:

- The newly established Digital Collaborative Opportunities Plaza (SIDCOP) platform at Guiyang in China provides market access to Indian IT firms in the huge Chinese market.
- The Guiyang corridor will focus on Big Data. Last December, the NASSCOM established its first SIDCOP platform in the Chinese port city of Dalian, which is India's first IT hub in China. Dalian corridor's focus was on IOT (Internet of Things).
- The corridor is aimed at setting up local offices and assisting companies from Guiyang to establish software and IT units in India.
- For India, getting access to China's IT market, valued at over \$493 billion in 2013 by the ministry of industry and information technology of China, is important to address the massive trade deficit which has now spiralled to over \$51 billion. The Chinese IT market grew exponentially since then.
- The two corridors, which were started in collaboration with China's provincial governments, are expected to provide the much-needed big opening for Indian IT firms.

Background:

- India's top IT firms have a big presence in China, specially multi-nationals and IT Corridor at Dalian which are expected to provide a gateway for the Indian IT-small and medium-sized enterprises.

Way ahead:

- India is a world leader in the area of Information Technology and IT-enabled services with annual revenue of over \$164 billion and exports of over \$120 billion. The country has been demanding China to provide market access to Indian IT and pharmaceutical firms for several years to reduce bilateral trade deficit.

Global Wind Summit

Context:

- The first edition of the Global Wind Summit will be held in Hamburg, Germany.

About the Global Wind Summit:

- The conference on wind is the largest and most important meeting of the wind industry worldwide. The event combines two conferences, WindEnergy Hamburg and WindEurope.
- The event will provide a platform for experts from across the globe to discuss innovative and green technologies for harnessing wind energy making.
- The focus of the conferences would be on three major subjects. Dynamic markets, cost efficiency and smart energy. How to develop new markets, make product competitive in auctions and use wind power for all energy applications.

Background:

- India is fourth largest country — after China, the US and Germany — in terms of wind energy installation capacity at around 33 GW. The government has set a target of achieving 60 GW by 2022.

NATO

Context:

- Colombia is all set to formally become the NATO's first Latin American “global partner.” Colombia will join as a “global partner”, which means it will not necessarily have to take part in military action, and will be fully accredited in Brussels. The move would improve Colombia's image on the world stage.
- Areas of cooperation include cyber security, maritime security, terrorism and its links to organised crime, as well as building the capacities and capabilities of the Colombian armed forces.

About NATO:

- The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was founded in 1949 and is a group of 29 countries from Europe and North America that exists to protect the people and territory of its members.
- The Alliance is founded on the principle of collective defence, meaning that if one NATO Ally is attacked, then all NATO Allies are attacked.
- The NATO lists Afghanistan, Australia, Iraq, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mongolia, New Zealand and Pakistan as “partners across the globe”.

World Health Assembly



Context:

- Plenary Meeting of the 71st World Health Assembly is being held at Geneva.
- In addition to its three main themes of celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Organization, the 40th Anniversary of Alma-Ata and WHO's top priority, universal health coverage, it will cover many topics on health throughout the life- course including sexual and reproductive health; early childhood development; maternal, infant and young child nutrition; poliomyelitis and the Global Vaccine Action Plan.

policies of the Organization, appoint the Director-General, supervise financial policies, and review and approve the proposed programme budget.

World Health Assembly (WHA):

- The World Health Assembly (WHA) is the forum through which the World Health Organization (WHO) is governed by its 194 member states. It is the world's highest health policy setting body and is composed of health ministers from member states.
- The members of the World Health Assembly generally meet every year in May in Geneva, the location of WHO Headquarters.
- The main functions of the World Health Assembly are to determine the

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Right To Information Act And Public Authorities

Why in news?

- Law Commission of India (LCI) in its 275th report has recommended to bring BCCI under RTI act.
- Election Commission recently said in an order that political parties are out of the purview of the RTI Act contrary to the Central Information Commission's directive of declaring political parties as public authorities.

What is a Public Authority under RTI act?

Section 2(h) of the RTI Act states that “public authority” means any authority or body or institution of self- government established or constituted-

- o By or under the Constitution;
- o By any other law made by Parliament;
- o By any other law made by state legislature;
- o By notification issued or order made by the appropriate Government, and includes any—
 - ✓ Body owned, controlled or substantially financed (The RTI Act does not define substantial financing. Consequently, courts are often required to decide whether a particular form and quantum of financial aid constitutes substantial finance.)
 - ✓ Non-Government organization substantially financed, directly or indirectly by funds provided by the appropriate Government.
- The RTI Act empowers citizens with the right to access information under the control of ‘public authorities’ and imposing penalties on officials of public authorities for failing to disclose ‘information’ defined in Section 2(f).
- The RTI Act also mandates that “every public authority shall pro-actively disclose information pertaining to it, and

maintain its documents and records to facilitate the right to information under the Act

BCCI as Public Authority

- **Mukul Mudgal Panel** for drafting National Sports Development Bill, 2013 and **Justice R.M. Lodha** suggested bringing BCCI under purview of RTI.
- Supreme Court in ‘*BCCI vs Cricket association of Bihar & others*’ asked LCI to examine whether it should be covered under RTI. LCI recommended its inclusion under RTI as:
 - o BCCI can be classified as a **limb of State** within the meaning of Article 12 of the Constitution because government does exercise control over its activities and functioning say requirement of approval for cricket matches between India and Pakistan in view of tense international relations.
 - o It also shall be deemed “**Public Authority**” because its functions are of public nature and it receives ‘**substantial financing**’ from appropriate Governments over the years (in the form of tax exemptions, land grants etc.).
 - o It is the “**approved**” **national level body** holding virtually monopoly rights to organize cricketing events in the country. It also selects the Indian cricket team.
 - o It virtually acts as **National Sports Federation** and like all other sports bodies which are listed as NSF's BCCI should also be covered under the RTI Act and the act should be made applicable to all of its constituent member cricketing associations.

BCCI

It is a registered society under Tamil Nadu Societies Registration Act, 1975.

It is headquartered in Mumbai and is the central governing body regulating the game of cricket in India.

Law Commission of India

- It is a non-statutory body constituted by the Government of India from time to time.
- The Commission was originally constituted in 1955 and is re-constituted every three years.
- The current 21st Law commission was constituted in 2015 to undertake research in law and review of existing laws in India for making reforms therein and enacting new legislations and undertake studies and research for bringing reforms in the justice delivery systems.

Political Parties as Public Authorities

- Six national parties — the BJP, the Congress, the BSP, the NCP, the CPI and the CPI(M) were **brought under the ambit of the RTI Act** by a full bench of the Central Information Commission in 2013. (The Trinamool Congress was also recognised as the seventh national party in 2016).
- However, the political parties have refused to entertain the RTI applications directed at them.
- Several activists have approached the Supreme Court on the grounds of non-compliance of the CIC order and the matter is pending.

Arguments in favour of bringing Political parties under RTI

- **Need to ensure Transparency in Funding-**
 - o According to **Association for Democratic Reforms**, between FY 2004-05 and 2014-15 only 31.55% of the total income of political parties was through voluntary

contributions/donations and for the rest 68.45% they have evaded declaring any details by exploiting section 29C of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 which exempts them from declaring any donations below Rs 20,000.

- o **Crony capitalism** - From FY 2004-05 to FY 2014-15, six national parties have declared receiving 88% of their total donations in excess of Rs 20,000 crore from corporate or business houses which is not without any quid pro quo for the corporates.
- o **Black money** - According to ADR, 34% of the donations have been received with no address or any other detail of the donor, and 40% donations have been received with no PAN details.
- o **Illicit foreign contributions:** National parties have been accepting foreign contributions despite The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 1976, prohibited political parties from accepting contributions from foreign companies or companies in India controlled by foreign companies.
- **Political parties are vital organs of the State-** According to CIC, critical role played by these political parties point towards their public character. They perform functions like government bodies and they have monopoly over selection of candidates, who will ultimately form the government. Therefore, they cannot escape the scrutiny by the common people of their functioning.
- **Political parties are public authorities-** The CIC held that political parties **enjoy various benefits** directly or indirectly like land for offices of political parties on concessional rates, allotment of free time on Doordarshan/All India Radio and supplying electoral roll copies free of cost during elections hence they are

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'public authority' under section 2(h) and answerable under the RTI Act.

- **Larger Public Interest:** The disclosure of the information is in larger public interest. Even **170th report of Law Commission of India on reform of the electoral laws** recommended to introduce internal democracy, financial transparency and accountability in the working of the political parties

Arguments against bringing Political parties under RTI

- **Obstruct party functioning:** Political parties cannot disclose their internal functioning and financial information under the Right to Information Act as it will hamper their smooth functioning
- **RTI can be a tool of misuse:** RTI can become a weak spot and rivals with malicious intentions may take advantage of RTI.
- **Not 'public authorities':** Political parties are not established or constituted by or under the Constitution or by any other law made by Parliament. Even the registration of a political party under the 1951 Act was not the same as establishment of a government body.
- **Transparency provisions for parties** People Act, 1951, which demand “necessary transparency regarding financial aspects of political parties.
- **Information in public domain:** Government holds the view that information about a political body is already in the public domain on the website of the Election Commission.
- **Not envisaged in the RTI Act** - According to the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) when the RTI Act was enacted, it was never visualised that political parties would be brought within the ambit of the transparency law.

The Central Information Commission (CIC)

- CIC set up under the Right to Information Act is the authorised body, established in 2005, to act upon complaints from those individuals who have not been able to submit information requests to a Central Public Information Officer or State Public Information.
- It includes 1 Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) and not more than 10 Information Commissioners (IC) who are appointed by the President of India.
- The jurisdiction of the Commission extends over all Central Public Authorities.
- When it comes to the RTI Act, the Central Information Commission is the only appellate authority which may declare a body as public authority if it is convinced that the organisation fits into the criteria for being under the **Right to Information Act**.

SCO Cultural Ministers’ meeting

Context:

- 15th SCO Cultural Ministers’ Meeting is being held in Sanya, China. India is participating in the Cultural Ministers’ Meet for first time as full time member.

About SCO:

- The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is an eight-member multilateral organization, established on 15 June 2001 in Shanghai, China by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
- Pakistan also became the full member of SCO along with India, taking its membership to 8.
- After the expansion of membership, SCO represents approximately 42% of the world’s population, 20% of its GDP and 22% of the landmass.
- The main objectives of the SCO are to strengthen relations among member states; promote cooperation in various fields like political affairs, economics, and education, culture, tourism, environment protection etc. and promote regional peace, security, and stability among others.

Islamic Cooperation countries (OIC)

Context:

- Russia has come in support of Organization of Islamic Cooperation countries (OIC) in their effort to enter the Russian market.

Background:

- Russia's trade turnover with OIC countries stands at about \$75 billion, with exports accounting for about \$58 billion. Imports from OIC countries total about \$17 billion.

About the OIC:

- Organisation of Islamic Cooperation is an international organization founded in 1969, consisting of 57 member states. It is the second largest inter-governmental organization after the United Nations.
- The organisation states that it is “the collective voice of the Muslim world” and works to “safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony”.
- The OIC has permanent delegations to the United Nations and the European Union.

Excessive Government Litigations

Why in news?

Recently, Supreme Court in a judgement imposed Rs. 1 lakh penalty on the Government for frivolous litigation as similar appeals had already been dismissed earlier by the Court.

because of the conduct by government agencies (regulators) that generates litigation by writing orders, even on closed issues. Even after improvement in India's rankings, it ranks very low on Enforcing Contracts.

Implications of frivolous litigations

- **Hurts investor's confidence:** As Economic Survey 2017- 18 discusses, **economic activity is getting affected** by high pendency and delays across the legal system. Delays of economic cases (company cases, arbitration cases and taxation cases) in courts are leading to stalled projects, legal costs, contested tax revenues, and consequently reduced investment.
- **Adds to the burden of Courts** and collaterally harms other litigants by delaying hearing of their cases through the sheer volume of numbers.
- **Increase in project costs:** Delays in power, roads, and railways projects led to an **increase in almost 60% of the project costs.**
- **Slows down government administrative processes** by delaying decision-making on matters that are the subject of litigation.
- **Diversion of precious resources:** A recent document by the **Ministry of Law & Justice**, state that the government, including PSUs and other autonomous bodies, are party to around **“46%” of the 3.14 crore court cases** pending in various courts in the country, making it the biggest litigant in the country. Handling these cases must be using a major portion of taxpayers money.
- **Affects ease of doing business:** India suffers badly in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business rankings primarily

Steps taken to reduce pendency

- In **1989, the Department of Public Enterprises set up a “Permanent Machinery of Arbitrators”**. Based on this, it directed enterprises that all commercial disputes (excluding disputes on income-tax, customs and excise, later extended also to the railways) should be settled by arbitration, and that this dispute resolution mechanism should be a part of all contractual and tender agreements.
- Adoption of **“National Litigation Policy 2010”** as part of **“National Legal Mission to Reduce Average Pendency Time from 15 Years to 3 Years”** to transform government into an Efficient and Responsible litigant. All states formulated state litigation policies after National Litigation Policy 2010.
- An internal portal called **Legal Information Management and Briefing System (LIMBS)**, was created in **2015** with the objective of tracking cases to which the government is a party. As of 11th June 2018, data collected by LIMBS show 2.4 lakh ‘live’ cases.
- In **April 2017**, the Law Minister called upon each Ministry/Department to chalk out an **'Action Plan for Special Arrears Clearance Drives'** to reduce the number of court cases and implement the plan on Mission Mode.
- The Government, in September 2015, proposed a **National Litigation Policy** for out-of-court settlement of cases among government departments, public sector undertakings and other

government bodies. However, no concrete decision has been taken yet in this regard.

Way Forward

- **The National Litigation Policy should be revised**
- It should **address all three stages of dispute**, viz. pre-litigation, litigation and post litigation stage.
- It must have clear objectives that can be assessed. **Minimum standards for pursuing litigation must be listed out.**
- The role of **different functionaries must be enumerated** and **fair accountability mechanisms** must be established.
- **Consequences for violation of the policy** must be clearly provided and a **periodic impact assessment programme** must be factored in.
- Appointment of a **Nodal Officer to regularly monitor the status of the cases** in every department at the Joint Secretary Level to coordinate effective resolution of the disputes.
- Promotion of **alternative dispute resolution mechanisms** to encourage mediation as the preferred form of dispute resolution in service related matters. All agreements to mandatorily include a reference to either arbitration or mediation.

Suggestions by economic survey 2017-18 may be adopted:

- **A Coordinated action between government and the judiciary-** a kind of **horizontal Cooperative Separation of Powers** to complement vertical Cooperative Federalism between the central and state governments-- would address the “Law’s delay” and boost economic activity.
- **Judicial capacity should be**

strengthened in the lower courts to reduce the burden on higher courts. Government must increase its expenditure on the judiciary, improve the courts case management and court automation system, and create subject specific benches.

- **Tax departments must limit their appeals**, given that their success rate is less than 30% at all three levels of judiciary (Appellate Tribunals, High Courts, and Supreme Courts).
- Courts could consider **prioritising stayed cases and impose stricter timelines** within which cases with temporary injunctions may be decided, especially when involving government infrastructure projects.
- **Solutions unique to each litigation prone department need to be identified:** For instance - robust internal dispute resolution mechanisms for service related disputes within each department will inspire confidence among employees.
- **Quasi-judicial authorities** should be judicially trained or a separate class of judicial officers to discharge quasi-judicial functions should be created.
- **The bureaucracy should be sufficiently motivated** to tackle the issues.
- A major recommendation of the **100th Law Commission of India (LCI) report** was to set up a ‘**litigation ombudsman**’ in each state to manage and handle government litigation. Similarly, the **126th LCI report** recommends the creation of a **grievance redressal system** within departments, specifically to manage disputes between the government-employer and its employees.
- **Step by step online dispute resolution** must be adopted as done by Ministry of Consumer Affairs on a pilot basis for e-commerce related disputes. The ministry has established an **Online Consumer**

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Mediation Centre with the motto ‘**Anytime Anywhere Dispute Resolution**’, for mediation services for consumer disputes in e-commerce.

- Conducting a thorough **100-percent audit of all pending appeals** filed by regulators to decide what ought to be withdrawn, would be a good way to start.

and regional level monitoring system to minimize litigation. “**Nodal Officer**” in each departments to “actively” monitor litigation and track court cases.

However, the policy did not become successful due to reasons such as Ambiguity, rhetoric and generic phraseology, absence of adequate data, No measurable outcomes or implementation mechanism, Lack of any form of impact assessment etc.

Challenges in dealing with government litigations

- Government litigation being an **encounter of unequals**, where an ill-equipped individual person or entity is pitted against a massive government machinery with its limitless resources.
- **Lack of adequate and reliable data:** After the **126th Law Commission of India report**, no actual estimate of costs or comprehensive litigation data (regarding number of cases, categories and government department party) has been collated.
- **Risk avoiding attitude of bureaucracy:** Due to fear of CVC, CBI, they tend to shift the burden of taking risky decisions on judiciary.

Some features of National Litigation Policy, 2010

- Government must **cease to be a compulsive litigant**,
- The easy approach "Let the courts decide" must be eschewed and condemned,
- Challenge to the orders of the Tribunal should be an exception and not a matter of routine,
- Proceedings will not be filed in service matters merely because the order of the Administrative Tribunal affects a number of employees,
- It recommends setting up of the **national**

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NAFTA

Context:

- Negotiators have failed to reach NAFTA deal. Negotiators have ended talks without a deal to modernize NAFTA, agreeing instead to resume negotiations soon, ahead of a deadline next week issued by U.S House of Representatives. The failure to secure a quick deal underscores uncertainty over the North American Free Trade Agreement.

What is NAFTA?

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

Background:

- President Donald Trump has pledged to begin renegotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in upcoming talks with the leaders of Mexico and Canada. Trump has called NAFTA the “worst trade deal in history,” and blames it for the loss of manufacturing jobs in America’s Rust Belt. He has pledged to negotiate “tough and fair” trade agreements with the goal of creating more U.S. jobs as a top goal.

What was the purpose of NAFTA?

- In 1993 the European Union (EU) created a “single market”— one territory without any internal borders or other regulatory obstacles to the free movement of goods and services. This allowed every country and business in the EU to have access to more than 500 million consumers.
- NAFTA, which was approved that same year, was designed to have a similar effect, providing a way to allow the exchange of goods and services to flow more freely across national borders without the artificial restrictions.
- NAFTA provided for progressive elimination of all tariffs on any goods qualifying as North American. The deal also sought to protect intellectual property, establish dispute-resolution mechanisms, and, through corollary agreements, implement labor and environmental safeguards.

Why is NAFTA controversial?

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

Revision Of Rajya Sabha Rules

Why in news?

A two-member committee (**Agnihotri committee**) has been appointed to make recommendations for revising the rules of the Upper House.

About rules of procedure

- **Article 118(1)** of the Constitution gives the two Houses of Parliament the power to make rules to regulate their functioning.
- Thus, both houses have their own rules of procedure that govern various functions of the house including meetings, summons to members, oaths, sitting of council, election of deputy chairman, arrangement of business, etc.
- These rules are the **bulwark of our parliamentary democracy**. For **Parliament to be effective** in its role, these rules require regular updating and strengthening.
- However, even after various amendments, in some cases, the provisions were merely carried forward. For example, the rules to discipline disorderly MPs are the same ones as before.

- **Need to balance completion of government business with discussions raised by other political parties** – As of now, the two Houses of Parliament meet mostly for transacting government business.
- **Need to overhaul accountability mechanisms** - The existing mechanisms, like Question Hour, for securing the government's accountability to Parliament have lost their edge.
- **Reducing the difference in two houses** - There are differences in provisions of Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha Rules in certain matters.

The two Houses of Parliament are responsible for the formulation of laws in the country thus being the basis of Democracy. Their better functioning requires better management, which in turn is a result of updated and well laid out set of rules for the functioning.

Need for revision of rules

- **Frequent disruption of parliamentary proceedings** - Over 120 working hours of a total of 165 were lost during the Budget session. Thus, there is a need to devise solutions for protecting the sanctity of parliamentary proceedings.
- **Increasing complexities and technicalities of the issues before Parliament** - In such an environment, the committee's suggestions for strengthening deliberations in the House will be crucial.

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Pacific Islands Forum

Context:

- The Pacific Islands Forum has been granted approval to establish a Permanent Observer Office at the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG).
- The Permanent Observer status would entrench the presence of the Blue Pacific region in, and strengthen its links to the United Nations organisations, including its specialised agencies, programmes, fund initiatives and joint programs.

About Pacific Islands Forum:

- Pacific Islands Forum, formerly (1971–2000) South Pacific Forum, organization established in 1971 to provide a setting for heads of government to discuss common issues and problems facing the independent and self-governing states of the South Pacific.
- It comprises 18 members: Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.
- In 2000 Forum leaders adopted the **Biketawa Declaration**, which was a response to regional political instability and which put forward a set of principles and actions for members to take to promote open, democratic, and clean government, as well as equal rights for citizens regardless of gender, race, colour, creed, or political belief.

United Nations Peacekeeping Course for African

Context:

- The third edition of the United Nations Peacekeeping Course for African Partners (UNPCAP) is being held in New Delhi.

About UNPCAP:

- The course is aimed to build and enhance the capacity of the African Troop Contributing Countries to the UN and to further train the trainers from these countries.
- The course is conducted by the Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping in India (CUNPK) in partnership with the US, the Indian Army said in a statement.
- The first and second editions of the course were held in New Delhi in 2016 and 2017, respectively.
- The training incorporates topics on operational and logistical matters, humanitarian issues, thematic topics, Blackboard and table Top exercises and mission briefs. The course is also targeted to assist the student officers to further train officers in their respective countries on the nuances of peacekeeping.

Role Of Governor In Hung Assembly

Why in news?

The role of governor came under question in recent Karnataka legislative assembly elections.

More about the news

- It came under question that whether Governor should call single largest party to form the government and prove its majority in the House or a post-poll alliance to form a majority that overcomes the single largest party and form the government
- **Article 164(1)** provides for the appointment of chief minister by governor. Supreme Court clarified that there is no qualification mentioned in article 164(1) and reading it with collective responsibility in 164(2), the only condition chief ministerial candidate need to satisfy is that he/she should be commanding majority in the house.
- But this discretionary power is being misused by governors. It may encourage horse trading of MLAs, defections against the spirit of tenth schedule and decline in public trust in the office of Governor.
- In case of Goa, Manipur and Mizoram, the single largest party was not given preference to form the government unlike in Karnataka. Thus, raising question mark on the role of Governor and also forcing Supreme Court to take cognizance of the issue.

Suggestions

- **Sarkaria Commission** and a constitutional bench judgement in *Rameshwar Prasad v Union of India*, 2005 held that:
 - o The party or combination of parties with widest support in the Legislative

Assembly should be called upon to form the Government.

- o If there is a pre-poll alliance or coalition, it should be treated as one political party and if such coalition obtains a majority, the leader of such coalition shall be called by the Governor to form the Government.
- o In case no party or pre-poll coalition has a clear majority, the Governor should select the CM in the order of preference indicated below:
 - ✓ The group of parties which had pre-poll alliance commanding the largest number.
 - ✓ The largest single party staking a claim to form the government with the support of others.
 - ✓ A post-electoral coalition with all partners joining the government.
 - ✓ A post-electoral alliance with some parties joining the government and the remaining supporting from outside.
- **M M Poonchi Commission** elaborated that the governor should follow “**constitutional conventions**” in a case of a hung Assembly.
- While **SR Bommai case** related to discretion of Governor does not apply to hung assembly but it laid emphasis on floor test in the house within 48 hours (although it can be extended to 15 days) so that legislature should decide the matter and Governor’s discretion should merely be a triggering point.

The Governor must be true to the oath of office and must ensure that the person he/she invites to be Chief Minister will be able to form a responsible and reasonably lasting government in the State. Even Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in his

speech described how a Governor should use his discretion not as “representative of a party” but as “the representative of the people as a whole of the State”.

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World Gold Council (WGC)

Context:

- As per WGC's 'Gold Demand Trends' report, the global gold demand fell by 7% to 973 tonne during the January- March period this year as compared to the same period last year mainly due to a decline in investment demand.

Highlights of the report:

- ETF inflows were down year-on-year.
- Investment in gold bars and coins was down.
- Jewelry demand was flat.
- Central banks bought more gold.
- Gold supply up 3 percent year-on-year.

About World Gold Council:

- The World Gold Council is the market development organisation for the gold industry. It works across all parts of the industry, from gold mining to investment, and their aim is to stimulate and sustain demand for gold.
- The World Gold Council is an association whose members comprise the world's leading gold mining companies. It helps to support its members to mine in a responsible way and developed the Conflict Free Gold Standard.
- Headquartered in the UK, they have offices in India, China, Singapore, Japan and the United States.

Asian Development Bank (ADB)

Context:

- 51st Annual Meeting of Asian Development Bank (ADB) is being held in Manila, Philippines. The Annual Meeting of the ADB Board of Governors is an opportunity to provide guidance on ADB administrative, financial, and operational directions.

About ADB:

- It is a regional development bank established on 22 August 1966 and is headquartered in Philippines. It aims to facilitate economic development of countries in Asia. It also aims for an Asia and Pacific free from poverty.

Membership:

- The bank admits the members of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP, formerly known as the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East) and non-regional developed countries.
- Currently, it has 67 members – of which 48 are from within Asia and the Pacific and 19 outside.

Voting:

- ADB was modelled closely on the World Bank, and has a similar weighted voting system where votes are distributed in proportion with member's capital subscriptions.

Funding:

- ADB raises funds through bond issues on the world's capital markets.
- ADB also rely on its members' contributions, retained earnings from its lending operations, and the repayment of loans.

- Japan holds the largest proportions of shares at 15.67%. The United States holds 15.56%, China holds 6.47%, India holds 6.36%, and Australia holds 5.81%.

Board of Governors:

- It is the highest policy-making body of the bank.
- It is composed of one representative from each member state.
- The Board of Governors also elect the bank's President who is the chairperson of the Board of Directors and manages ADB.
- The Alternate Board of Governors are nominated by Board of Governors of ADB's 67 to represent them at the Annual Meeting that meets formally once year to be held in a member country.

Loans:

It offers both Hard Loans and Soft loans. The ADB offers “hard” loans from ordinary capital resources (OCR) on commercial terms, and the Asian Development Fund (ADF) affiliated with the ADB extends “soft” loans from special fund resources with concessional conditions.

Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETBPS)

Why in news?

The ETPBS was recently used in Chengannur (Kerala) Assembly bypoll for service voters.

More about ETPBS

- It was developed by the Election Commission with the help of Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) to provide an alternative method of quick dispatch of Postal Ballot paper electronically (earlier delivered by post) to the entitled Service Voters.
- It uses QR codes for uniqueness of the Service Voters and the secrecy in transmission is ensured by the use of OTP and PIN.
- The postal ballots are delivered in **electronic data format** to voters on a **real time basis**. The voters can download the postal ballot and votes so cast would be received by the returning officer **through post**.
- It was first used in Nellithope by-elections in Puducherry in 2016.

Service Voter

As mentioned in Representation of People's Act, 1950, Service voters are:

- members of Armed Forces of the Union
- members of forces to which provisions of Army Act, 1950 applies.
- members of armed police force of a State and serving outside that state
- persons who are employed by GoI in a post outside India.

Permanent Residency Status scheme

Context:

- Recent report by the government shows that even after two years after it was launched, the Permanent Residency Status (PRS) scheme providing a host of facilities for foreigners who invest at least ₹10 crore under the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) route has not found a single applicant.

crores to be brought within 36 months.

- Further, the foreign investment should result in generating employment to at least 20 resident Indians every financial year.

Features of the PRS scheme:

- Under the Scheme, suitable provisions will be incorporated in the Visa Manual to provide for the grant of PRS to foreign investors.
- The PRS will be granted for a period of 10 years with multiple entry. This can be reviewed for another 10 years if the PRS holder has not come to adverse notice.
- PRS will serve as a multiple entry visa without any stay stipulation and PRS holders will be exempted from the registration requirements.
- PRS holders will be allowed to purchase one residential property for dwelling purpose.
- The spouse/ dependents of the PRS holder will be allowed to take up employment in private sector (in relaxation to salary stipulations for Employment Visa) and undertake studies in India.

The scheme will be applicable only to foreign investors fulfilling the prescribed eligibility conditions, his/her spouse and dependents.

These include:

- The foreign investor will have to invest a minimum of Rs. 10 crores to be brought within 18 months or Rs.25

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Trade facilitation pact in services

Context:

- India has pitched for inclusion of the trade facilitation pact on services in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) saying it would help promote growth of the global economy.

Background:

- On the lines of the trade facilitation pact in goods, India has submitted a detailed proposal to the WTO to negotiate a trade facilitation agreement in services (TFS). India is pitching for this pact as the sector contributes over 60% to the GDP and 28% to total employment.

About Trade Facilitation agreement in services:

- The TFS proposal aims at liberalising rules for movement of professionals and other steps to reduce transaction costs with a view to boost growth of the services sector.
- It will focus on issues like liberalised visa regime, long-term visas for business community and freer movement of professionals for the greater benefit of both India and the world, among others.

Key proposals:

- The proposed agreement would set provisions on all four modes of services supply of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS).
- For services supplied through “mode 3” (a foreign company setting up subsidiaries or branches to provide services in another country), it suggests streamlining the setting up of businesses through a “single

window”.

- For the cross-border movement of services suppliers (known as “mode 4”), it suggests simplifying work permit and visa procedures and ensuring that measures relating to taxation, fees and social security contributions do not unfairly disadvantage foreign service suppliers.
- Other suggestions include enhancing cooperation among authorities, facilitating cross-border data flows, and allowing WTO members to comment on measures before their entry into force. The proposal also foresees special and differential treatment for developing countries.

Need for Trade Facilitation in Services:

- The TFS Agreement, in conjunction with enhanced liberalization commitments, would help realize the fuller potential for trade in services.
- Global trade in services represents a contradiction in the macroeconomic sphere. It has about 70.5% of share in world GDP and 50.9% share in employment.
- However, relative to this, its share in global exports is lower than that of trade in goods, despite having a higher share in GDP. This dichotomy suggests that there are more barriers existing for trade in services as compared to trade in goods.

Way ahead:

- Given this context, and India’s ever-growing global services footprint, it is not surprising that the country has taken the initiative in moving for a TFS Agreement.

It is expected that the TFS Agreement, in conjunction with enhanced liberalization commitments, would help realize the fuller potential for trade in services. It would both complement and supplement the progressive liberalization of this. By moving the proposal for a TFS Agreement, India has opened the floor for negotiation for more interactive trade in services at the multilateral level.

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Iran Nuclear Deal

Context:

- US President Donald Trump has announced he is pulling out of the Iran nuclear deal. He described the agreement as “decaying and rotting”.

Background:

- The agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), has been on the rocks since Trump’s election, and the resulting climate of uncertainty spooked many large firms from doing business in Iran, thus diminishing the economic incentives that drew Iran to the agreement in the first place.

What is the Iran nuclear deal?

- Iran agreed to rein in its nuclear programme in a 2015 deal struck with the US, UK, Russia, China, France and Germany.
- Under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) Tehran agreed to significantly cut its stores of centrifuges, enriched uranium and heavy-water, all key components for nuclear weapons.
- The JCPOA established the Joint Commission, with the negotiating parties all represented, to monitor implementation of the agreement.

Why did Iran agree to the deal?

- It had been hit with devastating economic sanctions by the United Nations, United States and the European Union that are estimated to have cost it tens of billions of pounds a year in lost oil export revenues. Billions in overseas assets had also been frozen.

Why is US pulling out of the deal?

- Trump and opponents to the deal say it is flawed because it gives Iran

access to billions of dollars but does not address Iran’s support for groups the U.S. considers terrorists, like Hamas and Hezbollah. They note it also doesn’t curb Iran’s development of ballistic missiles and that the deal phases out by 2030. They say Iran has lied about its nuclear program in the past.

What about the other countries involved?

- The agreement was signed by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council: The United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia and China, plus Germany — and Iran. The deal was also enshrined in a UN Security Council resolution, incorporating it into international law.
- Some of the US’ closest allies, the UK, France and Germany, issued a statement expressing “regret and concern” about the decision, emphasizing Iran’s compliance with the deal and their “continuing commitment” to the deal. The leaders of those countries failed in their attempts to convince Trump to preserve the deal.
- Russia meanwhile said the deal was “new confirmation of Washington’s incompetence,” and underscored that the US, not Iran, is now technically in violation of the deal.

What happens next?

Experts believe that, should Iran choose to resume the enrichment of uranium, it could build a bomb within about a year. The sanctions, meanwhile, could take months to go into effect as the US government develops guidance for companies and banks.

Hague Convention

Context:

- A committee set up by the Centre to prepare a report on the issue of inter-country parental child abduction has questioned one of the basic principles of the Hague Convention by arguing that the return of the child to his or her habitual residence may not necessarily be in the best interest of the child. The Committee recently submitted its report to the Women and Child Development Ministry.

overlook the fact that a mother is the primary caregiver of the child.

Proposed draft law:

- The panel has prepared a draft law to safeguard the interest of the children, as well as those of the parents, particularly mothers. The proposed legislation lays down nine exceptions under which a child will not be returned to the country of habitual residence.
- The important conditions under which a child's return can be refused are — best interest of the child, domestic violence or mental or physical cruelty or harassment against the parent who fled with the child, the parent claiming the return of the child was not exercising the custody rights at the time of removal, and if there is a grave risk that the child would be exposed to physical or psychological harm.

Background:

- The Justice Rajesh Bindal Committee was set up last year to suggest a model legislation to safeguard the interest of the child as well those of the parents when an NRI (Non Resident Indian) marriage goes sour and one of the parents flees from one country to another with the child.
- In 2016, the government had decided not to be a signatory to the on the ground that it can be detrimental to the interest of the women fleeing an abusive marriage.

Significance of the Indian family system:

- The report highlights the importance of the “Indian family system” in ensuring the best interest of the child, seemingly to question the logic behind returning the child to a place of habitual residence outside India.
- With the older generation of womenfolk being home-makers, the households have great caregivers in terms of grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, etc., on either sides. A child, even if he may have stayed in some other country, would never be completely uprooted from the country of his parents' origin, who have families back home in India.

The issue of habitual residence:

- Under the treaty, there is the criterion of “habitual residence” of the child, which is used to determine whether the child was wrongfully removed by a parent as well as to seek the return of the child.
- The Committee feels that the concept of habitual residence is not synchronous with the best interest of the child. It is because returning a child to the place of habitual residence may result in sending the child to an inharmonious set-up as well as

About Hague Abduction Convention:

- The Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction or Hague Abduction Convention is a multilateral treaty developed by the Hague Conference on Private International Law (HCCH) that provides an expeditious method to return a child internationally abducted by a parent from one member country to another. The Convention entered into force between the signatories on 1 December 1983.
- The Convention was drafted to ensure the prompt return of children who have been abducted from their country of habitual residence or wrongfully retained in a contracting state not their country of habitual residence.
- The primary intention of the Convention is to preserve whatever status quo child custody arrangement existed immediately before an alleged wrongful removal or retention thereby deterring a parent from crossing international boundaries in search of a more sympathetic court.
- The Convention applies only to children under the age of 16.

A Global Environment Compact

Context:

- The UN General Assembly has adopted a resolution to set up a working group for negotiations aimed at creating a Global Pact for the Environment, a legally binding international instrument.

About the resolution:

- The resolution requests UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to submit to the General Assembly a report that identifies and assesses possible gaps in international environmental law and environment-related instruments with a view to strengthening their implementation.
- It decides to establish an ad hoc open-ended working group to consider the report, and if deemed necessary, to consider the scope, parameters and feasibility of a Global Pact for the Environment.
- The resolution requests the current president of the General Assembly to appoint two co-chairs of the working group — one from a developing country and one from a developed country — to oversee its consultations.

Key facts for Prelims:

- The resolution was sponsored by France and won the support of 143 countries.
- Iran, the Philippines, Russia, Syria, Turkey and the United States voted against it.
- Six other countries abstained while several states did not vote.

Mission Innovation

Context:

- The Mission Innovation Ministerial is being held at Malmo-Sweden. India is also taking part in the ministerial.

Mission Innovation:

- Mission Innovation is a global platform of 23 countries and European Union aimed at accelerating clean energy innovations through enhanced Government funding, greater public-private sector partnership and enhanced global cooperation.
- Mission Innovation is complemented by private sector-led investments of extraordinary levels of private capital in clean energy, focusing on early-stage innovations.
- As part of the initiative, participating countries have committed to seek to double their governments' clean energy research and development (R&D) investments over five years, while encouraging greater levels of private sector investment in transformative clean energy technologies. These additional resources will dramatically accelerate the availability of the advanced technologies that will define a future global energy mix that is clean, affordable, and reliable.
- Mission Innovation was announced on November 30, 2015, as world leaders came together in Paris to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change.
- **India is Founding Member of the Steering Committee** and also a Member of the two sub-groups: Joint research and Capacity Building and Private Sector Engagement.

Way ahead:

The power of innovation – driven by sustained public investment in research and development (R&D) coupled with business leadership – can push down costs further and bring fledgling ideas into the mainstream. Further reducing the cost of tomorrow's clean energy technologies, along with adoption of today's clean energy solutions, underpin global strategies to enhance global energy security, drive economic growth, bring life-changing energy services to the poor, and increase ambition in combatting climate change.

Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)

Context:

- Pakistan is hosting its first ever Shanghai Cooperation Organisation-Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (SCO- RATS) meeting in Islamabad. The participants of the meeting include the executive committee of the SCO and of RATS along with legal advisors from eight member states.
- The main agenda is to talk over the issue related to terrorist threats in the region and how to overcome them.

About RATS:

- The Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), headquartered in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, is a permanent organ of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) which serves to promote cooperation of member states against the three evils of terrorism, separatism and extremism.
- The Head of RATS is elected to a three-year term. Each member state also sends a permanent representative to RATS.

Brahmos Missile

Context:

- BrahMos, supersonic cruise missile was recently successfully test fired from the Integrated Test Range (ITR), Balasore, Odisha.

Key facts:

- BrahMos is a joint venture between DRDO of India and NPOM of Russia.
- The highly versatile BrahMos has been operationalised in the Indian Army, Indian Navy and Indian Air Force.
- BrahMos is the first Indian missile whose life has been extended from 10 years to 15 years. Life extension of the missile system is yet another step that helps in reducing the cost of BrahMos.
- BrahMos became the first heavy missile system in the world to be integrated successfully on a Sukhoi-30 MKI frontline fighter jet of the Indian Air Force (IAF). The missile can be fired from land, from ships (both vertical and inclined configuration), under-water, and from air.
- BrahMos initially had a range of 300-km, but after India became a part of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), the range was extended to 450-km.
- BrahMos can attain a cruise speed of 2.8 Mach and can carry a conventional warhead of almost 300 kg.

be used for chemical, biological, and nuclear attacks.

- The MTCR regime urges its members, which include most of the world's key missile manufacturers, to restrict their exports of missiles and related technologies capable of carrying a 500-kilogram payload at least 300 kilometers or delivering any type of weapon of mass destruction.

About MTCR:

- Established in April 1987, the voluntary MTCR aims to limit the spread of ballistic missiles and other unmanned delivery systems that could

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RIMPAC Naval Exercises

Context:

- The United States has decided to disinvite China from participating in the Rim of the Pacific naval exercise, held near Hawaii. The decision to withdraw the invitation extended to China was made in response to Chinese activity in the South China Sea.

and thus perhaps act as a deterrent to further aggressive action.

- **Observer nations:** Several observer nations are usually invited, including China, Ecuador, India, Mexico, the Philippines, and Russia. While not contributing any ships, observer nations are involved in RIMPAC at the strategic level and use the opportunity to prepare for possible full participation in the future.

Background:

- China first participated in the RIMPAC exercises in 2014, as noted by The Diplomat. Back then China's participation was lauded and viewed as a step toward cooperation.
- In Asia's current climate, these exercises are especially important. Tension in both the South China Sea and East China Sea tends to increase during summer months, when activity is on the rise due to the presence of fishing and trade vessels.

What is RIMPAC?

- RIMPAC is the world's largest set of international maritime war games. The exercises occur every two years and are led by the U.S. Navy's Pacific Fleet, headquartered in Honolulu, Hawaii.
- They are seen as a unique opportunity for Pacific Rim nations to cooperate as they train and work together to solve problems. Also, the games are seen as a way of ensuring open access to important shipping lanes in Asia's increasingly contested waters. The exercises are also a display of power — in the sense that participants are able to understand the technological capabilities of other participants —

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INDOPACOM**Context:**

- The US military has renamed its Pacific Command to US-Indo Pacific Command, underlining the growing connectivity between India and Pacific Oceans. The symbolic move came in recognition of the growing importance of the Indian Ocean in US strategic thinking.

What necessitated this move?

- The renaming reflects the existing geographic coverage of the command and the acknowledgment of the increasing connectedness between the two oceans — Pacific and India —, but also, more broadly, the process of India’s re-entry into the US government’s “Asia” orbit.”

Background:

- Formerly known as United States Pacific Command, it is a unified combatant command of the United States Armed Forces responsible for the Indo-Asia-Pacific region. It is the oldest and largest of the unified combatant commands.
- Its commander, the senior U.S. military officer in the Pacific, is responsible for military operations in an area which encompasses more than 100 million square miles, or roughly 52% of the Earth’s surface, stretching from the waters off the west coast of the United States to the west coast of India, and from the Arctic to the Antarctic.
- The Commander reports to the President of the United States through the Secretary of Defense and is supported by Service component and

subordinate unified commands, including U.S. Army Pacific, U.S. Pacific Fleet, U.S. Pacific Air Forces, U.S. Marine Forces Pacific, U.S. Forces Japan, U.S. Forces Korea, Special Operations Command Korea, and Special Operations Command Pacific.

Significance of INDOPACOM:

- U.S. Indo-Pacific Command is critical for “a region open to investment and free, fair and reciprocal trade, not bound by any nation’s predatory economics or threat of coercion, for the Indo-Pacific has many belts and many roads.”
- Also, renaming the combatant command is strategically significant, in that it reflects a recognition within the U.S. government that East Asia and the Indian Ocean Region are gradually becoming a single competitive space. It’s also shrewd marketing — a way of reaffirming to New Delhi and to the rest of the world that India is, and ought to be, an indispensable pole of the future Asian order.

Way ahead:

- The US move comes in the wake of a series of measures by China that have raised tensions in the South China Sea. China claims almost all of the South China Sea. Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan have counter claims over the area. The US also rejects China’s claims of ownership of the area.
- However, the effectiveness of an Indo-Pacific defense and security strategy and US-India cooperation

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will still depend on the level of discussion and coordination across combatant commands and bureaus.

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Umang App

Context:

- EPFO (Employees’ Provident Fund Organisation) has announced the introduction of a new service for pensioners through the Umang App.
- Under the new facility, a pensioner can view his pension passbook on the app.

About Umang app:

- Umang is an initiative to promote Digital India program. The term — **Umang** stands for **Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance** and is envisaged to make e-governance. The application is developed by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (**MeitY**) and National e-Governance Division (**NeGD**) in order to drive **Mobile Governance** in India.
- The key goal of launching this application is to allow the citizens of India do everything online, at just a click – be it making a passport, Aadhaar or Pan, book a gas cylinder, know about your Provident fund account or resolving an Aadhaar related. Umang app basically provides a unified approach where you can install one application to avail multiple government services — almost over 100 of them.

SWAYAM

Context:

- The Ministry of Human Resource Development has launched a major and unique initiative of online professional development of 1.5 million higher education faculty using the MOOCs platform SWAYAM.
- In the first phase, 75 discipline-specific National Resource Centres have been identified which are tasked to prepare online training material with focus on latest developments in the discipline, new & emerging trends, pedagogical improvements and methodologies for transacting revised curriculum.

SWAYAM:

- It is an online interactive learning platform that provides, not only video lectures, reading material but also assignments/quizzes that could end up in securing credits after completing the assessment system.
- More than 400 Courses are available on SWAYAM covering all the engineering and non-engineering subjects at undergraduate and post-graduate levels.
- The UGC has already issued Regulation that allows transfer of credits earned through the courses done through SWAYAM into the academic record of the students.
- It is now possible for the students and others to take courses of the prestigious IITs or IIMs without formally studying there.
- The platform has been constructed by Microsoft with totally indigenous efforts.

PRAGATI

Context:

- The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, recently chaired his twenty-sixth interaction through PRAGATI – the ICT-based, multi-modal platform for Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation.
- The 25 PRAGATI meetings so far have seen a cumulative review of 227 projects with a total investment of over Rs. 10 lakh crore. Resolution of Public Grievances has also been reviewed across a range of sectors.

About PRAGATI:

What is it?

- PRAGATI is a unique integrating and interactive platform. The platform is aimed at addressing common man's grievances, and simultaneously monitoring and reviewing important programmes and projects of the Government of India as well as projects flagged by State Governments.
- of the ground level situation. It is also an innovative project in e-governance and good governance.
- It is a three-tier system (PMO, Union Government Secretaries, and Chief Secretaries of the States).
- Issues to be flagged before the PM are picked up from the available database regarding Public Grievances, ongoing Programmes and pending Projects.
- The system will ride on, strengthen and re-engineer the data bases of the CPGRAMS for grievances, Project Monitoring Group (PMG) and the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. PRAGATI provides an interface and platform for all these three aspects.
- The system has been designed in-house by the PMO team with the help of National Informatics Center (NIC).

Unique features:

- The PRAGATI platform uniquely bundles three latest technologies: Digital data management, video-conferencing and geo-spatial technology.
- It also offers a unique combination in the direction of cooperative federalism since it brings on one stage the Secretaries of Government of India and the Chief Secretaries of the States.
- With this, the Prime Minister is able to discuss the issues with the concerned Central and State officials with full information and latest visuals

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PRAAPTI app

Context:

- In a bid to rein in errant distribution companies (discoms) that delay payments to power generation companies, the Power Ministry has launched the Praapti web portal, that aims at bringing transparency in power sector of India.

About PRAAPTI:

- PRAAPTI, Payment Ratification and Analysis in Power procurement for bringing Transparency in Invoicing of generators, will contain all details related to payments.
- The app will enable citizens to monitor the payments that are being made to power generation companies. The app will also allow its users to know the details related to the payments made by the discoms to the power generation company and when it was made.
- PRAAPTI will also enable the consumers to know the performance of their discoms in terms of payments that are being made to the generation companies. Later, the performance of the discoms will be ratified on the basis of payments that were made.

Special Category Status for Bihar

Context:

- CM Nitish Kumar has appealed for Special Category Status for Bihar. He has highlighted various issues impeding Bihar's development and implored the central government for granting the Special Category Status (SCS) for the state.

What's the issue?

- Six states — Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Jharkhand, Orissa and Rajasthan — at different points in time have been demanding special category status. However, the Inter-Ministerial Group had rejected Bihar's plea to be considered a special category State.

Reasons for demand:

- It is observed that Bihar not only had the highest number, but also the highest proportion of backward districts compared with any other state. As many as 36 out of 38 districts in Bihar were backward as per the rankings of Inter Ministry Task Group (IMTG). It is also a fact that Bihar has occupied the last rank in terms of real per capita GSDP among all States in all the years 2000 through 2012. Bihar accounted for roughly 2.8 % of the GDP but 8.2% of the country's population during 2009-12.

What is Special Category Status?

- There is **no provision of SCS in the Constitution**; the Central government extends financial assistance to states that are at a comparative disadvantage against others. The concept of SCS emerged in 1969 when the Gadgil formula (that determined Central

assistance to states) was approved.

Some prominent guidelines for getting SCS status:

- Must be economically backward with poor infrastructure.
- The states must be located in hilly and challenging terrain.
- They should have low population density and significant tribal population.
- Should be strategically situated along the borders of neighboring countries.

What kind of assistance do SCS States receive?

- The SCS States used to receive block grants based on the Gadgil-Mukherjee formula, which effectively allowed for nearly 30 per cent of the Total Central Assistance to be transferred to SCS States as late as 2009-10.
- Following the constitution of the NITI Aayog (after the dissolution of the Planning Commission) and the recommendations of the Fourteenth Finance Commission (FFC), Central plan assistance to SCS States has been subsumed in an increased devolution of the divisible pool to all States (from 32% in the 13th FC recommendations to 42%) and do not any longer appear in plan expenditure.
- The FFC also recommended variables such as “forest cover” to be included in devolution, with a weightage of 7.5 in the criteria and which could benefit north-eastern States that were previously given SCS assistance. Besides, assistance to Centrally Sponsored Schemes for SCS States was given with 90% Central share and 10% State share.

When was the first Special Category status bestowed?

The NDC first accorded SCS in 1969 to Jammu and Kashmir, Assam and Nagaland. Over the years, eight more states were added to the list — Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Sikkim, Tripura and, finally, in 2010, Uttarakhand. Until 2014-15, SCS meant these 11 states received a variety of benefits and sops..

Way ahead:

Considering special status to any new State will result in demands from other States and dilute the benefits further. It is also not economically beneficial for States to seek special status as the benefits under the current dispensation are minimal. States facing special problems will be better off seeking a special package.

‘Bharat Inclusion Seed Fund’**Context:**

- Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad’s (IIMA’s) centre for innovation, incubation, and entrepreneurship (CIIE) has launched ‘Bharat Inclusion Initiative’.

About Bharat Inclusion Initiative:

- The Bharat Inclusion Initiative aims to provide a continuum of solutions to inclusion-focused tech entrepreneurs across the pre-incubation, seed and scale-up stage and help them jump to the next orbit.
- It is a \$25 million initiative that will look to mentor and invest in start-ups in the early stage and seed segment over the next three-four years.
- The fund will look at start-ups in areas such as financial inclusion, livelihood, education, agriculture, and health.
- The initiative received an initial pledge of \$12.5 million from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, and Omidyar Network.

Indian Petroleum & Explosives Safety Service (IPESS)

Context:

- The Union Cabinet has approved the Cadre review and formation of Group ‘A’ service of the technical cadre of Petroleum & Safety Organization (PESO) in the name of Indian Petroleum & Explosives Safety Service (IPESS).

Significance of the move:

- To remove acute stagnation in all grades and uplift the morale of the workforce and enhance its performance, it has been decided to form Group ‘A’ Service of the technical cadre of PESO in the name of IPESS and restructure the newly-formed service.
- The measure will enhance the capacity and efficiency of the organization and it will also enhance career progression of its Group ‘A’ officers.

About PESO:

- PESO is a subordinate office under Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion (DIPP).
- The organization is serving the nation since 1898 as a nodal agency for regulating safety of substances such as explosives, compressed gases and petroleum.
- The organization deals with wide range of subjects related to explosives, petroleum, compressed gases, pressure vessels, gas cylinders, cross-country pipelines, Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), Compressed Natural Gas (CNG), Auto Liquefied Petroleum Gas (Auto LPG) etc.

Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission

Context:

- In a step that would spare animals from suffering due to drug experiments, the Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission has approved modern, animal-free tests for drug manufacturers.

before the product is approved for marketing. In this, mice or guinea pigs are injected with the vaccine.

Key facts:

- In its latest guidelines on tests for drugs manufactured and marketed in India, the IPC has replaced the pyrogen test carried out on rabbits and the abnormal toxicity test carried out on guinea pigs and mice with tests that can be done in test tubes.
- With the Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission's new mandate, the pyrogen test will be replaced by a bacterial endotoxin test or a monocyte activation test which can be carried out in test tubes.

About IPC:

- Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC) is an Autonomous Institution of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- IPC is created to set standards of drugs in the country. It's basic function is to update regularly the standards of drugs commonly required for treatment of diseases prevailing in this region.
- It publishes official documents for improving Quality of Medicines by way of adding new and updating existing monographs in the form of Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP). It further promotes rational use of generic medicines by publishing National Formulary of India.

Background:

- People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India has been pushing for doing away with the cruel methods of testing on animals for the past several years.

Key facts for Prelims:

- The pyrogen test** is carried out to check impurity or substance that can cause adverse side-effects. For the test, the drug is injected into a rabbit and the animal is closely observed for feverish symptoms.
- The abnormal toxicity test** is carried out to check potential hazardous biological contamination in vaccine formulations. This batch test is done

TRIFED

Context:

- Tribal Co-operative Marketing Development Federation (TRIFED) of Ministry of Tribal Affairs has operationalised Retail Inventory Software (RIS) in all its Tribes India Outlets, Regional Offices and Head Office for inventory control.

of the tribal products.

It also organizes exhibitions like National Tribal Craft Expo called “Aadi Mahotsav” etc. in which it promotes and markets tribal products.

Key facts:

- The electronic mode of system has been made available at all Regional Offices and Outlets, streamlining the entire retail operations from purchases upto sales by automating the transaction process and tracking important purchase, stocks and sales data.
- Implementation of RIS software will bring greater transparency and control over various transactions under Retail sale.

About TRIFED:

- TRIFED is an apex organisation at National Level and functioning under the administrative control of Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

What it does ?

- TRIFED is serving the interests of Tribals, who are engaged in collection of NTFP and making of Tribal Art & Handicraft Products for their livelihood so as to ensure better remunerative price for their products as well as for the socio-economic betterment through Self Help Groups, Empanelled NGOs, State level Tribal Development Corporations, Forest Development Corporations for undertaking marketing development

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Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR)

Context:

The Government of India has carried out an Amendment to the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules, 1961 substituting “Directorate General of Trade Remedies” in place of “Directorate General of Anti-Dumping and Allied Duties” in Department of Commerce.

- The creation of DGTR will also provide a level playing field to the domestic industry. In the last three years, India initiated more than 130 anti-dumping/countervailing duty/safeguard cases to deal with the rising incidences of unfair trade practices and to provide a level playing field to the domestic industry.

Key facts:

- The DGTR will function as an attached office of Department of Commerce. The recommendation of DGTR for imposition of Anti-dumping, countervailing & Safeguard duties would be considered by the Department of Revenue.
- The DGTR will be a professionally integrated organisation with multi-spectrum skill sets emanating from officers drawn from different services and specialisations.

Functions of DGTR:

- DGTR will deal with Anti-dumping, CVD and Safeguard measures.
- It will also provide trade defence support to our domestic industry and exporters in dealing with increasing instances of trade remedy investigations instituted against them by other countries.

Need for a unified umbrella authority:

- Presently, the trade defence mechanism in India lacks optimality and takes more than a year to complete proceedings in cases pertaining to unfair trade practices. Currently, the Directorate General of Anti-dumping and Allied Duties (DGAD) deals with anti-dumping and CVD cases, Directorate General of Safeguards (DGS) deals with safeguard measures and DGFT deals with quantitative restriction (QR) safeguards.
- The DGTR will bring DGAD, DGS and Safeguards (QR) functions of DGFT into its fold by merging them into one single national entity. This provides comprehensive and swift trade defence mechanism in India.

“AYUSH” finds a place in English Language

Context:

- The Commission for Scientific and Technical Terminology has decided to adopt the word ‘AYUSH’ in Hindi and English languages for scientific and technical purposes.
- As approved by the Commission, the word ‘ayush’ will have the meaning “Traditional and Non-Conventional Systems of Health Care and Healing which include Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa Rigpa, Homoeopathy etc.

Background:

- The “AYUSH” became popular as the acronym for five traditional and complementary systems of medicine, namely Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy and successfully adopted and used in all Government communications.

Implications:

- This decision will give a boost to India’s efforts to find a place for the Indian Systems of Healthcare in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) of the World Health Organization. The Indian systems finding a place in ICD will lead to their international acceptance, increased rigor of research in them and their over-all development.

About International Classification of Diseases (ICD):

The International Classification of Diseases is the standard diagnostic tool for epidemiology, health management, and clinical purposes. This includes the analysis of the general health

situation of population groups. It is used to monitor the incidence and prevalence of diseases and other health problems, providing a picture of the general health situation of countries and populations.

- The first international classification edition, known as the International List of Causes of Death, was adopted by the International Statistical Institute in 1893. WHO was entrusted with the ICD at its creation in 1948. The ICD is revised periodically and is currently in its 10th revision.

Uses of ICD:

- Uses include monitoring of the incidence and prevalence of diseases, observing reimbursements and resource allocation trends, and keeping track of safety and quality guidelines. They also include the counting of deaths as well as diseases, injuries, symptoms, reasons for encounter, factors that influence health status, and external causes of disease.

Facts for Prelims:

Commission for Scientific and Technical Terminology:

The Commission for Scientific & Technical Terminology (CSTT) was set up on December 21, 1960 by a resolution of Government of India under the proviso to Clause (4) of Article 344 of the Constitution with the objective to evolve and define scientific and technical terms in Hindi and all Indian languages; publish glossaries, definitional dictionaries, encyclopaedia.

Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH)

Context:

- Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) is engaged in restoration works of a trove of more than 600 pages of rare Tibetan manuscripts which contains Buddha's teachings written in gold letters. The restoration work is being carried out at Mak Dhog Monastery in West Bengal.

Facts:

- The manuscripts contain the *ancient Tibetan text called Gyetongba*, which contains teachings of Buddhism. The manuscripts are in the *Tibetan script Sambhota*, named after its inventor.

About INTACH:

- INTACH is an autonomous non-governmental Indian non-profit society that seeks to preserve Indian culture and heritage. It was founded in 1984.
- In 2007, the United Nations awarded INTACH a special consultative status with United Nations Economic and Social Council.

NCDRC

Context:

- Former Supreme Court judge Justice R K Agrawal has been appointed the President of the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC).

Statutory provisions:

- **Section 21** of Consumer Protection Act, 1986 posits that the National Consumer shall have jurisdiction to entertain a complaint valued more than one crore and also have Appellate and Revisional jurisdiction from the orders of State Commissions or the District fora as the case may be.
- **Section 23** of Consumer Protection Act, 1986, provides that any person aggrieved by an order of NCDRC, may prefer an Appeal against such order to Supreme Court of India within a period of 30 days.

About NCDRC:

- The National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC), India is a quasi-judicial commission in India which was set up in 1988 under the Consumer Protection Act of 1986.
- The commission is headed by a sitting or retired judge of the Supreme Court of India.

Citizenship Bill

Context:

- People in Assam have been protesting against the granting of Indian citizenship to Hindu foreigners as the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016 began its hearing in Assam. Protesters say the move would threaten the existence of the indigenous people of Assam. They also see it as a violation of the provisions of the Assam Accord of 1985.

communities in the three neighbouring countries, such as Jews, Bahais etc.

WHY ARE PEOPLE IN ASSAM NOT HAPPY ABOUT IT ?

- The Citizenship Amendment Bill has not been sitting well with the Assamese as it contradicts the Assam Accord of 1985, which clearly states that illegal migrants heading in from Bangladesh after March 25, 1971, would be deported.

WHAT IS THE CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT BILL 2016 ?

- The Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016 seeks to allow illegal migrants from certain minority communities in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan eligible for Indian citizenship. In other words, it amends the Citizenship Act of 1955.
- The Bill provides that the registration of Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders may be cancelled if they violate any law.

Assam Accord:

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

WHAT DOES IT WANT ?

- The Citizenship Amendment Bill seeks to allow illegal migrants belonging to the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian religious communities coming from Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan to not be imprisoned or deported.
- It also appeals for the minimum years of residency in India to apply for citizenship to be lessened from at least 11 to six years for such migrants.
- The Bill, however, does not extend to illegal Muslim migrants. It also does not talk about other minority

ALIMCO

Context:

- Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD-Divyangjan Shashaktikaran Vibhag), Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation of India (ALIMCO) for the Financial Year 2018-19. It covers major developments to be achieved in this year for the Empowerment of Divyangjan of the country.

About ALIMCO:

- ALIMCO is a “Not For Profit” Central Public Sector Undertaking working under the administrative control of Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment.
- For past 40 years, it has been relentlessly manufacturing various types of aids and appliances on mass scale to meet the requirements of PwDs including orthopedically, visual and hearing impaired etc.
- Since its inception, it has been serving on an average around two lakhs of disabled population every year and has supplied 42 lakhs of aids & appliances (approx.).

Need for their empowerment:

A country can truly progress only when it is able to build an all-inclusive society, in which equal opportunities are provided for the growth and development of Persons with Disabilities so that they can lead productive, safe and dignified life.

Overcrowding In Prisons

Context:

- The Supreme Court has expressed concern about overcrowding in prisons across the country, in some cases beyond 150 per cent of the capacity, and asked all the high courts to consider the issue as it involves “violation of human rights”. The court has requested the chief justices of the high courts to take up the matter as a suo- motu writ petition.
- The Centre apprised the court that steps were being taken to encourage setting up of ‘open prisons’ and a model uniform rules for the administration of open correctional institutions have already been framed.

What are open prisons?

- Semi-open prisons or open prisons allow convicts to work outside the jail premises and earn a livelihood and return in the evening. The concept was brought in to assimilate the convicts with society and reduce the psychological pressure and lack of confidence they faced lack of confidence in returning to lives outside prison.

Background:

- Overcrowding is one of the biggest problems faced by prison inmates. It results in poor hygiene and lack of sleep among other problems. More than 65% of the undertrials spend three months to five years in jail before getting bail. A fourth of all the under trials have been under detention for more than a year.

Management of prisons:

- The management of prisons falls exclusively under the domain of the state government, as per the seventh schedule of the constitution. In every state, the prison administrative machinery works under the chief of prisons who is a senior ranking IPS officer.

Need for reforms:

- NHRC figures show that prisoners cut off from family and friends had a 50% more chance of committing suicide than those outside. The average suicide rate among the general public for this period is 11 (per 100,000) whereas the average suicide rate in prison is 16.9 (per 100,000). In other words, the average suicide rate in prisons is over 50% more than in normal conditions.
- Indian prisons face three long-standing structural constraints: overcrowding, thanks to a high percentage of undertrials in the prison population, understaffing and underfunding. The inevitable outcome is sub-human living conditions, poor hygiene, and violent clashes between the inmates and jail authorities.
- Besides, while 33% of the total requirement of prison officials still lies vacant, almost 36% of vacancy for supervising officers is still unfulfilled. In the absence of adequate prison staff, overcrowding of prisons leads to rampant violence and other criminal activities inside the jails.

Way ahead:

Indian jails have often been dubbed as a university for grooming criminals due to pathetic and inhumane conditions. In the absence of a robust Whistleblower Protection Act and structural changes to address the issues

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of overcrowding and understaffing, India’s prisons will continue to be heaven for politically connected criminals and hell for socio-economically disadvantaged undertrials, some regular media uproars notwithstanding.

Fundamental rights of prisoners cannot be placed in the back-burner and the Centre and the states need to be more pro-active in sensitising staff about the need to treat prisoners as humanely as possible.

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Senior Citizen draft Bill

Context:

- The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has drafted the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizen Draft Bill, 2018, that will amend the 2007 version of the legislation to expand its scope and provide for more stringent penalties.

Key provisions in the Bill:

- The Bill enhances the jail term for those found abandoning or abusing their parents, 60 years or older, to six months from the existing three months.
- The Bill expands the definition of children, which currently refers to only biological children and grandchildren, to include daughter-in-law and son-in-law and also adopted/step-children.
- It extends the definition of maintenance beyond provision of food, clothing, housing, health care to include “safety and security” of the parent.
- As per the Bill, senior citizens can also approach a Maintenance Tribunal in case their children neglect or refuse to maintain them. In such cases, the draft Bill states that the Tribunal can order the children or, in case the person is childless, the relative to pay a monthly maintenance to the senior citizen. The amount would be decided by taking into account the standard of living of the senior citizen and the financial situation of both the parties.
- The Bill proposes to make monthly maintenance amount variable as people who earn more, can afford to shell out a higher amount for the upkeep of their parents.
- The Bill also introduces a punitive measure of up to one month imprisonment in case the monthly allowance remains unpaid.
- Currently, various government and private schemes for insurance/health, housing and travel, have varied cut-off

age for offering benefits meant for senior citizens. The Bill mandates the uniform age across schemes should be 60 years.

- The Bill will require the government to establish and run at least one Senior Citizen Care Home in every district in the country.
- As per the Bill, if parents transfer property to their children on the condition that they take care of them, and this clause is breached, the transfer of property will be deemed to be “made by fraud or coercion or under undue influence” and a tribunal can order it to be transferred back to the parent.

Elderly as a resource:

- The elderly should be seen as a blessing, not a burden. The elderly are becoming the fastest growing, but underutilized resource available to humanity. Rather than putting them aside, physically (and mentally), to be cared for separately, they should be integrated into the lives of communities where they can make a substantial contribution to improving social conditions.
- The benefits of turning the ‘problem’ of the elderly into a ‘solution’ for other social problems is being demonstrated in several countries.

Way ahead:

The elderly are the fastest growing, underutilized resource that humanity has to address many other problems. Re-integration of the elderly into communities may save humanity from mindlessly changing into a technology-driven ‘Industry 4.0’ which futurists are projecting: an economy of robots producing things for each other. Investing a little to engage the elderly in communities can improve the health and well-being of the elderly. It can also improve the health and well-being of communities.

Van Dhan Vikas Kendras

Context:

- Ministry of Tribal Affairs is planning to expand Van Dhan Vikas Kendras in Tribal Districts across the country.

Implementation:

- The scheme will be implemented through Ministry of Tribal Affairs as Nodal Department at the Central Level and TRIFED as Nodal Agency at the National Level.
- At State level, the State Nodal Agency for MFPs and the District collectors are envisaged to play a pivot role in scheme implementation at grassroot level.
- Locally the Kendras are proposed to be managed by a Managing Committee (an SHG) consisting of representatives of Van Dhan SHGs in the cluster.
- As per the plan, TRIFED will facilitate establishment of MFP-led multi-purpose Van Dhan Vikas Kendras, a cluster of 10 SHGs comprising of 30 tribal MFP gatherers each, in the tribal areas.
- Minor Forest Produce (MFP) is a major source of livelihood for tribals living in forest areas. The importance of MFPs for this section of the society can be gauged from the fact that around 100 million forest dwellers depend on MFPs for food, shelter, medicines and cash income.
- It provides them critical subsistence during the lean seasons, particularly for primitive tribal groups such as hunter gatherers, and the landless. Tribals derive 20-40% of their annual income from MFP on which they spend major portion of their time.
- This activity has strong linkage to women's financial empowerment as most of the MFPs are collected and used/sold by women. MFP sector has the potential to create about 10 million workdays annually in the country.

About Van Dhan Vikas Kendras initiative:

- The initiative aims to promote MFPs-centric livelihood development of tribal gatherers and artisans.
- It mainstreams the tribal community by promoting primary level value addition to MFP at grassroots level.
- Through this initiative, the share of tribals in the value chain of Non-Timber Forest Produce is expected to rise from the present 20% to around 60%.

Significance of MFP:

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Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram (PMJVK)

Context:

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved the proposal for renaming and restructuring of Multi-sectoral Development Programme (MsDP) as Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram (PMJVK). CCEA has also approved its continuation during the remaining period of the 14th Finance Commission.

Background:

- Multi-sectoral Development Programme (MsDP) was launched in the year 2008-09 in 90 identified Minority Concentration Districts (MCDs) having at least 25% minority population and below national average with respect to one or both of the backwardness parameters with the objective of developing assets for socio-economic and basic amenities.
- MsDP has been identified as one of the Core of the Core Schemes under National Development Agenda in the Report of the Sub-Group of Chief Ministers on Rationalization of Centrally Sponsored Schemes, which was constituted by NITI Aayog.
- MsDP has been designed primarily to address the developmental gaps/deficits in identified backward minority concentration areas by topping up of existing Centrally Sponsored Schemes of various Central ministries/departments without any change in the norms, guidelines and the funding pattern.

areas has been done on the basis of presence of substantial population of notified Minority Communities based on Census, 2011.

- The restructured programme would provide better socio economic infrastructure facilities to the minority communities particularly in the field of education, health & skill development as compared to the present situation, which would further lead to lessening of the gap between the national average and the minority communities with regard to backwardness parameters.

States/Districts covered:

Moreover, the scheme will also be implemented in Backward Clusters of Minority Concentration Villages (CoMCV). These CoMCV will be identified on the proposal of the States/UTs as per criteria of PMJVK.

About PMJVK:

- The Programme aims to address development deficits in the identified minority concentration areas. The identification of minority concentration

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Gujarat to offer PNG subsidy

Context:

Gujarat is planning to launch the new PNG/LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) Sahay Yojana—an extension to the Ujjwala Yojana.

Key facts:

- The scheme for select urban areas will supplement Ujjwala for BPL-AAY households not covered under Ujjwala to help supply households with clean fuel.
- As per the scheme, the government will pay Rs 1,600 as one-time subsidy per connection and Rs1,725 as loan to customers opting for a new PNG connection. As a result, a beneficiary will have to pay only Rs118 to get a new connection and a refundable security deposit of Rs50 per month for a period of 100 months.
- The pipeline infrastructure and maintenance charges will be borne by city gas distribution companies.

About the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:

- Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana aims to provide LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) connections to poor households.

Implementation:

- Under the scheme, an adult woman member of a below poverty line family identified through the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) is given a deposit-free LPG connection with financial assistance of Rs 1,600 per connection by the Centre.
- Eligible households will be identified in consultation with state governments and Union territories.
- The scheme is being implemented by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.

What makes LPG adoption necessary?

- About 75 crore Indians, especially women and girls, are exposed to severe household air pollution (HAP) from the use of solid fuels such as biomass, dung cakes and coal for cooking. A report from the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare places HAP as the second leading risk factor contributing to India's disease burden.
- According to the World Health Organization, solid fuel use is responsible for about 13% of all mortality and morbidity in India (measured as Disability-Adjusted Life Years), and causes about 40% of all pulmonary disorders, nearly 30% of cataract incidences, and over 20% each of ischemic heart disease, lung cancer and lower respiratory infection.

DNA profiling Bill

Context:

- The Supreme Court has considered the submission of the Centre that it would move a Bill in the upcoming Parliament session for DNA profiling to enable authorities to maintain records of unidentified and unclaimed dead bodies or missing persons.

Background:

- The government was responding to a PIL petition on the use of DNA profiling for identifying unclaimed bodies, especially to match them with old cases of missing persons.

Human DNA Profiling Bill:

- The Centre's Human DNA Profiling Bill, 2015, was prepared by the Department of Biotechnology and the Hyderabad-based Centre for DNA-Fingerprinting and Diagnostics.
- Several organisations and individuals, however, raised concerns that the bill gave sweeping powers to government to mine the database and use it for purposes beyond just solving crime.

Highlights of the Human DNA Profiling Bill:

- The bill proposes to allow collection of samples from private parts of human body for DNA profiling and data preservation

with the approval of a regulatory body.

- It suggests that a National DNA Profiling Board and a National DNA Bank be set up in Hyderabad, with every state having a regional DNA data bank. The DNA Data Bank would maintain records of samples found at crime scenes, or from suspects, offenders, missing persons, volunteers, etc.
- The bill also makes it clear that no DNA Laboratory shall undertake DNA profiling without the prior approval of the DNA Board.
- If a foreign country requests DNA profiling, the DNA Bank will coordinate through CBI or a concerned department.
- The bill mandates that the DNA profiles or samples be kept confidential, and they should be used only for establishing identity of a person and nothing else.
- Government investigation agencies and judiciary, among others, can seek information from Data Banks. For unauthorized use of data, a stringent punishment is provided.

Law commission report:

- Last year, the Law Commission of India, in its 271st report, prepared the draft Bill named The DNA Based Technology (Use and Regulation) Bill, 2017 after examining various judicial pronouncements and constitutional provisions.

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- It however had also flagged that privacy concerns and the ethics involved in this scientific collection of data were very high. The Commission said the procedure for DNA profiling, if given statutory recognition, should be done legitimately as per constitutional provisions.

Highlights of the DNA Based Technology (Use and Regulation) Bill, 2017:

- **DNA profiling Board:** Constitution of a DNA Profiling Board, a statutory body to undertake functions such as laying down procedures and standards to establish DNA laboratories and grant accreditation to such laboratories; and advising the concerned ministries/departments of the Central and state governments on issues relating to DNA laboratories.
- **Functions of the Board:** The Board shall also be responsible for supervising, monitoring, inspecting and assessing the laboratories. The Board will frame guidelines for training of the police and other investigating agencies dealing with DNA-related matters. Advising on all ethical and human rights issues relating to DNA testing in consonance with international guidelines will be another function of the Board. It will recommend research and development activities in DNA testing and related issues, etc.
- **Security:** DNA profiling would be undertaken exclusively for identification of a person and

would not be used to extract any other information.

- **National DNA Data Bank:** There shall be a National DNA Data Bank, and Regional DNA Data Banks for the states, to be established by the Central government. The data banks will be responsible for storing DNA profiles received from the accredited laboratories and maintaining certain indices for various categories of data, like crime scene index, suspects' index, offenders' index, missing persons' index and unknown deceased persons' index.
- With a view to assist the kith and kin of missing persons, provisions have been made for proper identification of missing persons on the basis of their bodily samples/substances.

DNA technology- significance and concerns:

- DNA analysis is an extremely useful and accurate technology in ascertaining the identity of a person from his/her DNA sample, or establishing biological relationships between individuals. A hair sample, or even bloodstains from clothes, from a scene of crime, for example, can be matched with that of a suspect, and it can, in most cases, be conclusively established whether the DNA in the sample belongs to the suspected individual. As a result, DNA technology is being increasingly relied upon in investigations of crime, identification of

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unidentified bodies, or in determining parentage.

- But information from DNA samples can reveal not just how a person looks, or what their eye colour or skin colour is, but also more intrusive information like their allergies, or susceptibility to diseases. As a result, there is a greater risk of information from DNA analysis getting misused.

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National Telecom Policy

Context:

- The draft National Digital Communications Policy 2018 has been released by the Department of Telecom (DoT).

The draft policy has outlined three major missions which it aims to achieve by 2022:

- Connect India under which it aims to create robust digital communications.
- Propel India under which the government aims to harness the power of emerging digital technologies, including 5G, artificial intelligence (AI), Internet Of Things (IoT), etc.
- Secure India which aims to safeguard the digital sovereignty of India with a focus on ensuring individual autonomy and choice, data ownership, privacy and security.

Key features:

- **Major goals:** The policy has outlined goals such as providing broadband for all, creating 4 million additional jobs in the digital communications sector, apart from enhancing the contribution of the digital communications sector to 8% of India's gross domestic product (GDP) from less than 6% in 2017.

Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS)

Context:

- The parliamentary panel on Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) funds has recommended that amounts donated by lawmakers for rehabilitation work after natural disasters be disbursed within two weeks.

What's the issue?

- Funds are to be released by the nodal district of the lawmaker concerned to the district authority of the affected district. However, funds allocated for the purpose by the parliamentarians often reach the affected people too late to help. Currently, the actual transfer takes anything from six months to over a year due to red tape.

About MPLAD scheme:

- What is it?** It was launched in December, 1993, to provide a mechanism for the Members of Parliament to recommend works of developmental nature for creation of durable community assets and for provision of basic facilities including community infrastructure, based on locally felt needs.
- Works under the scheme:** Works, developmental in nature, based on locally felt needs and always available for the use of the public at large, are eligible under the scheme. Preference under the

scheme is given to works relating to national priorities, such as provision of drinking water, public health, education, sanitation, roads, etc. MPs were allowed to spend the money outside their constituency — and outside their State in case of Rajya Sabha— after the 1999 super cyclone in Odisha.

- Funds:** Funds are released in the form of grants in-aid directly to the district authorities. The funds released under the scheme are non-lapsable. The liability of funds not released in a particular year is carried forward to the subsequent years, subject to eligibility.
- Execution of works:** The MPs have a recommendatory role under the scheme. They recommend their choice of works to the concerned district authorities who implement these works by following the established procedures of the concerned state government. The district authority is empowered to examine the eligibility of works sanction funds and select the implementing agencies, prioritise works, supervise overall execution, and monitor the scheme at the ground level.

Recommendation of works: The Lok Sabha Members can recommend works in their respective constituencies. The elected members of the Rajya Sabha can recommend works anywhere in the state from which they are elected. Nominated members of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha may select works for implementation anywhere in the country.

Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP)

Context:

- The Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH) had recently announced the completion of the first round of bidding under its new Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP), a part of its revamped Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP) unveiled in March 2016.

Key features of the new policy:

- The ‘open acreage’ in OALP refers to the fact that potential investors are now able to choose exactly which areas they want to explore and develop. Under OALP, investors choose the exact areas they are interested in, convey their interest to the government, which then places just those blocks up for bidding, typically twice a year.
- Under the new policy, developers don’t need to apply for separate licences for each of the hydrocarbons they want to extract from the block. They can obtain a single unified license that will allow them to extract and market oil, gas, coal bed methane, shale oil and shale gas.
- The new policy also does away with the earlier provision for a profit-sharing model with the government. Profit sharing as a policy led to a number of delays and complications over what exactly constituted the cost, and therefore profit, of the firm doing the exploring. The new policy

hinges on revenue-sharing, doing away with this ambiguity.

What was the need for the new Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP)?

- India is the 3rd largest consumer of crude oil and petroleum products with oil and gas contributing 34.4% to primary energy consumption. In 2015-2016, India’s crude oil import dependence rose to 81% from 78.5%. In last five years, India has seen overall decline in exploration and production of conventional resources. New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP) created in 1997 ended the state dominance and created a competitive environment leading to liberalization of oil and gas exploration and production industry. However, it failed to keep the momentum of production growth and attracting the foreign investment.

Bureaucratic hurdles like multiple approvals and sanctions, cost overruns, and disputes led to some oil majors leaving their awarded blocks and exit from the space.

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NABH (Nextgen Airports For Bharat) NIRMAL INITIATIVE

Why in News?

The Government has decided for **capacity augmentation of the airports**, as a part of NABH Nirman initiative.

- It will help to connect smaller towns and cities and increase tourism and economic activity.

Background

- **Capacity Constraint** has come to such a point that airports like Delhi and Mumbai are unable to provide further slots for new services.
- According to some government documents, **at least 25 of the 50 busiest airports** in India are already operating beyond their capacity, while almost all the others will reach optimal capacity in 2018-19 with the **aviation industry growing at an unanticipated 18-20% every year.**

About NABH Nirman Initiative

- It was announced in the budget (2018). It seeks expansion of the airport capacity more than 5 times to handle a billion trips a year.
- The key aspects of NABH Nirman are-
 - **Fair and equitable land acquisition.**
 - **Long-term master plan for airport and regional development and**
 - **Balanced economics for all stakeholders.**
- It aims to establish about 100 airports in 15 years at an estimated investment of Rs 4 lakh crore and a large percentage of the investment is to come from the private sector.

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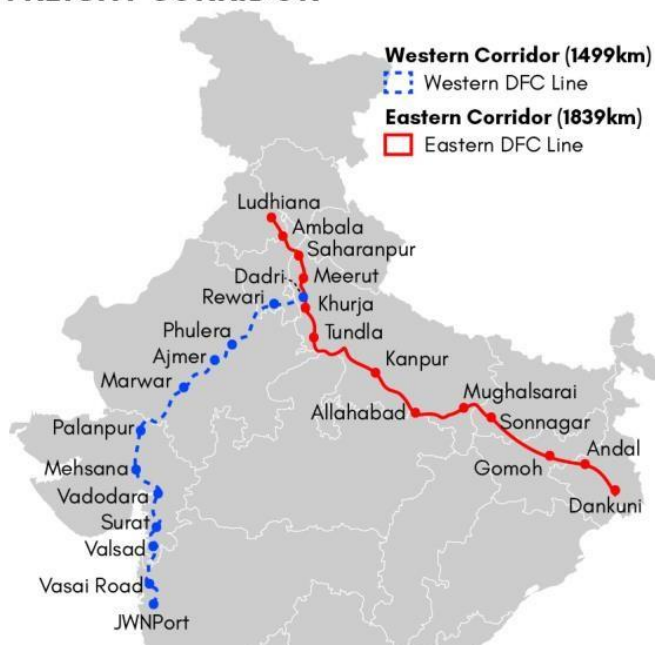
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Freight Corridors To Be Operational Soon

EASTERN AND WESTERN DEDICATED FREIGHT CORRIDOR



- Once operational, the western and eastern corridors will increase the railway's freight carrying capacity to around 2,300 million tonnes, up from 1,200 million tonnes at present, and help reduce cost of freight transportation.
- The construction of the western corridor is being fully funded by the **Japanese International Cooperation Agency**, which has provided around Rs 33,000 crore as soft loan. The eastern corridor is being partially funded by the **World Bank**.

Why in news?

The first phase of the dedicated rail freight corridors project is likely to be completed by year end.

About Dedicated Freight Corridor project

- The dedicated freight corridor (DFC) project is being implemented by Ministry of Railways. The project involves the construction of six freight corridors traversing the entire country.
- Initially the construction of Eastern and Western DFCs is being undertaken.
- The other four corridors North-South (Delhi-Tamil Nadu), East-West (West Bengal-Maharashtra), East-South (West Bengal-Andhra Pradesh) and South-South (Tamil Nadu- Goa) are in planning stage.

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Strategic Oil Reserve

Why in news

Recently India received a consignment of 2 million barrels of crude oil from United Arab Emirates (UAE) for

India's strategic petroleum reserve at Mangalore.

- Presently, strategic reserves are situated at Visakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh), Mangalore (Karnataka), and Padur (Karnataka).
- Moreover, project of three additional reserves is in pipeline-at Chandikhol (Orissa), Bikaner (Rajasthan) and Rajkot (Gujrat).

Details

- India at present stores – including private and public firms – crude oil, petroleum products and gas to last for 63 days
- India is building around 39 million barrels of strategic crude oil storage facility of which the 5.86 million barrels supplied by state-run Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC)— the only one to partner with India on its crude oil reserve programme till date
- Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas had also invited Saudi Arabia and Oman early this year to participate in the Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserve Programme.

Strategic Oil Reserve

- It is storage of crude oil which would act as a cushion during any external supply disruptions or supply-demand mismatch shock.
- The crude oil storages are constructed in underground rock caverns.
- They are maintained by Indian **Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited** (a SPV of the Oil Industry Development Board under Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas).

Patratu Super Thermal Power Project

Why in news?

Recently, Prime Minister laid foundation stone for the first phase of Patratu Super Thermal Power Plant.

About Patratu Super Thermal Power Project (STPP)

- It is a joint venture (74:26) between Government of Jharkhand and **Patratu Vidyut Utpadan Nigam Ltd. (PVUN)**, a subsidiary company of NTPC.
- The project will also ensure 24X7 power supply to household under **Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana**.
- Salient Features of the project include –
 - **Dry ash disposal system** – It is presently being used in NTPC Dadri Thermal Power Plant.
 - **Zero liquid discharge system** - Under this the waste water from the plant which contains salts and other impurities is and clean water is collected. The solid residue is further used for landfill purposes.
 - **Air cooled condenser technology** – This technology ensures that there is less water consumption and allows the exhaust steam to directly condense from steam turbine.
 - **Rail loading facility for transportation of ash**
 - Project is also complaint with the **new emission norms with high efficiency** Electrostatic Precipitator, Flue-Gas desulphurization (FGD) and Nox

control emission.

New Emission Norms for Power Plants

- Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change had notified new environmental norms in December 2015 with respect to suspended particulate matter, sulphur oxide, nitrogen oxide and mercury along with water consumption norms for thermal power stations.
- Under these norms the **power plants have been categorized** into 3 categories based on the year of commissioning as mentioned below –
 - Plants installed before the December 2003
 - Plants installed after 2003 but before December 31 2016
 - Plants installed after January 2017
- These standards are to be **implemented in a phased manner**.
- They aim at reducing PM10, sulphur Dioxide and Oxides of Nitrogen which will further aim at improving Ambient Air Quality in an around Thermal Power Plants.
- The norms will also help to **reduce mercury emission** which is a co-benefit and it also limits the use of water.
- However, 90% of the coal fired thermal power plants have still not complied with the norms and around 300 have been given deadline extension even though the deadline for new norms was December 2017.
- **Reasons for extending the deadlines**

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– high cost incurred due to retrofitting with FGD systems, increased cost per unit for the consumers, reluctance on part of private thermal power plants etc.

Super Thermal Power Station

- These are a series of thermal power plants with a capacity of **1000MW and above**.
- Government is currently developing STPSs which will add about 100,000 Megawatt. E.g. Patratu Super Thermal Power Plant, Talcher Super Thermal Power Plant etc.

Ultra-Megawatt Power Projects

- These power projects have the capacity of **4000MW or more**.

Renewable Energy Policies In A Time Of Transition

Why in news

Recently, *Renewable Energy Policies In A Time Of Transition* report is released in a collaborative effort of **International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA)**, the **International Energy Agency (IEA)**, and the **Renewable Energy Policy Network for the 21st Century (REN21)**.

Background

- Since 2012, renewable energy has **accounted for more than half of capacity additions** in the global power sector.
- **Increasing investment in renewable:** In 2017, investments in new renewable power capacity outstripped the amount invested in fossil-based generating capacity, with most of the installation of new renewable energy capacity currently occurring in developing and emerging countries.
- **Reaching to hinterland:** Nearly 146 million people are now served by off-grid renewable power, and many small island developing states are advancing rapidly towards targets of 100% renewables.

Findings of report

Objective: To provide policymakers with a comprehensive understanding of the diverse policy options to support the development of renewables across sectors, technologies, country contexts, energy market structures, and policy objectives.

- **Policies in The Heating and Cooling Sector**

- Heating is the largest energy end-use, accounting for over 50% of total final energy consumption in 2015, with over 70% of that met by fossil fuels.
- Renewables can play a **key role in decarbonising** and providing a cleaner heating and cooling supply option by mandating building codes, enacting energy efficiency policies, providing fiscal and financial incentives and imposing carbon or energy taxes.

Transport sector

- Transport is the second largest energy end use sector, accounting for 29% of total final energy consumption in 2015, and 64.7% of world oil consumption.
- Decarbonisation of the transport sector requires a fundamental change in the nature and structure of transport demand, integrated planning and policy design to overcome the immaturity or high cost of certain technologies, improvements in energy infrastructure, changes in the energy mix, removal of fossil fuel subsidies etc.

Power Sector

- Power sector consumed only about a fifth of total final energy consumption in 2015, however it received most attention in terms of renewable energy support policy due to falling technology costs and support policies.

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- Investments in the sector are largely driven by regulatory policies such as quotas and obligations and pricing instruments, supported by fiscal and financial incentives.
- To ensure the effectiveness of quotas and certificates, a robust framework to monitor and penalise non-compliance is needed along with auctioning in setting pricing policies, net metering and net billing for efficient distribution and avoidance of cross subsidization.
- **Universal Energy Access:** National energy access plans should consider both on and off grid solutions to reach universal access in a timely manner. It should also prioritise the adoption of clean-cooking systems and fuel switching towards modern fuels.
- **Cheaper option:** To expand energy access in rural areas are increasingly turning to renewables as the most cost-effective, cleanest and most secure option.
- **Renewable role in Improving Air Quality:** According to WHO, an estimated 7.3 million premature deaths per year are attributable to household and outdoor air pollution.
- **Cost barriers:** It pertains to the capital/investment costs of renewable energy technologies particularly in the early stages of market growth.
- **Financial barriers:** It pertains to the lack of adequate funding opportunities, difficulty in accessing suitable financial instruments, lack of institutional knowledge, lack of access to and affordability of effective risk mitigation instruments and financing products for renewable.
- **Infrastructure barriers:** It pertains to the availability of needed infrastructure to incorporate renewable energy into the energy grid resulted in the curtailment of power from renewable sources.
- **Institutional and administrative barriers:** It includes a lack of institutions and authorities dedicated to renewables; the absence of clearly defined responsibilities; complicated licensing procedures; difficulty with land acquisition and permission etc.
- **Market barriers:** It includes inconsistent pricing structures that lead to disadvantages for renewables, irregular pricing of renewable energy products, information asymmetries, distortions in market power, fossil fuel and nuclear subsidies, and a failure to incorporate social and environmental externalities into costs.
- **Public acceptance and environmental barriers:** It

Challenges

- **Awareness and capacity barriers:** It relates to a lack of sufficient information and knowledge about renewables and their performance as well as a lack of skilled personnel and training programs.

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constitutes constraints that could lead to a renewable energy project being found unsuitable for a specific location.

Way Forward

- **Increasing Direct policy support** for renewable energy in the power and end-use sectors, which both account for large shares in final energy consumption as well as energy related CO2 emissions.
- **Enabling policies** are needed to ensure effective operating conditions like level playing field with other technologies, facilitating innovation etc. for renewables in energy systems and markets
- **Integrating policies:** Renewable energy needs to be integrated into the daily life of consumers as well as into the institutional framework, to allow them to be part of the overall energy transition.
- **Effective participation by all stakeholders:** To ensure improved energy transition and it have transformative impact on society, institutions, financing and on the wider economy.
- **Contextual policy making:** Policies need to be continuously adapt to changing market conditions, to achieve greater cost-competitiveness and improved integration of renewables into the grid system.
- **Increasing share of renewable to achieve Paris Goals:** According to **Global Energy**

Transformation: A Roadmap to 2050, the share of renewables in the primary global energy supply must increase from 15% today to 65% by 2050.

- **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 7 on energy:** Policies are needed to support the **deployment of decentralised renewables** to accelerate the pace of energy access and **achieving universal access to modern energy services by 2030.**
- **Power Infrastructure Integration:** To ensure the smooth integration of renewables into the wider energy system for a cost-effective and sustainable energy transition.

International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA)

- It is an intergovernmental organization, principal platform for international co-operation, a centre of excellence, and a repository of policy, technology, resource and financial knowledge on renewable energy.
- Promotes the widespread adoption of renewable energy, including bioenergy, geothermal, hydropower, ocean, solar and wind energy.
- India is a member country of IRENA.

International Energy Agency (IEA)

- It is a Paris-based autonomous intergovernmental organization established in the framework of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1974 in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis.
- It works to ensure reliable, affordable and clean energy for its 29 member

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countries and beyond. Its mission is guided by four main areas of focus: energy security, economic development, environmental awareness and engagement worldwide.

- Only the OECD member states can become members of the IEA. Except for Chile, Iceland, Israel, Mexico, and Slovenia, all OECD member states are members of the IEA. In 2014, Estonia joined the IEA and became its 29th member.
- China, India, Indonesia, Morocco, Singapore and Thailand are the associate members of IEA.
- With India as a member, it now formally covers 70% of the world's energy consumption.
- Important publications of IEA:
 - World Energy Outlook 2016
 - World Energy Investment 2016

Renewable Energy Policy Network for the 21st Century

- It is the global renewable energy policy multi- stakeholder network with the goal of facilitating knowledge exchange, policy development and joint action towards a rapid global transition to renewable energy.
- It brings together governments, non-governmental organisations, research and academic institutions, international organisations and industry to learn from one another.
- India is a member.

Private Participation In National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme

Why in News?

Government has decided to execute the **National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS)** in the public- private partnership mode.

National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS)

- Its objective is to promote apprenticeship training and incentivize employers who wish to engage apprentices.
- It reimburses **25% of prescribed stipend** subject to a maximum of Rs. 1500/- per month per apprentice and targets 15 lakh apprentices in 2018-2019 & 20 lakh apprentices in 2019-20.
- It covers all apprentices except the Graduate, Technician and Technician (Vocational) apprentices which are covered by the scheme administered by MHRD.
- It also promotes **dual-learning Mode of training** in which theoretical instructions are given in the ITI's while practical training is given in the industry, thus improves the connect between industry and ITI's

NAPS under PPP Mode

- Until now, the programme was being run by the **director general of training** under the ministry of skill development and entrepreneurship.
- It will be partly operated by National Skill Development Corporation

(NSDC) and Sector Skill Councils (SSCs) to increase the rate of private participation.

NSDC (National Skill Development Corporation)

- It was established in 2009 as a Public Private Partnership Company with an objective to bridge the emerging skill gaps in the Indian economy and also addresses the worldwide skill shortages.
- Government of India through Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE) holds 49% of the present equity base, while the private sector has rest 51%.
- It is also aligned to **re-skilling and upskilling** those who are already a part of the formal human resource.

Sector Skill Councils (SSCs)

- They are set up **under NSDC** as autonomous **industry-led bodies** for steering skill development and training by identifying Skill gaps, conducting Train the Trainer Programs, providing the real time information about the labour market and developing a robust training delivery mechanism.
- **Sharada Prasad Committee (2016)**, recommended scrapping of the existing Councils due to their overlapping roles and also highlighted the conflict of interest in these.

Government Savings Promotion Act

Why in news?

Government proposed creation of a New Government Saving Promotion Act during the budget (2018).

More on News

- The Act would be a merger of Government Savings Certificates Act, 1959 and Public Provident Fund (PPF) Act, 1968 with the Government Savings Banks Act, 1873.
- No existing benefits to depositors are proposed to be taken away through this process, while certain new benefits have been proposed.
- Moreover, no change in interest rate or tax policy on small savings scheme is being made through these amendments.

The proposed amendments intend to remove the various existing ambiguities due to **multiple Acts and rules** for Small Saving Schemes and also introduce certain flexibilities for the investors.

Present Scenario

- There has been a sharp rise in government borrowings from small savings scheme in the past five years.
- Small savings schemes accounted for a little over a fifth (20.9 per cent, in FY18) of all central government borrowing, up from 17.2 per cent a year before and 2.4 per cent in FY14.
- Interest rates for small savings schemes are to be notified on a **quarterly basis**.

Proposed Amendments

- Provision of premature closure of Small Savings Schemes may now be introduced to **deal with medical emergencies, higher education needs**, etc. -through specific scheme notification. Presently this provision is absent in PPF act.
- Investment in small saving scheme can be made **by a guardian on behalf of minor(s)**. The guardian may also be given **associated rights** and responsibilities- such as, **provisions for nominations** etc. Thus, the move will promote culture of savings among children.
- Provisions of accounts **for differently abled persons** have now been made, which **was not clear** in aforesaid acts.
- The amended Act place a mechanism for **redressal of grievances** and for amicable and expeditious settlement of disputes relating to Small Savings.

Other Issues and suggested Reforms

- The **sharp rise in central borrowing** from small saving schemes distorts the interest rate structure, which hampers the cost of funds economy-wide. Thus, it is imperative to align the government borrowing with **fiscal prudence**.
- Government needs to create a more conducive environment for **monetary transmission**, (process through which the policy action of the central bank is transmitted for stable inflation and growth) by aligning the rates on small savings schemes with market rates

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or to align SSSs to the benchmark Government Security yield, as suggested by the Urjit Patel committee report (2014).

- The tax administration for the small savings instruments need to be made more efficient to ensure tax compliance (**Shyamala Gopinath 2011**).

About Small Saving Schemes (SSSs)

- They are important source of household savings for **providing social benefit**.
- These can be classified under three heads;
 - (i) **Postal deposits:** Savings account, recurring deposits, time deposits of varying maturities and monthly income scheme(MIS)];
 - (ii) **Savings certificates:** (National Small Savings Certificate and Kisan Vikas Patra (KVP).
 - (iii) **Social security schemes:** Public Provident Fund (PPF), Senior Citizens Savings Scheme(SCSS), and Sukanya Samridhi Account Scheme.

Features of Small Saving Scheme

- They offer slightly **higher interest rates** compared to bank deposits. Some of the small savings schemes also have **income tax benefits**, assure return and government's guarantee.
- All the money pooled from different SSSs goes to **National Small Savings Fund (NSSF)** which was established in 1999 within the Public Account of India.

Designated Offshore Securities Market

Why in News?

Bombay Stock Exchange has become the **first Indian exchange** to be designated as a ‘Designated Offshore Securities Market’ (DOSM) by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

More on news

- Till now, equity and bond securities traded on the BSE and issued in the US could not generally be resold in non- prearranged trades without fulfilling certain requirements.
- DOSM status **allows sale of securities to US investors through the trading venue of BSE without registration of such securities with the US SEC**, which eases the trades by US investors in India.
- It will also enhance the attractiveness of Indian Depository Receipts (IDRs) amongst US investors.
- The BSE’s new status will provide additional benefits to companies whose securities are traded both in the US and on the BSE for e.g. certain directors and officers of dual- listed companies will be permitted to resell their securities on the BSE, regardless of any restrictions or holding periods that may apply under the US securities laws.
- Only a few exchanges globally enjoy the DOSM recognition, such as **London Stock Exchange**, **Bourse de Luxembourg**, **Tokyo Stock Exchange** and **Toronto Stock Exchange**.
-

Bombay Stock Exchange

- It is **Asia's oldest stock exchange** establishes in 1875.
- BSE's overall performance is measured by the **Sensex**, an index of 30 of the BSE's largest stocks covering 12 sectors.
- India INX, India's 1st international exchange, located at GIFT CITY IFSC in Ahmedabad is a fully owned subsidiary of BSE.

IDR

- It is a **financial instrument denominated in Indian Rupees** in the form of a depository receipt created by a Domestic Depository (registered with the SEBI India) against the underlying equity of issuing company to enable foreign companies to raise funds from the Indian securities Markets.

Free Trade Agreement And Their Costs

Why in news?

Recently NITI Aayog released a note on free trade agreements and their costs

Drivers of Indian Exports

- India's exports are **more sensitive to changes in external demand than price changes**. Thus given the export basket composition first, increase in global demand drives India's exports much more than price cuts.
- Further, the supply-side constraints like **energy shortages** dampen price responsiveness of exports. Tackling the issue of energy deficit can boost export performance considerably.
- Similarly, **higher logistics costs** have been a major impediment to export growth. The Economic Survey 2017-18 also points out that, “Improved logistics have huge implications on increasing exports, as a 10% decrease in indirect logistics cost can contribute to around 5-8% of extra exports.”
- In the **Global Competitiveness Index 2017-18** compiled by the World Economic Forum, while China ranks 27th, India is placed 13 points below at the 40th place. India has improved but India's manufacturing exports have been technologically backward and have also grown slower than China.

Indian experience with FTAs

India is a fairly open economy with overall trade (exports plus imports) as a percentage of GDP at around 40% with exports diversified both in terms of markets and

products in the past two decades.

- India's exports to FTA countries has **not outperformed overall export growth** or exports to rest of the world with both growing at an 13 % year on year average.
- Taking example of **ASEAN, Korea and Japan** it is visible that Bilateral trade has increased post signing of FTAs but Imports from FTA partners into India increased more than India's exports to partner countries resulting into **widening of trade deficit**.
- According to Economic Survey 2016-17, FTAs have had a **bigger impact on metals on the importing side and textiles on the exporting side**. A 10% percent reduction in FTA tariffs for metals increases imports by 1.4 %
- India's exports are much **more responsive to income changes** as compared to price changes and thus a tariff reduction/elimination does not boost exports significantly.
- Since India runs a trade deficit with ASEAN as well as the partner countries of **RCEP**, tariff eliminations may be more harmful to Indian Industry and more so due to **India's inability to negotiate a good services deal** in the past and China's excess capacity in most sectors.
- Further the **Utilisation rate** of other Regional Trading Agreements by exporters in India is very low (between 5 and 25%). Lack of information on FTAs, low margins of preference, delays and administrative costs associated with rules of origin, non-tariff measures, are major reasons

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for underutilization

- It accounts for 25% of global GDP, 30% of global trade, 26% of FDI flows and
- 45% of the total population.

Suggestions

- Before getting into any multilateral trade deal India should firstly, **review and assess its existing FTAs** in terms of benefits to various stakeholders like industry and consumers, trade complementarities and changing trade patterns in the past decade.
- Second, **negotiating bilateral FTAs with countries where trade complementarities** and margin of preference is high may benefit India in the long run.
- Third, India needs to reduce **compliance cost** and administrative delays which are extremely critical to increase utilisation rate of FTAs.
- Fourth, proper **safety and quality standards** should be set to avoid dumping of lower quality hazardous goods into the Indian market.
- Fifth, **circumvention of rules of origin** should be strictly dealt with by the authorities as occurred in case of India-SriLanka FTA regarding copper exports.

Thus FTAs have to be signed keeping two things in mind, mutually reciprocal terms and focusing on products and services with maximum export potential.

Regional comprehensive Partnership Agreement (RCEP)

- RCEP is a proposed free trade agreement (FTA) between 10 ASEAN countries and their six FTA partners, namely Australia, China, India, Japan, Korea and New Zealand.

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CABOTAGE LAW

Why in News?

Recently, Ministry of Shipping relaxed Cabotage restrictions on the movement of foreign ships.

About the move

- It will allow movement of foreign ships engaged in transporting containers laden with goods for export or import as well as empty containers between and among Indian ports along the country's coastline.

Benefit of the move

- **Cargo Growth:** Indian ports can now attract cargo originating from or destined to foreign ports which would turn Indian ports into major transshipment hub.
- **Time-Cost Saving:** it will increase competitiveness of the Indian traders and manufacturers by reducing the supply chain lag time and transshipment cost at a foreign port.
- **Competition:** It would allow coastal movement of export, import/ empty containers by foreign vessels leading to healthy competition among shipping lines.
- **Congestion:** it would also address the problem of empty containers getting accumulated at some Indian port while other ports facing a shortage of empty containers.

around 42% in the 1990s to less than 8% at present. Similarly, Operational expertise available to foreign shipping industry would **undermine the position** of the domestic shipping industry.

- Moreover, relaxation in cabotage law demand a balance in **national security consideration**.

About Cabotage?

- Cabotage refers to shipping along coastal routes between foreign sea ports, and also to the restriction on the operation of vessels between sea ports within a particular country.
- It is governed by the Merchant Shipping Act (MSA) of 1958.
- It aims to protect domestic shipping industry from **foreign competition** as well as for the purpose of **national security**.
- Presently, foreign-flagged ships can transport cargo within the country, in the non-availability of India Ships, after obtaining a licence.

Concerns

- Indian trade carried by Indian ships/flagships has come down from

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Directorate General Of Trade Remedies

Why in News?

A unified **Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR)** has been formed for providing comprehensive and swift trade defence mechanism in India.

About Directorate General of Trade Remedies

- It would subsume the Directorate General of Anti-dumping and Allied duties, Directorate General of Safeguards and some functions of the Directorate General of Foreign Trade.
- It will be the **apex national authority** for all trade remedial measures including anti-dumping, countervailing duties and safeguard measures.
- It will have all expertise, including legal skills, people dealing with accounting, trade experts and revenue people, under one roof and it will function as an **attached office of Department of Commerce**.
- The recommendation of DGTR for imposition of anti-dumping, countervailing and safeguard duties would be considered by the **Department of Revenue**.

- At a price below the one it charges in the home market or
- Below the cost of production or at less than fair value; and
- It damages the producers in the importing country.

Countervailing Duty

- If the exporting nation is found to offer export subsidies to their exports, then CVD is imposed by the Importing Nation on imports.

Safeguard Duty

- The safeguard duty as a temporary measure is used when imports of a product, due to tariff concessions or other WTO obligations, increase unexpectedly to a point that they cause or threaten to cause serious injury to domestic producers.

Additional Information Anti-Dumping Duties

- These are special import duties imposed when a firm, following an enquiry, is assessed as having sold a product in the importing market-

Report Of Task Force On Shell Companies

Why in news?

Recently ‘Task Force on Shell Companies’ has submitted its report to government.

Background

- The Task Force was constituted in 2017 under the co- chairmanship of the revenue secretary and the corporate affairs secretary for effectively tackling the malpractices by shell companies in a comprehensive manner.
- In India Shell companies are **not defined under Companies Act, 2013** or any other legislation. However some laws can help curbing illegal activities such as money laundering and can indirectly be used to target shell companies — Benami Transaction (Prohibition) Amendment Act 2016; The Prevention of Money Laundering Act 2002 and The Companies Act, 2013 etc.

Recommendations

- The task force has listed **18 key parameters** to determine if a company has been created to launder money or exploit regulatory arbitrage (See Picture).
- It has recommended that MCA must look into the filings of financial statements of companies which had been misused to channel **unaccounted cash after demonetization**.

- Further it has suggested keeping a watch on companies with **abnormal increase or decrease in debts**, or more than 10 per cent of bad debts written off, and the increase in investment in partnership firms by 100 per cent or more.

Other Government Measures to tackle shell companies

- Serious Fraud Investigation Office under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs has prepared **comprehensive digital database** of shell companies and their associates that were identified by various law enforcement agencies.
- Income Tax department has conducted **investigations** that led to detection of more than 1155 shell companies which were used as conduits by over 22,000 beneficiaries.
- **Information sharing mechanism** between various law enforcement agencies is implemented under the Regional Economic Intelligence Council (REIC) and Central Economic Intelligence Bureau (CEIB) forums.
- **Ministry of corporate affairs has deregistered** over 2.26 lakh companies for various non-compliances and being inactive for long.
- Government has **removed the exemption under Section 276CC of the Income Tax Act** through Budget 2018-19. It provided that if a person with tax liability more than Rs. 3000 wilfully fails to furnish the return of








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income in due time, he shall be punishable with imprisonment and fine. The provision was being misused by around 3 lakh inactive companies showing nil income.

Shell Companies

- Shell companies typically refer to companies **without active business operations or significant assets**.
- Task force has explained that a typical shell firm is incorporated with a standard memorandum or articles of associations. It has inactive shareholders and directors, and is left dormant. It is created for the purpose of being palmed off later.
- After the sale transaction, inactive shareholders usually transfer their shares to the buyer and the so-called directors resign or flee.

New criteria set for dubious firms

	Lack of business ownership		Huge inconsistencies in bit-ticket transactions
	Rotation in transactions with no apparent business purpose		Disproportionate investments in shares of other companies
	Majority of the shares held by other companies		Board of directors are of low means
	Transfers large sums of funds to a related-party		

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BSE becomes India's first exchange to be recognized as a DOSM by the US SEC

Context:

- Asia's first stock exchange, the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) has become the first stock exchange in India to have received recognition as a 'Designated Offshore Securities Market' (DOSM) from the United States Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

Implications:

- The DOSM status allows the sale of securities to U.S. investors through the trading venue of BSE without registration of such securities with the US SEC and thus eases the trades by US investors in India.

Background:

- Prior to this recognition, investors who wished to sell such securities (i.e., equity or debt securities issued by BSE listed companies in a private placement under the U.S. securities laws) had to take certain measures to ascertain the location of the purchaser prior to re-selling.

The availability of a liquid resale market is expected to:

- Make exempt offerings by BSE-listed companies more attractive to U.S. investors.
- Enhance the attractiveness of Indian Depository Receipts (IDRs) amongst US investors.

What is an IDR?

- An IDR is a depository receipt denominated in Indian rupees issued by a domestic depository in India. Much like an equity share, it is an ownership pie of a company. Since foreign companies are not allowed to list on Indian equity markets, IDR is a way to own shares of those companies. These IDRs are listed on Indian stock exchanges.

IDRs and equity shares:

IDRs are similar to equity shares. IDR holders have the same rights as shareholders; They can vote for or against company moves or decisions as and when it comes to them, get dividends, bonus and rights issues as and when the company declares them.

GST Network (GSTN)

Context:

- The GST Council has approved making GST Network (GSTN) a government entity by taking over stakes held by private entities. As per the proposal, the central government will own 50% and the remaining would be collectively held by state governments.

What is GSTN?

- The GSTN is a private limited company floated to aid the rollout of the new indirect tax regime.
- The company will provide information technology support to all stakeholders for smooth implementation of the new taxation

regime across the country and will be the repository of all information related to taxation and entities registered under GST.

- The majority (51%) shareholding in the firm is with private entities including HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank and LIC among others. The central government, jointly with state governments and Union Territories, own 49% in the company.



Merchandise Export from India Scheme

Context:

- The Director General of Foreign Trade has said that the rates enhanced under the Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS), a scheme to promote exports, would continue beyond June 30.

About MEIS:

What is it?

- Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) under Foreign Trade Policy of India (FTP 2015-20) is one of the two schemes introduced in Foreign Trade Policy of India 2015-20, as a part of Exports from India Scheme.
- Objective of Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) as per Indian Foreign Trade Policy 2015-20 (FTP 2015-20) is to offset infrastructural inefficiencies and associated costs involved in export of goods/products, which are produced/manufactured in India, especially those having high export intensity, employment potential and thereby enhancing India's export competitiveness

Govt weighs linking drug prices to WPI inflation

Context:

- The government is considering the feasibility of linking the permitted annual increase in prices of non-scheduled formulations to the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) in a bid to regulate the prices of drugs.

Implications:

- The move, if implemented, could deal a big blow to the Pharma-industry. The industry is currently in a situation where there are strong incentives for companies to market non-scheduled formulations to avail to automatic 10% increase. Compounded over five years, the price of a non-scheduled drug goes up by over 60%.

Background:

- The NITI Aayog has recommended an amendment to the Drug Price Control Order (DPCO) 2013, suggesting that prices of non-scheduled drugs be also be linked to WPI to regulate them like the prices of scheduled drugs.

What necessitates this?

- According to DPCO 2013, prices of scheduled drugs are revised in line with the wholesale price index (WPI) of the previous calendar year.
- As a corollary, the companies are even required to cut the prices if there is a decline in the annual

WPI.

- However, manufacturers of medicines not under price control are allowed to increase the maximum retail price by 10% annually.
- According to DoP, only about 850 drugs are under price control as against the more than 6,000 medicines available in the market of various strengths and dosages.

Concerns:

- Pharma companies see this proposal as a serious adverse development and say it has the potential to cause irreparable damage to the Indian Pharma industry. Given the real annual inflation, increase based only on WPI is not at all reasonable as the industry has to deal with the rising cost of manufacturing.
- Additionally, according to the proposal, in case of a negative WPI, mandating the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) to change the ceiling price of scheduled drugs and it will not be required for individual drugs to reduce their MRPs if they are already lower than such revised ceiling price.
- Pharma lobby groups have supported the equalization of the annual price increase between scheduled and non-scheduled drugs.

Corporate Environment Responsibility

Why in News?

Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has issued guidelines that will require every corporate seeking green clearance to follow the CER norms.

have to undertake for implementing the mandatory **environment management plan (EMP)** for the project- affected area.

What is CER?

- It is the **social responsibility of the companies to protect the environment** by integrating the environmental concerns including those related to forestry, wildlife and bio- diversity, wherever applicable, into the main stream of the Corporate Policies.
- This term derives from

Corporate Social Responsibility

(CSR) and CER activities will include measures like pollution control, wildlife and forest conservation, **compensatory afforestation** and rehabilitation and resettlement of displaced persons.

- Funds can be used for creating drinking water supply **infrastructure, sanitation, health, education and skill development**, among others.

New Guidelines vis-à-vis CER

- Every corporate seeking green clearance to set aside **2%** of its capital investment for the new projects above 1 billion and for project seeking expansion with 1bn additional cost to spend max. of **1%** cost on CER activities.
- CER will be imposed over and above the expenditure the company will

Criticism

- **Loss to the smaller projects-** In the name of **CER smaller projects will pay more** as a percentage of their capital expenditure compared to bigger ones
- **Non-utilisation of Compensatory Afforestation (CA) Fund-** CA has been brought under the scope of CER activity, while Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority is sitting on nearly Rs 42,000 crore of unutilised funds which has been collected from companies seeking environment and forest clearances. Thus, **bringing Compensatory afforestation under CER has little justification.**
- **Another layer of Clearance-** The existing mechanism of Environmental Impact Assessment is already facing various issues in terms of compliance and approval and adding another layer of Environmental clearance in form of CER may lead to stagnancy of the projects.
- **Over and above CSR-** With in this companies are being forced to pay twice the mandatory CSR amount.

Responsibilities of Companies under CER

- Ensure, as a part of this policy, adherence with the environmental

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clearances and forestry clearances wherever applicable, granted to the company.

- Ensure that inter-alia the company functions in conformity with the policy.
- Ensure that deviations from this policy and cases of violation of environmental and forestry clearances conditions should be duly reported to the Board of its Directors and desirably reflected thereafter on its website and its annual report.
- Identify and designate responsible persons at all levels of the hierarchy for ensuring adherence to this policy and compliance with environmental laws and regulations.

Green load

Fund allocation for Corporate Environment Responsibility to be subject to these rules:

Capital investment (₹)	Green-field project*	Brown-field project*
Less than or equal to ₹ 100 crore	2	1
₹ 100-500 cr	1.50	0.75
₹ 500-1,000 cr	1	0.50
₹ 1,000-10,000 cr	0.50	0.25
Over ₹ 10,000 cr	0.25	0.125

*% of capital investment

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Widening Of India's Tax Base

Why in news?

India's tax base has been widening over last few years but some issues still remain.

Major trends

- Country's total taxpayer base increased to 6.41 crore in 2016-17 from 4.38 crore in AY 2011-12 which shows a rise of over 46 per cent over five years with individual tax payers registering a faster growth rate than total tax payers.
- The surge in the numbers is partly attributable to the tax department's focus on increasing compliance on the direct tax front, especially after demonetisation (Operation Clean Money).
- Even within the class of individual taxpayers, there is a skew in the tax pay out trend wherein average tax payment by a salaried individual is more than average individual business taxpayer.

Issues and Concerns

- Currently the total number of individual taxpayers at 6.08 crore, constitute only 4.86 per cent of India's total population of 125 crore.
- The Standing Committee on Finance has said the **low number of individual taxpayers** vis-à-vis the country's total population demonstrated the “**regressive nature of our direct tax regime**” and “the narrow base the (Revenue) Department operates on.

- The Economic Survey 2017-18 highlighted that there has been a **decline in the reliance on direct taxes** in India which contribute only around 35 per cent of total taxes as against a contribution of about 70 per cent in Europe.

Need to widen tax base

- A Study on **Widening of Tax Base and Tackling Black Money** by FICCI highlighted widening of tax net helps in achieving higher tax to GDP ratio, achieve fiscal consolidation, meet the targeted tax collection and reduce the shortfall in tax collection with budget estimates.
- Further, it helps the government to **undertake planned investments in infrastructure** and other important areas for growth & development.
- Above all, it will shift the **revenue pressures from honest taxpayers** and creates the possibility of reducing the direct and indirect tax rates in the future thus improving ease of doing business scenario in India.

Suggestions

- Implement Direct Taxes Code:** Government has constituted Arbind Modi headed task force to review the Income-tax Act and draft a new direct tax law.
- Simplifying/rationalising the process** and procedures of tax laws & tax administration
- Rationalise the tax slabs/rates** in respect of GST may to broadening the

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tax base and increasing tax compliance.

- **Promoting electronic payments** by making digital payments mandatory for payment of wages & salaries for some sectors and in case of payment of statutory dues like property taxes, stamp duty, utility bills etc.
- **Economic Survey** has suggested devolution of taxation powers to local government so that they can collect more direct taxes rather than devolved resources.

untaxed, especially the informal/unorganised sectors

- Extension of scope of TDS for early collection of tax and also deter tax evasion
- Using presumptive tax schemes for small businesses to ease and encourage compliance
- Reinstate banking cash transaction tax (BCTT) and Fringe Benefit tax (FBT).
- Large farmers with income more than 50 lakh should be brought into the tax net
- Use surveys and technology based information and intelligence systems to identify potential taxpayers.
- The tax administration needs to be oriented more towards customers to improve voluntary compliance



Operation Clean money

- It is a programme of Income Tax Department (ITD) **Operation Clean Money** to bring out illegal wealth.
- It involved e-verification of large cash deposits using data analytics during demonetisation.

Tax Administration Reforms Commission (TARC) **Parthasarathi Shome** headed panel gave following recommendations to widen tax base:

- Focus on bringing in new taxpayers by targeting sectors that are currently

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Precision Agriculture Using Artificial Intelligence

Why in news?

A Statement of Intent has been signed between NITI Ayog and IBM to develop **Precision Agriculture using Artificial Intelligence (AI)** in Aspirational Districts.

applications with a focus on improving the crop yield and cost savings through better farm management.

Details

- It is first of a kind project leveraging AI in agriculture across 10 Aspirational Districts in India across the States of Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh in its Phase I. The project will aim at improving yields of small landholders.
- IBM will be using AI to provide all the relevant data and platform for developing technological models for improving agricultural output and productivity for various crops and soil types, for the identified districts.
- NITI Aayog, on its part, will facilitate the inclusion of more stakeholders on the ground for effective last mile utilisation and extension, using the insights generated through these models.
- The scope of this project is to introduce and make available climate-aware cognitive farming techniques and identifying systems of crop monitoring, early warning on pest/disease outbreak based on advanced AI innovations.
- It also includes deployment of weather advisory, rich satellite and enhanced weather forecast information along with IT & mobile

What is precision agriculture/satellite farming?

- Precision agriculture means application of precise and correct amount of inputs like water, fertilizer, pesticides etc.
- It is a farming management concept based on observing, measuring and responding to inter and intra-field variability in crops.
- The goal is to define a decision support system (DSS) for whole farm management for optimizing returns on inputs while preserving resources.
- Advanced technology like big data analytics, artificial intelligence (AI), and the Internet of Things (IoT) can help farmers to make precise decisions from planting, growing, harvesting, to transporting food.

GM mustard

Context:

- Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) has asked the developer of GM Mustard to undertake “field demonstration” to generate additional data to check whether the transgenic oilseed affects honey bees and other pollinators and also whether it negatively impacts soil health.

“field demonstration” has drawn flak from farm activists. They have been opposing environmental release of any genetically engineered crops on the ground of its adverse impact on human health and biodiversity even as a sub-committee of the central regulator had concluded in 2016 that the GM mustard would be safe for human consumption and environment.

Background:

- GEAC had last year given its nod to this indigenously developed transgenic oilseed and recommended it to the environment ministry for final clearance. However, the government later asked it to re-examine the entire issue after receiving several representations both in support and against GM mustard.

About GEAC:

- The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) is the apex body constituted in the Ministry of Environment and Forests under ‘Rules for Manufacture, Use, Import, Export and Storage of Hazardous Microorganisms/Genetically Engineered Organisms or Cells 1989’, under the Environment Protection Act, 1986.
- The GEAC is responsible for approval of proposals relating to release of genetically engineered organisms and products into the environment including experimental field trials (Biosafety Research Level trial-I and II known as BRL-I and BRL-II).

What next?

- The developer – Centre for Genetic Manipulation of Crop Plants of the Delhi University – will now have to undertake field demonstrations on GM mustard in an area of five acres at two or three different locations to generate relevant data before approaching the regulator again for its consideration of commercial release.

Opposition:

- The GEAC’s latest move of asking the applicant to undertake “field

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Model Contract Farming Act, 2018

Context:

- The government has released the Model Agriculture Produce and Livestock Contract Farming and Services (Promotion & Facilitation) Act, 2018. It is drafted as a promotional and facilitative act and not regulatory in its structure.

Background:

- With a view to integrate farmers with bulk purchasers including exporters, agro- industries etc. for better price realization through mitigation of market and price risks to the farmers and ensuring smooth agro raw material supply to the agro industries, Union Finance Minister in the budget for 2017-18 announced preparation of a “Model Contract Farming Act” and circulation of the same to the States for its adoption.

Salient features of the Act:

- The act lays special emphasis on protecting the interests of the farmers, considering them as weaker of the two parties entering into a contract. It brings contract farming outside the ambit of the APMC Act.
- It provides for a “Registering and Agreement Recording Committee” or an “Officer” at the district/block/taluka level for online registration of sponsor and recording of agreement. The contracted produce will also be

covered under crop/livestock insurance in operation.

- In a bid to allay the fears of individual farmers, the act explicitly states that no permanent structure can be developed on farmers’ land/premises under such contracts.
- It gives no right, title of interest of the land to the sponsor. Similarly, no rights, title ownership or possession to be transferred or alienated or vested in the contract farming sponsor.
- The act provides for the promotion of Farmer Producer Organization (FPOs)/Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) to mobilise small and marginal farmers. The FPO/FPC can also be a contracting party if so authorized by the farmers.
- As per the law, the contracting party will be obliged to buy the entire pre-agreed quantity of one or more of agricultural produce, livestock or its product of contract farming producer as per contract.
- It also envisages the setting up of Contract Farming Facilitation Group (CFFG) for promoting contract farming and services at village/panchayat level.
- It also includes an accessible and simple dispute settlement mechanism at the lowest level possible for quick disposal of disputes.

What is Contract farming?

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- The concept of Contract Farming (CF) refers to a system of farming, in which bulk purchasers including agro- processing/exporting or trading units enter into a contract with farmer(s), to purchase a specified quantity of any agricultural commodity at a pre-agreed price.

Punjab has a separate law on contract farming. However, only 14 states notified rules related to contract farming, as of October 2016.

Contract farming in India:

- Although varied forms of contract farming existed in pockets in the country, the formal contract farming is not, however, wide spread in India. By and large, cultivation of commercial crops like cotton, sugarcane, tobacco, tea, coffee, rubber and dairy have had some elements of informal contract farming for a long time.

What are the issues with the current structure?

Over the years, expert bodies have identified issues related to the implementation of contract farming. These include: (i) role of APMCs which are designated as an authority for registration and dispute settlement in most states, (ii) provisions of stockholding limits on produce under contract farming, and (iii) poor publicity of contract farming among the farmers about its benefits.

What is the existing regulatory structure?

- Currently, contract farming requires registration with the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) in few states. This means that contractual agreements are recorded with the APMCs which can also resolve disputes arising out of these contracts. Further, market fees and levies are paid to the APMC to undertake contract farming.
- The Model APMC Act, 2003 provided for contract farming and was released to the states for them to use this as reference while enacting their respective laws.
- Consequently, 20 states have amended their APMC Acts to provide for contract farming, while

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Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana

Context:

- The government has clarified that all the remaining households in the country including located in the habitations/hamlets/Dhanis/Majras/Tolas associated with the Census villages and households attached to urban settlements would be covered under ‘Saubhagya’.

About the Saubhagya scheme:

- Under the ‘Saubhagya’ scheme, launched in September, 2017, all willing households in rural areas and poor families in urban areas are given free electricity connections. There are around 4 Crore un-electrified households in the country and they are targeted for providing electricity connections by December 2018.

Implementation:

- Rural Electrification Corporation Limited (REC) is the Nodal Agency for the operationalization of the scheme throughout the country.

Salient Features of Saubhagya are:

- All DISCOMs including Private Sector DISCOMs, State Power Departments and RE Cooperative Societies shall be eligible for financial assistance under the scheme in line with DDUGJY.

- The prospective beneficiary households for free electricity connections under the scheme would be identified using SECC 2011 data. However, un-electrified households not covered under SECC data would also be provided electricity connections under the scheme on payment of Rs. 500 which shall be recovered by DISCOMs in 10 installments through electricity bill.
- The electricity connections to un-electrified households include provision of service line cable, energy meter including pre-paid/smart meter, single point wiring. LED lamps and associated accessories in line with technical specifications and construction standard.

The expected outcome of the Scheme is as follows:

- Environmental upgradation by substitution of Kerosene for lighting purposes.
- Improvement education services.
- Better health services.
- Enhanced connectivity through radio, television, mobiles, etc.
- Increased economic activities and jobs.
- Improved quality of life especially for women.

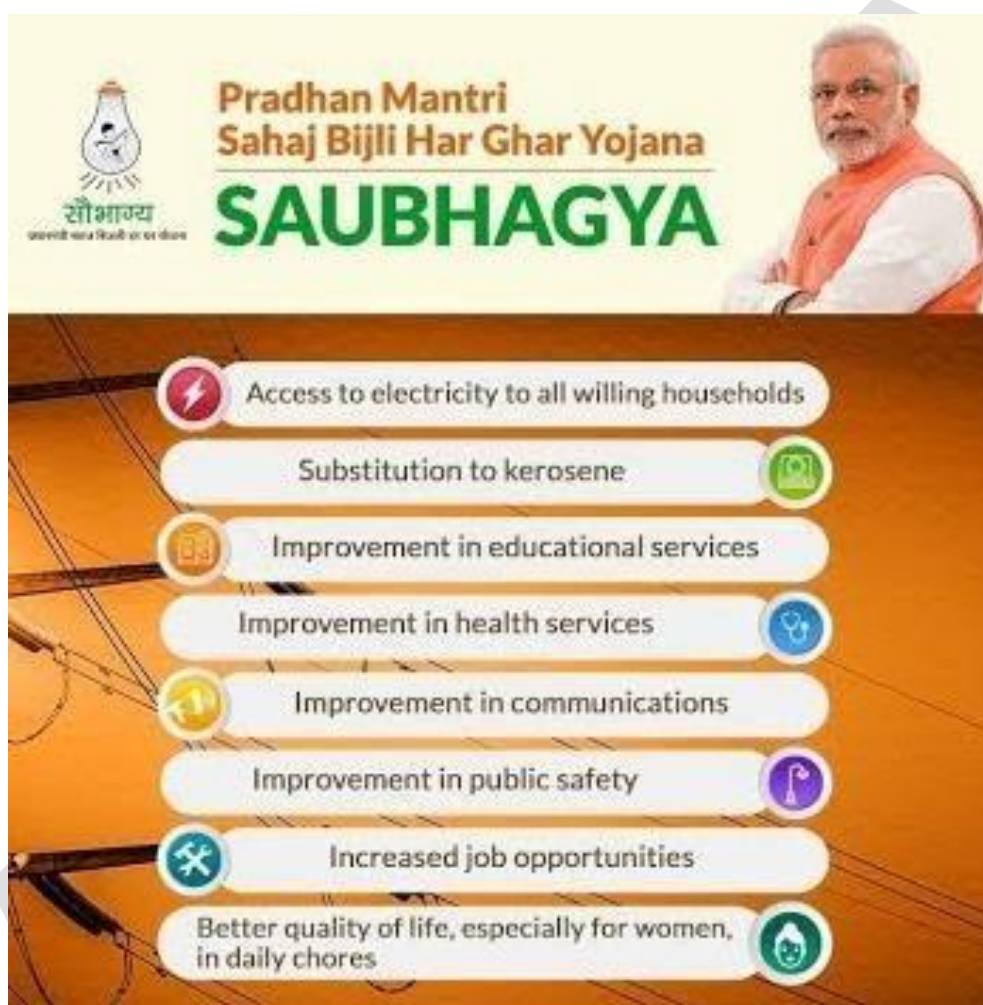
Way ahead:

- The scheme will help India, the

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world's third-largest energy consumer after the US and China, to help meet its global climate change commitments as electricity will substitute kerosene for lighting purposes.

- Lighting in turn will also help in improving education, health, connectivity with the multiplier effect of increased economic activities and job creation.



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Corpus For Micro Irrigation Fund

Why in News?

A dedicated Micro Irrigation Fund (MIF) with National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) under Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) has been set up.

Status of Micro -Irrigation in India

- According to a study the average penetration level of Micro-irrigation in India is **5.5%**. Only few states like Haryana, Sikkim, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu have penetration level greater than national average.
- Micro-irrigation in India is largely being **promoted in arid and semi-arid regions** where groundwater is the primary source of water.
- The task force on micro irrigation had estimated a **potential of 69.5 million hectare under micro irrigation**, whereas the area covered so far is only about 10 million hectares.

Micro Irrigation Fund

- It intends to provide states financial assistance on concessional rate of interest to **encourage Micro-Irrigation** and an allocation of Rs 2,000 crore has been made for this fiscal while Rs 3,000 crore has been earmarked for the 2019-20 fiscal.
- The lending rate under the MIF has been proposed at **3% lower** than the cost of raising the fund by NABARD.

- It will have a **pan-India coverage** and the loans extended by NABARD can be **paid back in 7 years**, including a grace period of two years.

Advantages of MIF

- It would supplement the efforts of **Per Drop More Crop Component (PDMC)** of Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana in an effective and timely manner and may ensures water use efficiency as much as 50- 90%.
- Fund will help to bring **more area under micro-irrigation** over 5 years, i.e. almost about 10 million hectares.
- Farmers Producers Organization (FPO)/Cooperatives/State Level Agencies **can also access** the funds with state government guarantee or equivalent collateral.
- It will also **help states mobilise resources** for their own initiatives, including additional subsidy, to bring about **2 million hectares under micro irrigation each year** during the remaining period of the 14th Finance Commission.
- **Increase in Farmer Income**-Farmers can add more new crops in an improved water scenario which ultimately results in increase in farmer's income.

Challenges Ahead

- **High cost of Installation**- Micro-sprinklers are quite costly and to offset the financial constraint of the farmers, Government will have to provide the subsidies to the extent of 40-90%, of the cost of Micro-

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Irrigation.

- **Inefficiency in implementation**- Implementation agency for micro-irrigation was changed from a dedicated mission to a component part of NMSA under PMKSY this has led to inefficiencies like improper utilisation of funds across the states.
- **Other Issues** include inadequate electricity supply as well as poor follow up services by drip agencies.

programme for mainstreaming of the microfinance innovation and encourages other banks to lend to SHGs.

- **Long Term Irrigation Fund (LTIF)** has been established in NABARD during Budget 2016-17, as a part of PMKSY with an initial corpus of **20,000 Crore Rupees** and it has been doubled to 40,000 crores in Budget 2017-18.

Micro-irrigation

- It is the slow application of water above, or below the soil by surface drip, subsurface drip, bubbler and micro-sprinkler systems, thereby increases the yield and productivity of crops.
- Due to recurring droughts in years 2012, 2015 and 2016, micro-irrigation has become a policy priority in India in form of **Per Drop More Crop Component** of PMKSY.

Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sichayee Yojana

- It aims to extend the coverage of irrigation ‘Har Khet ko pani’ and improving water use efficiency ‘More crop per drop’ in a focused manner with end to end solution on source creation, distribution, management, field application and extension activities.
- It will be supervised and monitored by Inter-Ministerial National Steering Committee (NSC) under PM with Union Ministers of all concerned Ministries. A National Executive Committee (NEC) is to be constituted under the Chairmanship of the Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog to oversee programme implementation
- PMKSY has been formulated amalgamating ongoing schemes viz. Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme (AIBP); Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP); and On Farm Water Management (OFWM) component of National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA).
- Water budgeting is done for all sectors namely, household, agriculture and industries.

NABARD

- It was established under the **NABARD Act of 1981** with an objective of providing and regulating credit and other facilities for the promotion and development of Agriculture, Small-scale industries, Cottage and village industries, Handicrafts and other allied economic activities in rural areas.
- It **refinances the financial institutions** like state co-operative agriculture and rural development banks (SCARDBs), state co-operative banks (SCBs), regional rural banks (RRBs), commercial banks (CBs) which finances the rural sector.
- It promotes **SHG-Bank linkage**

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Green Revolution - Krishonnati Yojana

Why in news?

The CCEA has given its approval for Green Revolution - Krishonnati Yojana in agriculture sector beyond 12th Five Year Plan for the period from 2017-18 to 2019-20.

Details about Krishonnati Yojana

- The scheme has been continued as part of its objective to double farmers' income by 2022.
- It is an umbrella of 11 schemes/missions under Ministry of Agriculture:
 - **Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH):** to improve nutritional security and income support to farm Households.
 - **National Food Security Mission (NFSM),** including National Mission on Oil Seeds and Oil Palm (NMOOP): to increase production of rice, wheat, pulses, coarse cereals and commercial crops and to augment the availability of vegetable oils to reduce its import.
 - **National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA):** promotes sustainable agriculture practices best suitable to the specific agro-ecology focusing on integrated farming, appropriate soil health management and synergizing resource conservation technology.
 - **Submission on Agriculture Extension (SMAE):** to strengthen the ongoing extension mechanism of State Governments, local bodies, to forge effective linkages and synergy amongst various stake-holders, to support HRD interventions, to promote pervasive and innovative use of electronic / print media, inter-personal communication and ICT tools, etc.
 - **Sub-Mission on Seeds and Planting Material (SMSP)** to increase production of certified / quality seed, to increase SRR, to promote new technologies in seed production, infrastructure, etc.
 - **Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanisation (SMAM):** to increase the reach of farm mechanization to small and marginal farmers, to promote 'Custom Hiring Centres', to create hubs for hi-tech and high value farm equipment, to create awareness among stakeholders through demonstration and capacity building activities, and to ensure performance testing and certification at designated testing centers located all over the country.
 - **Sub Mission on Plant Protection and Plant Quarantine (SMPPQ):** to minimize loss to quality and yield of agricultural crops from the ravages of insect pests, diseases, weeds, nematodes, rodents, etc. and to shield our agricultural bio-security from the incursions and spread of alien species, to facilitate exports of Indian agricultural commodities to global markets,

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and to promote good agricultural practices, particularly with respect to plant protection strategies and strategies.

- **Integrated Scheme on Agriculture Census, Economics and Statistics (ISACES):** to undertake the agriculture census, study of the cost of cultivation of principal crops, to undertake research studies on agro-economic problems of the country, to improve agricultural statistics methodology and to create a hierarchical information system on crop condition and crop production from sowing to harvest.
- **Integrated Scheme on Agricultural Cooperation (ISAC):** to provide financial assistance for improving the economic conditions of cooperatives, remove regional imbalances and to speed up - cooperative development in agricultural marketing, processing, storage, computerization and weaker section programmes.
- **Integrated Scheme on Agricultural Marketing (ISAM):** to provide infrastructure facilities for grading, standardization and quality certification of agricultural produce; to establish a nation•wide marketing information network; and to integrate markets through a common online market platform to facilitate pan-India trade in agricultural commodities

- **National e-Governance Plan (NeGP-A):** to improve access of farmers to information & services throughout crop-cycle and to build upon, enhance & integrate the existing ICT initiatives of Centre and States.

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Sugarcane Pricing

Why in news?

Union government recently approved financial assistance of Rs 5.50 per quintal for cane crushed by sugar mills in the ongoing 2017-18 season.

Details

- The money would be credited directly into the bank accounts of farmers, who haven't received the “fair and remunerative price” (FRP) for sugarcane fixed by the Centre.
- The Centre's Sugarcane (Control) Order mandates mills to pay the FRP within 14 days of cane purchase from farmers, failing which 15% annual interest is charged on the due amount for the period of delay.
- Considering the large cane price arrear dues to farmers the mills say they cannot pay farmers beyond 75% of their realisations from sugar and thus the amount sanctioned by government is grossly inadequate.
- The populist increases in SAP recent years has resulted in excessive production of sugarcane, estimated at 295.07 lakh tone thus triggering a glut of supply of sugar which reached an all-time high of 29.98 million tonne.
- Further considering the high cost of production of sugar (partly due to high cane prices in India) in other countries the export prices of sugar are much lower than from domestic sales.

- India has the largest area under sugar cane cultivation in the world but the yield per hectare is extremely low and is even lower in North India than in South India
- The sugar industry has a **seasonal character** and the crushing season normally varies between 4 and 7 months in a year leaving the mill and the workers idle for almost half of the year.
- Average **rate of sugar recovery** from the sugar cane is less than 10 per cent which is much lower than other sugar producing areas like Java, Hawaii and Australia, up to 14 per cent.
- Most of the **sugar mills** in our country are of more old, have small size and outdated machinery with a crushing capacity of about 1200 tons per day.
- The **cost of sugar production** in India is one of the highest in the world mainly due to high sugar cane cost, uneconomic production process, inefficient technology and high taxes exercised by the state and the central governments.
- The industry faces problems in **disposing by-products** i.e. bagasse and molasses, especially under pollution control devices.
- The government policy, based on **dual price system**, discourages the entrepreneurs to make investment for further growth and improvement.
- The **per capita annual consumption** of sugar is about 10 kg in India, whereas it is about 20 kg in the world.

Other Major Challenges facing the Sugar Industry in India

Suggestion

Government has already taken following measures to arrest the downslide in sugar prices and to ameliorate the liquidity position of sugar mills:

- Increased import duty on sugar from 50 to 100 per cent
- Imposition of stock holding limits on sugar mills for two months
- Fixing of Minimum Indicative Export Quotas (MIEQ) and
- Removal of customs duty on export of sugar to find a way for surplus output in the overseas markets.
- **C. Rangarajan Committee (2012)** on sugarcane pricing had recommended abolition of SAP and favoured **revenue sharing formula (RSF)** for cane price payments, 75 per cent of sugar value or 70 percent of the value of sugar and its byproducts should be disbursed to farmers towards sugarcane price.
- **CACP** has also recommended a **hybrid approach** with simultaneous implementation of Revenue sharing formula, FRP of Sugar and Sugar Price Stabilization fund.
- Better pricing, predictability and augmentation of storage facilities under **Ethanol Blended Petrol programme** to incentivise its procurement by OMCs.
- **Power generation** using cogeneration technology is another option through which companies can generate revenues by selling extra electricity generated as a by-product of sugar production to power distribution companies.
- Government should also **incentivise**

crop diversification towards other less water intensive crops to reduce the problem of excess groundwater extraction from crops like sugarcane.

Green Licence Plates For E-Vehicles



Context:

- The government has approved distinctive green licence plates for electric vehicles to encourage people to use electric vehicles. Such vehicles will be fitted with green licence plates bearing numbers in white fonts for private cars and yellow font for taxis.

Significance of the move:

- The measure is aimed at promoting e-vehicle's use and the government is considering exemption from permits for such vehicles. The purpose behind distinctive number plates is their easy identification for preferential treatment in parking, free entry in congested zones besides other proposed benefits like concessional toll.

Types of number plates:

- India, currently, has four kinds of

number plates – white licence plates with numbers on black font for private cars, yellow plates with fonts in black for commercial vehicles, black plates with yellow font letters for self-driven rental vehicles and blue plates with white font letters for Embassies and High Commissions.

- Army vehicles, on the other hand, follow a different registration system given by the defence ministry, while vehicles of the President and governors have red licence plates with the national emblem.
- Challenges ahead:**
- Mainstreaming electric vehicles will require an overhaul of the country's energy and transport infrastructure. For example, EV charging stations will have to be set up on a war footing, and electricity generation will have to improve

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significantly even as its piggybacks on the push for solar energy. **EV technology** (especially the battery) will have to become much cheaper before it can perform well in a price-sensitive market like India.

Way ahead:

- With the onus of being the second-largest populated country in the world, India has a lot of reasons to rejoice over the bright outlook of the adoption of electric vehicles in India. NITI Aayog said in a recent report that can cut its energy demand by 64% and carbon emissions by 37% by making its passenger mobility shared, electric, and connected. The concept not only helps India to fulfil its renewable energy goals but also assists it in other facets like the ‘Make in India’ vision.
- The Indian automobile industry is the sixth-largest in the world and accounts for a whopping 22% of the country’s total manufacturing output. The large-scale adoption of electric vehicles can play an important role in increasing the share of manufacturing in India’s GDP from the current 15% to 25% by 2022.

Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) Programme

Context:

- Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) has shipped the first oil cargo for India's strategic petroleum reserve at Mangalore.

Background:

- Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Ltd (ISPRL) had then signed an agreement with ADNOC which allows the firm to store 5.86 million barrels of crude in the strategic facility at Mangalore at its own cost.
- India can use the entire available crude oil stored by ADNOC in the Mangalore facility during an emergency situation. The Agreement with ISPRL also allows ADNOC to sell part of the crude oil to Indian refineries on commercial basis while adhering to mutually agreed minimum crude storage which is for the exclusive use of the Indian government.

About SPR programme:

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

external supply disruptions.

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

Need for strategic oil reserves:

- In 1990, as the Gulf war engulfed West Asia, India was in the throes of a major energy crisis. By all accounts India's oil reserves at the time were adequate for only three days. While India managed to avert the crisis then, the threat of energy disruption continues to present a real danger even today.
- It is unlikely that India's energy needs will dramatically move away from fossil fuels in the near future. Over 80% of these fuels come from imports, a majority of which is sourced from West Asia. This is a major strategic risk and poses a massive financial drain for an embattled economy and its growing current account deficit.
- To address energy insecurity, the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government

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mooted the concept of strategic petroleum reserves in 1998. Today, with India consuming upwards of four million barrels of crude every day (January 2015 figures), the case for creating such reserves grows stronger.

Facts for Prelims:

- In January 2016, India signed a deal with the United Arab Emirates that allows the Gulf OPEC country to fill half of the underground crude oil storage facility of ISPRL at Mangalore. Therefore, the UAE's Abu Dhabi National Oil Company will store about 6 million barrels of oil at Mangalore.

New Initiatives To Curb Left Wing Extremism

Why in news?

Recently MHA has taken various measures to tackle Left Wing Extremism (LWE) in India.

Various initiatives

- **Black Panther combat force** – A specialised anti-Naxal combat force for Chhattisgarh on the lines of Greyhounds unit. The Greyhounds are a special force that specialize in Jungle warfare and anti-insurgency operations against Naxalites with jurisdiction limited to Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.
- **Bastariya Battalion** - It is newly formed battalion of CRPF with more than 534 tribal youth from four highly naxal infested districts of Chhattisgarh. Another remarkable feature of it is its adequate female representation which is in sync with the Government's policy of 33% reservation for women making it the first composite battalion in any of paramilitary forces.
- **Approval of Projects under USOF** - Union cabinet has approved the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) supported scheme to provide mobile services in 96 districts of LWE-affected states. The project will help not only in communication with the security personnel but also, for the residents of these areas.
- **Multi-disciplinary groups to check funding of Naxalites** - Union ministry of home affairs has formed multi-disciplinary groups with officers from central agencies,

including from the IB, NIA, CBI, ED and DRI, and state police to choke the financial flow to Maoists.

- A process has also been initiated to create a separate vertical in the NIA for investigating important cases relating to Left Wing Extremism (LWE)

Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF)

- USOF was established in 2002 in pursuance of objective of Universal service to all uncovered areas, including the rural areas, and encourage development of telecommunication facilities in remote, hilly and tribal areas of the country
- It derives its funding from **Universal Service Levy (USL)** of 5% charged from all the telecom operators on their Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) which are then deposited into the Consolidated Fund of India, and require prior parliamentary approval to be dispatched.

Joint Logistics Node At Andaman

Why in news?

Government has decided to set a joint logistic node at the India's only tri-services command in Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

More about the news

- It will provide logistical support to all three defence services and will improve utilisation of resources, manpower and remove duplication.
- The joint logistics node comprises of three elements:
 - Joint Logistics Command & Control Centre (JLC&CC), which is the overall command organisation,
 - Tri-services Detachment at Material Organisation (TRIDAMO), which will meet logistical needs of the armed forces and
 - Tri-services Advanced Detachment (TRISAD), based on mainland and responsible for sending troops and equipment to the nodes.
- There are plans to set up similar nodes at 12 or 13 locations in the western and north-eastern sectors and they are important in areas where two or more services are located.

Mission Raftaar

Blueprint of Mission Raftaar

Removal of constraints on high-priority
9,100
route km



Raising of Sectional Speed to minimum 130 kmph: Out of 9,100 route km, 6,400 km (70%) have sectional speed of less than 130 kmph

Removal of Level Crossings: There are 2,736 level crossings on 9,100 route km. 931 are already sanctioned for elimination

Removal of Speed Restrictions: On these routes, there are speed restrictions at about 730 locations due to various factors pertaining

to design and maintenance of fixed assets. There is a restriction every 15 km on these routes

Raising of Speeds on Turnouts: At present 10% of turnouts on these routes have a speed of less than 30 kmph and all have a speed of less than 50 kmph

LHB coach		Talgo coach	
			
160	Top-speed (kmph)	220	
78	Seating capacity	36	
506	Weight per seat ratio (kg)	341	
8	Wheels per coach	2	between 2 coaches

Talgo coach attractions

30% more energy efficient as compared to LHB

45% lighter than LHB

Low-centre of gravity leads to higher speed and stability on curves

Context:

- The Indian Railways conducted a one-day workshop ‘Mission Raftaar’ in which officials discussed ways to increase the average speed of freight and passenger trains. Issues such as “punctuality, rolling stock, removing bottlenecks in terms of traffic, elimination of unmanned level crossings were discussed” at the workshop.

essential for reducing travel time for passengers, transit time for cargo, operational cost, and improving revenues and the railway’s market share.

About Mission Raftaar:

- ‘Mission Raftaar’ aims at doubling the average speed of freight trains and increasing the average speed of coaching trains by 25 kmph over a five-year period.

Significance of the mission:

The average speed of freight trains is 24 kmph and that of passenger trains, excluding suburban trains, is 44 kmph. Increasing the average speed of trains is considered

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Atal Tinkering Marathon

What is it?

- It is a six month long nationwide challenge across six different thematic areas, namely, clean energy, water resources, waste management, healthcare, smart mobility and agri-tech.
- It is being organized by Atal Tinkering Labs of the Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) of NITI Aayog.

Why in news?

- Top 30 innovations have been selected from among 100 innovations shortlisted. These top 30 innovations have been identified from 20 different States and Union territories from across India.

What are ATLs?

- With a vision to ‘Cultivate one Million children in India as Neoteric Innovators’, Atal Innovation Mission is establishing Atal Tinkering Laboratories (ATLs) in schools across India.
- **Objective:** The objective of this scheme is to foster curiosity, creativity and imagination in young minds; and inculcate skills such as design mindset, computational thinking, adaptive learning, physical computing etc.
- **Financial Support:** AIM will provide grant-in-aid that includes a one-time establishment cost of Rs. 10 lakh and operational expenses

of Rs. 10 lakh for a maximum period of 5 years to each ATL.

- **Eligibility:** Schools (minimum Grade VI – X) managed by Government, local body or private trusts/society can set up ATL.

Significance of ATLs:

- Atal Tinkering Labs have evolved as epicenters for imparting these ‘skills of the future’ through practical applications based on self-learning.
- Bridging a crucial social divide, Atal Tinkering Labs provide equal opportunity to all children across the spectrum by working at the grassroots level, introducing children to the world of innovation and tinkering.

Need for such labs:

- As the world grapples with evolving technologies, a new set of skills have gained popular acceptance and have come to be in high demand. For India to contribute significantly during this age of rapid technological advancement, there is an urgent need to empower our youth with these ‘skills of the future’.
- Equipped with modern technologies to help navigate and impart crucial skills in the age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the ATLs are at the vanguard of the promoting scientific temper and an entrepreneurial spirit in children today.

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PROJECT “NETWORK FOR SPECTRUM”

Why in news?

- The Cabinet Committee on Infrastructure approved substantial hike in the budget for the Network for Spectrum (NFS) project.

About Project Network for Spectrum (NFS)

- It was launched to establish the **alternative communication network for exclusive use by defence services** to boost the communication capabilities of defence forces.
- The project is result of an agreement reached in 2010 between Defence ministry and Dept. of Telecom (DoT) in which DoT agreed to vacate 25 MHz of 3G spectrum and 20 MHz of 2G spectrum in phases solely for defence communication purpose
- The project is being implemented by state-run **Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL)**.

PINAKA ROCKET

Why in news?

An upgraded version of Pinaka rocket was recently successfully test-fired from Chandipur in Odisha.

About the rocket

- The **upgraded Pinaka system, Pinaka mark-II**, is a guided one unlike the earlier version and has navigation, guidance and control kit.
- The range of new version is more than **70 kilometre** which was earlier only 40km.
- It is a multi-barrel rocket launcher which can fire a salvo of 12 rockets in 44 seconds.

MILITARY EXERCISES

- Recently, 13th edition of the Joint Military Exercise **SURYA KIRAN** between **India and Nepal** was held. It is a **biannual event** which is conducted alternatively in Nepal and India.
- Recently, Indian Army and Air Force conducted exercise 'Vijay Prahar' to finetune Joint manship to maximize the impact of Joint Operations.

Green Propellant

Why in news?

- ISRO has reported progress in the development of an environment-friendly propellant to power satellites and spacecrafts.

Details

- Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre (LPSC) of ISRO is developing a green monopropellant based on **hydroxyl ammonium nitrate (HAN)** to **replace hydrazine**.
- The HAN based green propellant also contains ammonium nitrate (AN), Methanol and Water. Methanol reduces combustion instability and AN controls the burn rate and lowers the freezing point of the propellant.
- The conventional hydrazine rocket fuel is a **highly toxic and carcinogenic chemical**.
- Green propellant is needed as almost any propellant that gives good performance is a very active chemical; hence, most propellants are corrosive, flammable, or toxic, and are often all three.

Intellectual Property Rights Mascot

Why in news?

Recently, Ministry of Commerce and Industry launched Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Mascot - IP Nani.

More from news

- Mascot IP Nani has been launched to create awareness among people specially children which will fulfill the objective of **National Intellectual Property Rights Policy** i.e. IPR Awareness: Outreach and Promotion.
- Mascot IP Nani is a tech-savvy grandmother who helps the government and enforcement agencies in combating IP crimes.
- CIPAM (Cell for IPR Promotion and Management) had collaborated with the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EU-IPO) to produce a series of animated videos on IPRs for children with IP Nani as their central character.
- The character is also in line with the **World Intellectual Property Organisation's (WIPO)** campaign for the World IP Day.

established various IP laws and regulations.

- Mission - to lead the development of a balanced and effective international intellectual property (IP) system that enables innovation and creativity for the benefit of all.

World IP Day

- It is celebrated every year on 26th April to celebrate the brilliance, ingenuity, curiosity and courage of women and indeed everyone in their quest to bring their amazing ideas to market..

World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO)

- It is a specialised self-funding United Nations agency which acts as global forum for intellectual property services, policy, information and cooperation.
- It was established under the WIPO Convention in 1967 and currently has 191 member states.
- India joined WIPO in 1975 and has

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National Technology Day

technology.



Context:

- Since 1999, May 11 is celebrated as National Technology Day to mark India's technological advancements.

National Technology Day 2018 theme:

“Science and Technology for a Sustainable Future”.

Significance of the day:

- On May 11, 1998, India detonated three nuclear bombs in the Indian Army's Pokhran Test Range. Dr APJ Abdul Kalam lead the Indian team of scientists to successfully test-fire the Shakti-1 nuclear missile at Rajasthan's Pokhran test range.
- Hansa 3, India's first indigenous aircraft was first tested on the same day in 1998 in Bangalore.
- Successful test firing of Trishul, a short range missile made in India, was also done on the same day.
- Every year, on this day, the Technology Development Board of India awards various individuals with national awards for their contribution to indigenous

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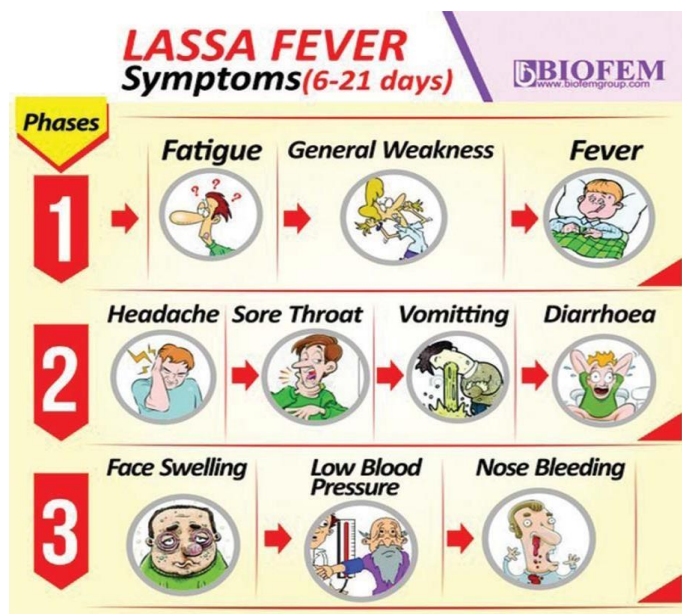
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Lassa fever



in Benin, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria, but probably exists in other West African countries as well.

- The overall case-fatality rate is 1%. Observed case-fatality rate among patients hospitalized with severe cases of Lassa fever is 15%. Early supportive care with rehydration and symptomatic treatment improves survival.

Context:

- Nigeria has announced that it is free from Lassa fever outbreak. The announcement follows the epidemiological review by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Lassa fever- key facts:

- Lassa fever is an acute viral haemorrhagic illness of 2-21 days duration that occurs in West Africa.
- The Lassa virus is transmitted to humans via contact with food or household items contaminated with rodent urine or faeces.
- Person-to-person infections and laboratory transmission can also occur, particularly in hospitals lacking adequate infection prevention and control measures.
- Lassa fever is known to be endemic

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Elysia Chlorotica

What is it?

- It is a green **sea slug** which can suck out an algae's plastids that generate energy from sunlight — and incorporate them into its own biology. In doing so, it becomes an animal with the photosynthetic ability of a plant.



What makes it unique?

- What makes *Elysia chlorotica* unique is it takes only the plastids, or the organelles that contain chlorophyll and perform photosynthesis, from the algae. The slug then uses its own genome to keep the plastids operating within its own body throughout the rest of its life.

Where is it found?

- The sea slug *Elysia chlorotica*, a mollusk that can develop to a length of 2 inches has been discovered in intertidal zone between Nova Scotia, Canada, and Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, as well as in Florida.

Significance of the discovery:

Figuring out how the slug keeps these algae-made solar panels functioning could lead to innovations in developing green machines that need only sunlight to generate energy or bioproducts that could be used as biodiesel.

New Element With Magnetic Properties Discovered

Why in News?

Researchers at the University of Minnesota (US) have discovered

magnetic properties in chemical element ruthenium (Ru). About Ruthenium (Ru)

- It belongs to the platinum group, has atomic number 44 and is mostly used in the electronics industry for chip resistors and electrical contacts.
- It is the **fourth element to have unique magnetic properties** at room temperature.
- Other than this only three elements have been found to be ferromagnetic at room temperature - **iron (Fe), cobalt (Co), and nickel (Ni)**.
- It is one of the **rarest metals on the earth**, resistant to oxidation, and additional theoretical predictions claim it has a high thermal stability.
- Magnetic materials are of great importance to modern industry and are used in many everyday applications such as sensors, electric motors, generators, hard drives and Spintronic storage.

Ferromagnetism

It is the property of material by which certain materials (such as iron) form permanent magnets or are attracted to magnets.

Queqiao Relay Satellite To Explore Far Side Of Moon

Why in news?

China launched a relay satellite to be the first to land a spacecraft on the far side of the moon.

It is a point where combined gravitational forces of two bodies, say Earth and sun or Earth and moon, equal the centrifugal force felt by much smaller body. Such interaction of forces creates equilibrium where spacecraft can be positioned to make observations.

Details

- As a part of Mission **Chang’e 4** under Phase II of Chinese Lunar Exploration Programme (CLEP), China launched Queqiao (or “Magpie Bridge,”).
- It is now on its way to the Lagrange point-2 (L2) of Earth- Moon system and will function as a communication relay satellite between the Earth and Chang’e 4 lander-rover spacecraft.
- Chang’e 4 spacecraft is scheduled to be launched in December 2018.

How much moon do we see from earth?

From Earth, **59%** of the moon is visible over a period of time. This is explained by two phenomena:

- **Tidal locking:** Moon takes nearly same time i.e. 27 days, to come one orbit around the Earth and also to rotate once on its own axis. Thus, same side of the moon is visible from Earth while the farther remains dark
- **Lunar vibrations:** due to tidal locking, ideally 50% of the moon should be visible but we see 59% because of north-south rocking and east-west wobbling of moon – rightly called as lunar vibrations

Lagrange point or L-point:

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Interstellar Asteroid 2015 BZ509

Why in news?

Scientist found an asteroid known as **2015 BZ509** which is supposed to be the first interstellar body to stay in our solar system.

More about news

- 2015 BZ509 was discovered in **2014**, by **Pan-STARRS (Panoramic Survey Telescope and Rapid Response System)** in **Hawaii** but at that time it was thought of as part of our solar system and **not regarded as interstellar object**.
- Now Researchers argue that It is **supposed to be captured from other star system** in the **early phase of formation of our solar system** approximately **4.5 billion years ago**.
- Its orbit is "**retrograde**," i.e. 2015 BZ509 moves around the sun in the **opposite direction (clockwise if seen from Sun's imaginary North Pole)** of Jupiter, Earth and most other bodies in the solar system.
- **The** orbit of the asteroid almost coincides with the Jupiter.

Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation (CMBR)

Why in news?

Scientists from the Raman Research Institute (RRI) in Bengaluru have conducted an experiment for detection of Cosmic Microwave background radiation in a place called Timbaktu in Andhra Pradesh.

More about news

- The experiment by RRI can profoundly change our understanding of the early universe, specifically of events leading up to the formation of the first stars.
- Similar experiment conducted by Arizona State University (ASU) at a similarly quiet place in Australia in February this year has observed unusual and unexplained shapes in the spectrum of CMBR.
- Timbaktu is chosen as it is described as Radio Quiet — an area where there is virtually no interference from signals produced by modern technology like mobile, TV etc. which makes it most suitable place to detect even faint electromagnetic signals from the sky.

Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation (CMBR)

- It was first discovered in 1964.
- It is an all-pervasive, but weak, electromagnetic radiation from the early universe, about 3,80,000 years after the Big Bang when matter was still to be formed.
- This radiation does not come from any of the objects that we see in the

universe, like stars or galaxies but from a time when matter and radiation were in thermodynamic equilibrium.

- The spectrum produced by CMBR is very smooth. It does, however, contain small wiggles, or deformities, in its shape.
- Each of these wiggles has valuable encoded information about specific events that took place as the first stars were born.
- CMB signals are so faint, and so pervasive is the interference from modern technology that there is a proposal to set up CMB observation experiments on the other side of the moon.

Important Scientific Inferences derived from CMBR:

- Most cosmologists consider this radiation to be the best evidence for the hot big bang model of the universe.
- The early universe was filled with hot, dense and extremely uniform gas, mostly hydrogen.
- The first stars were formed when these blobs of gas got together under the influence of gravity. That is when visible light also made its first appearance in the universe. Scientists refer to this phase as cosmic dawn.

Biosensor Technique To Detect Chikungunya Virus

Why in News?

Recently, Indian scientists have developed a biosensor technique to detect chikungunya virus.

Need

- There has been rapid increase (around 300-400 per cent) of Chikungunya cases in India during the period of 2014 to 2016.
- Chikungunya is detected through RT-PCR (Real-time polymerase chain reaction) from serum samples and by determination of serum anti-bodies which are time consuming and cumbersome.

About the Biosensor technology

- Scientist made a Molybdenum disulphide nanosheet which is absorbed onto the screen-printed gold electrodes and then used in the detection of chikungunya virus DNA using electrochemical voltammetric techniques.
- Advantages: Used to develop a point of care device for rapid identification of disease. It is suitable for mass production, has low cost, higher disposability and design flexibility as compared to traditional electrode materials.

WHO Publishes Essential Diagnostics List

Why in news?

World Health Organization (WHO) published its first Essential Diagnostics List (EDL) – which catalogues tests to diagnose the most common conditions and a number of global priority diseases.

Details

- EDL consists of 113 products – 58 tests for a range of common conditions and the rest 55 test for “priority” diseases such as HIV, TB, HPV, syphilis, malaria and hepatitis B and C.
- It focuses on *in-vitro* tests i.e. test of human specimen such as blood and urine.
- Some tests are particularly suitable for primary healthcare centres, where there is a lack of laboratories and highly trained personnel.
- It is intended to serve as a template for countries to develop their own list. WHO will support the countries for its local adaptation.

will lower costs and make these services affordable e.g. Xpert MTB/RIF test which is a good test but not affordable on small scale

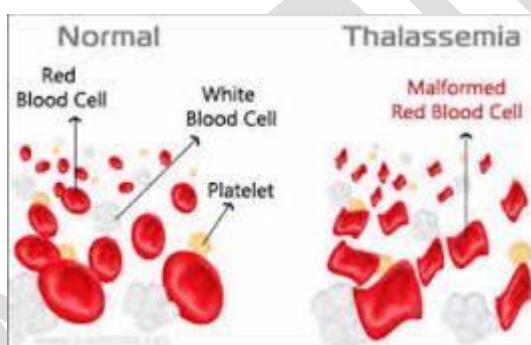
- Laboratory accreditation and training will also improve regulation and quality of diagnostics. It may help reduce Anti-Microbial Resistance and also provides leads for new product development, based on local public health profiles.

Need and use for EDL

- It will help improve patient care and clinical outcomes, by encouraging the countries to build laboratories, accessible across habitations
- Diagnostics infrastructure so created may help detect emerging infectious diseases, facilitate epidemiological surveys, program evaluation and disease elimination
- Awareness and public demand, large-scale purchases and volume discounts

Thalassemia

- Thalassemia is a **chronic blood disorder**. It is a genetic disorder due to which a patient cannot make enough hemoglobin found in Red Blood Cells (RBC's). This leads to anemia and patients also require blood transfusions every two to three weeks to survive.
- Thalassemias are inherited disorders passed from parents to children through genes. Each red blood cell can contain between 240 and 300 million molecules of haemoglobin. The severity of the disease depends on the mutations involved in the genes, and their interplay.
- India is the thalassaemia capital of the world with 40 million carriers and over 1,00,000 thalassaemia majors under blood transfusion



every month.

Nepal Eliminates Trachoma

Why in news?

Recently, WHO has announced that Nepal has eliminated Trachoma and became the first country in South East Asia to do so.

What is Trachoma?

- It is a chronic infective eye disease caused by infection with the bacterium **Chlamydia trachomatis** which is transmitted through contact with eye and nose discharge of infected people, particularly young children who are most vulnerable to the infection.
- It is also spread by flies which come in contact with the infected person and is most common under poor environment, low personal hygiene and inadequate access to water.
- It is one of the causes of the avoidable blindness and one of the 18 Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD).
- During 1950s, India was a hyperendemic to Trachoma. About 50%-80% children from North-west India were affected by it.
- Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of India had recently released National Trachoma Survey Report and also declared **India Trachoma free** under **WHO GET2020 program**, however it has not been yet announced by WHO

eliminated trachoma as a public health problem.

- less than 5% of children aged 1–9 years have signs of active trachoma which can be treated with antibiotics, in each previously-endemic district;
- less than 0.2% of people aged 15 years and older have trachomatous trichiasis, which requires eyelid surgery, in each previously-endemic district; and
- A health system which can identify and manage new cases of trachomatous trichiasis.

Global Initiatives for Trachoma

- **WHO's SAFE (Surgery, Antibodies, Facial cleanliness, Environmental modification)** strategy (1997) and Global Elimination of Blinding Trachoma by 2020 to eliminate Trachoma.
- **GET2020-** a WHO International Alliance of interested parties who work for elimination of Trachoma also known as Alliance for Global Elimination of Trachoma by 2020.
- **Vision 2020 of WHO and IAPB** (International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness) - includes Trachoma as a priority under its disease control component.

Criteria used by WHO for assessing a country's claim for having

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Gravityrat Malware

Why in news?

Maharashtra Cybercrime department has reported the malware “GravityRAT”.

Background

- The ‘RAT’ in the name stands for **Remote Access Trojan**, which is a program capable of being controlled remotely and thus difficult to trace.
- It was first detected by Indian Computer Emergency Response Team, CERT-In in 2017.
- Malware, or malicious software, is any program or file that is harmful to a computer user. It includes computer viruses, worms, Trojan horses and spyware.
- These malicious programs can perform a variety of functions, including stealing, encrypting or deleting sensitive data, altering or hijacking core computing functions and monitoring users' computer activity without their permission.
- It is **self-aware and is capable of evading** several commonly used malware detection techniques such as ‘**sandboxing**’ (used to isolate malware from critical programs on infected devices and provide an extra layer of security).
- Typically, malware activity is detected by the ‘noise’ it causes inside the Central Processing Unit, but GravityRAT is **able to work silently**.
- It can also **gauge the temperature of the CPU** and ascertain if the device is carrying out high intensity activity, like a malware search, and act to evade detection.

More about Gravity RAT

- It infiltrates a system in the form of an innocuous looking email attachment, which can be in any format, including MS Word, MS Excel, MS Powerpoint, Adobe Acrobat or even audio and video files.
- Unlike most malware, which inflict short term damage, it is an **Advanced Persistent Threat (APT)** i.e. it silently evolves and does long-term damage.

Digital Village Programme

Why in news?

Recently, it has been decided to expand Common Service Centres (CSC) to 2.50 lakh gram panchayats and to establish 700 Digital Villages by the end of this year.

More on news

- The CSC model has adopted six villages in the country in the pilot phase to be developed as Digital Villages.
- **DigiGaon or Digital Village** is conceptualized as a connected place in a rural and remote part of the country where citizens can avail various e-Services of the Central Government, state Governments and private players.
- The idea behind this project is to turn these villages into self-sustaining units. It aims at promoting rural entrepreneurship and building rural capacities and livelihoods through community participation and collective action.
- The digital villages have been equipped with solar lighting facility in their community center, LED assembly unit, sanitary napkin unit (with active participation on Asha and Anganwadi workers) and Wi-fi choupal.

Challenges in digitizing rural India

- **High level of digital illiteracy:** As per the 71st NSSO Survey on Education 2014, only 6% of rural households have a computer. This makes adoption of technology driven

services delivery very slow.

- **Slow and delayed digital infrastructure development** along with the need of high upfront investment in creating infrastructure.
- **Change in behavioral pattern:** Village community is generally perceived to possess conservative mindset. They are accustomed with years of same of practice and resist changes. The biggest challenge is ensuring that each panchayat point of broadband is functional and in use.
- **Connectivity to remote areas:** The challenge of connectivity is a complex issue because **every state has different laws pertaining to its execution.** Due to this, often the remote areas are neglected under implementation of the several programmes like Bharat net.
- **Promoting Entrepreneurship abilities** as rural youth are needed to be educated about the potential benefits and progress that digitization entails for the village.

Way Forward

- **PPP models** must be explored for sustainable development of digital infrastructure, as has been the case for civic infrastructure projects **like roads and metro.**
- **PMGDISHA (Prime Minister Gramin Digital Saksharata Abhiyaan)** must be implemented swiftly and coverage should be expanded to all rural households.
- Along with that, **a regular awareness**

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campaign must be organized in collaboration with civil societies about the benefits of adoption of technology.

- Local authorities should be empowered to fill in the digital gaps in terms of advanced infrastructure, digital skills as well as digital public services and create an environment to facilitate digital innovation in rural areas.

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Third Mission Innovation (MI-3) Ministerial Meeting

Why in News?

India recently participated in the 3rd Mission Innovation Ministerial Meeting held in Sweden.

Initiatives taken

- **Mission Innovation Champions Programme** was launched by Mission innovation countries to felicitate clean energy innovators.
- **Hydrogen Innovation Challenge** was announced to reduce costs along the value chain and further expand the deployment of hydrogen.
- India announced setting up of **First International Incubator for clean energy** in public-private partnership at a total investment of around US \$ 5 million in Delhi.
- India announced participation in Global cooling innovation challenge

Mission Innovation

- It was launched at COP21 of UNFCCC in Paris in November 2015. It is a **global platform of 23 countries and European Union** aimed at accelerating clean energy innovations through-
 - Enhanced Government funding,
 - Greater public-private sector partnership and
 - Enhanced global cooperation.
- It seeks to **double investments** in clean energy innovation over five years.
- India is founding member of Mission

Innovation and part of the Steering Committee besides co-lead of innovation challenges on smart grids, off grids and sustainable bio-fuels.

- **Department of Biotechnology (DBT)** is nodal agency of this mission in India
- The first Ministerial meeting was held in June 2016 in San Francisco.
- 4th MI Ministerial will be hosted by Canada, Vancouver in May 2019.

The **seven Innovation Challenges** under Mission Innovation are the following:

- Smart Grids Innovation Challenge
- Off-Grid Access to Electricity Innovation Challenge
- Carbon Capture Innovation Challenge.
- Sustainable Biofuels Innovation Challenge
- Converting Sunlight Innovation Challenge
- Clean Energy Materials Innovation Challenge
- Affordable Heating and Cooling of Buildings Innovation Challenge

Startup Ranking Framework

Context:

- 30 States and Union Territories have participated in the State Startup Ranking Framework 2018 launched by DIPP.

What next?

- The participating States and UTs shall now be evaluated on a score of 100, against 38 action points categorized into 7 areas of intervention such as Startup Policy and implementation, Incubation support, Seed Funding, Angel and Venture Funding, Simplification of Regulations, Easing Public Procurement and Awareness & Outreach.
- In order to evaluate States/UTs in a balanced and transparent manner, the assessment will be based on the aggregate score of the documentary proofs substantiating the implementation of action points by the State/ UT Government and also feedback from Startup ecosystem beneficiaries/components.
- DIPP has appointed seven dedicated evaluation committees involving members from all relevant departments and reputed players in the ecosystem, for evaluating States' responses in each area of intervention.

About the Ranking Framework:

- The key objective of the Startup States and UTs Ranking

Framework is to encourage States and UTs to take proactive steps towards strengthening the Startup ecosystems at the local level.

- The Ranking Framework will measure the impact of each step initiated at the local level for building a strong Startup ecosystem. The Ranking Framework will also enable continuous learning through the dissemination of good practices.
- The Ranking Framework is based on the feedback collected from Startup ecosystem stakeholders, which include startups, mentors, investors, accelerators, incubators and the government bodies. Areas which should be given greater thrust like seed funding support, women entrepreneurship are given more score.

Significance of Startups:

- India is home to about 20,000 startups, with about 1,400 beginning operations every year.
- They are not only driving economic growth but also leading to technological innovations and employment generation in every state.
- Entrepreneurs are introducing new solutions everyday and also improving existing processes.
- To encourage and help startups the Govt of India has taken the lead in creating policies and a framework. Many States and UTs have a startup focussed environment with

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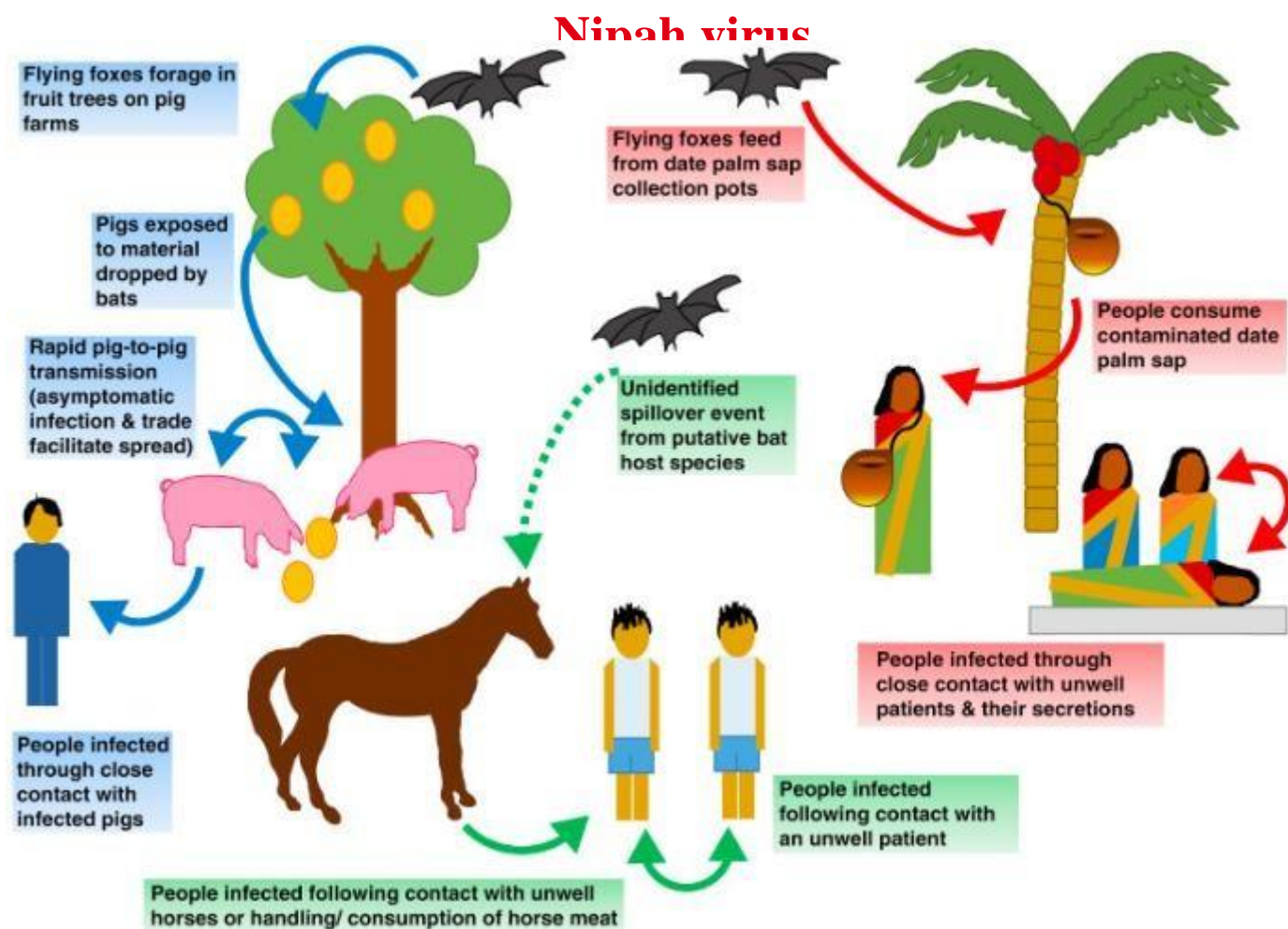
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ease of doing business for startups.



Way ahead:

The Govt has to align its strategies to tap into the infinite potential of young entrepreneurial minds. Startups need help in the journey from idea to business and business to success. States will also have to take proactive steps to enable startup ecosystems at the local level.

Context:

Kerala health department is on high alert in the wake of deaths due to the ‘Nipah’ virus (NiV). The government has set up a task force to monitor the cases and contain the spread of this fast spreading virus which has a reported mortality rate of 70%.

When was it first reported?

- It was first identified in 1998 at Kampung Sungai Nipah village, Malaysia. The virus is named after this village.

What are the symptoms in humans?

- The symptoms of Nipah are similar to that of influenza: fever, muscle pain, and respiratory problems. Inflammation of the brain can also cause disorientation. Late onset of Encephalitis can also occur. Sometimes a person can have an asymptomatic infection, and be a carrier of Nipah and not show any symptoms.

Are there any vaccines?

- **Currently, there are no vaccines** for both humans and animals. Intensive supportive care is given to humans infected by Nipah virus.
- According to WHO, ribavarin can reduce the symptoms of nausea, vomiting, and convulsions associated with the disease. Individuals infected need to be hospitalised and isolated. Special care should be taken to prevent human-to-human transmission. Surveillance systems should be established to detect the virus quickly and to initiate appropriate control measures.

What is Nipah Virus?

- According to WHO, the Nipah virus infection is a newly emerging zoonosis, that is, a disease transmitted from animals to humans. The virus belongs to a new genus termed Henipavirus (subfamily Paramyxovirinae).
- The natural host of the virus are fruit bats belonging to the family Pteropodidae. In 2004, humans were affected after eating the date palm contaminated by infected fruit bats. Pigs can also act as intermediate hosts.

Animal-Free Testing For Drugs

Why in News?

Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission has approved modern, animal-free tests for drug manufacturers.

New Guidelines

- In the **2018 edition of Indian Pharmacopoeia**, the IPC has **replaced the pyrogen test** carried out on rabbits and the abnormal toxicity test carried out on guinea pigs and mice.
- Pyrogen test will be replaced by a bacterial endotoxin test or a monocyte activation test which can be carried out in test tubes.
- **Abnormal toxicity test** can be waived by getting a compliance certificate from the National Control Laboratory.
- Tests like the one for abnormal toxicity have been removed by the U.S. and European pharmacopoeia as they are not an efficient marker.
- The guidelines will come into effect from 1 July 2018.

Pyrogen Test

- A **pyrogen is a foreign substance** that causes a fever (temperature elevation) in an animal's body. Vaccines and other injectable drugs must be confirmed to be pyrogen free according to regulatory requirements.
- For the test, the drug is **injected into a rabbit** (Food and water is withheld to rabbit overnight) and the animal is **closely observed for feverish**

symptoms.

Abnormal Toxicity Test

- This test is carried out to check potential hazardous biological contamination in vaccine formulations i.e. the degree to which a substance can damage living or non-living entity.
- The scientists observe if there is death of any animal during the tests.

Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC)

- It is an autonomous institution of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India.
- It is created **to set standards of drugs** in the country.
- It **publishes official documents** for improving Quality of Medicines by way of adding new and updating existing articles in the form of Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP).
- It also **promotes rational use** of generic medicines by publishing National Formulary of India.

Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP)

- It **contains a collection** of authoritative procedures of analysis and specifications for Drugs.
- It has **got legal status** under the Second Schedule of the Drugs & Cosmetics Act, 1940 and Rules 1945 there under.

New Norms For Labelling Packaged GM Foods

Why in news?

FSSAI has issued Draft food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations 2018 wherein it has proposed that all packaged food products containing genetically modified (GM) ingredients must clearly state it on their labels.

Background

- Genetically modified crops are cultivated from seeds that are genetically engineered to increase yields or tolerance to pests. The first GM labelling requirements for food products were introduced by the European Union (EU) in 1997.
- In case of India, a Supreme Court **moratorium** has been in place concerning the cultivation of GM food crops.
- Furthermore, GM food imports require approvals under two laws- the Environment Protection Act of 1986 and the Food Safety and Standards Act of 2006.
- While the EPA, 1986 covers environmental impacts of the food products, the FSSA, 2006 assesses the food's impact on human health.
- There are no regulations in India for GM products till now.

Draft food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2018

- It makes it mandatory to label such food stuffs as “Contains GMO/Ingredients derived from GMO” if such items contain 5% or more GE ingredients.

- It also suggests mandatory declaration by packaged

food manufacturers about nutritional information such as calories, total fat, trans fat, sugar and salt per serve on the front of the pack.

- It has also proposed a colour code scheme where food with the high fat, sugar and salt will be coloured ‘red’ in case the value of energy from total sugar is more than 10% of the total energy provided by the 100 grams or 100 ml of the product. It has similar provisions for trans-fat and sodium content as well.

Way Forward

- India needs to establish a **regulatory mechanism for GM foods**. The regulation of GM products may be integrated with other major initiatives undertaken by FSSAI for food safety such as:
 - Food Safety on Wheels** initiative under which 62 mobile food lab units will be deployed across the country for food testing, public education and awareness and for conducting training and certification programmes.
 - A centralised lab management system called **InFolNet (Indian Food Laboratory Network)** to connect all the government and private food labs.
 - Food safety index** which will be launched by FSSAI, considering the need for States to have a robust food safety ecosystem, to measure

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their performance on various parameters.

- Along with mandatory labelling of GMOs labels such as **Organic label and Non-GMO label** should also be promoted.

Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)

- FSSAI, under the **Ministry of Health & Family Welfare**, has been established under Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006.
- It has responsibility of laying down scientific standards for articles of food and to regulate their manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import to ensure availability of safe and wholesome food for human consumption.

Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee,

- It functions under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC)
- It is responsible for appraisal of activities involving large scale use of hazardous microorganisms and recombinants in research and industrial production from the environmental angle.
- It is also responsible for appraisal of proposals relating to release of genetically engineered (GE) organisms and products into the environment

Should labelling of GM foods be mandatory?

Arguments in favour	Arguments Against
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consumers have the right to know which products may have GM item as they are already being used in a lot of processed foods. Labelling is already mandatory in 27 member nations of the European Union, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Korea, Brazil and China. So India also must follow suit. GMO technology is unpredictable, uncontrollable and may have unforeseeable effects Eighty percent of GMOs are engineered to withstand toxic pesticides and herbicides using neurotoxic chemicals and genes. GMO crops, with heavy herbicide use, destroy the microbiome of the soil, reduce the nutritional content of the food and leave higher residues of chemicals on the food. Further GM technology into Indian fields may also lead to the widespread industrialisation of food production. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The experience in EU and Japan has shown that consumers, retailers and processors shift away from GM ingredients or food products. Thus, mandatory labelling would act as an import barrier and diverts trade and may result in GM foods not appearing at retail level at all. It results in additional taxpayer costs due to enforcement and testing. It also amounts to loss to those consumers who would otherwise prefer to buy lower-priced GM food products but may not get them due to the shift. Mandatory labelling makes it is easier for pressure groups opposed to genetic modification to target any product and launch a negative campaign against the processing firms. Voluntary labelling could achieve less-distorted results with lower costs and is a superior regulatory solution.

Trans Fat

Why in News?

World Health Organization has urged developing nations to eliminate man-made trans fatty acids from their food supplies.

About Trans-Fat

- Also known as Trans Fatty Acids (TFA), they are of 2 types-
 - Natural Trans-Fat- Occur naturally in the dairy and some meat products.
 - Artificial Trans-Fat- They are created when the oil goes through hydrogenation, which involves adding hydrogen to the liquid oil to make it more solid.
- They help to increase the shelf life of oils and foods and stabilise their flavours.
- In India, Vanaspati, desi ghee, butter and margarine are the main sources of trans fat. Vanaspati is favoured by the industry as it prolongs a food product's shelf life and is cheap.

Health Hazards due to Trans-Fat

- According to various studies, a 2% increase in energy intake from trans-fat has been associated with a 23 % increase in the risk of heart disease and according to another estimate by WHO.
 - Its consumption increases the risk of heart disease by raising the level of low-density lipoprotein (LDL), also known as the “bad” cholesterol and at the same time it reduces the level of high-density

lipoprotein (HDL) which is the “good” cholesterol.

- They are supposed to be the main cause of Type-2 Diabetes and linked to insulin resistance, that is why WHO recommends that no more than one per cent of a person's calories come from trans fats.

FSSAI Recommendation

- The current permitted level of trans fat is 5 per cent (by weight) in India. FSSAI has further proposed to limit the maximum amount of trans fat in vegetable oils, vegetable fat and hydrogenated vegetable oil to 2 per cent to make India trans-fat free by 2022.
- It had also notified standards on re-use or reheating of cooking oil last year, according to which, vegetable oils that have accumulated the total polar compounds (Polar compounds are formed due to oxidation, hydrolysis and some other chemical reactions of oils during frying) of more than 25 per cent cannot be used.

Green Cricket in India

Context:

- The main aim of the partnership is to spread greater awareness about key environmental challenges that are facing the country and highlight alternate and more sustainable solutions.

Key facts:

- Through the agreement, the BCCI will endeavor to reduce its environmental impact by greening its operations and engaging cricketers and fans in green initiatives.
- The partnership will help make cricket green and sensitise spectators towards minimising waste generation during matches.
- The partnership will also focus on phasing out single-use plastic across stadiums and cricket events in the country.

Background:

- As global host of World Environment Day in 2018, India is leading the global charge to #BeatPlasticPollution in the country, and around the world. It is estimated that the world uses 10 million plastic bags every minute, and much of ends up in our oceans and landfills and is ingested by marine animals and wildlife.

About the Board of Control for Cricket in

India:

- The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) is the national governing body for cricket in India. Today, the BCCI has 30 full-time members. It organizes – among others – the Indian Premiere League.

About World Environment Day:

- World Environment Day is the single largest celebration of our environment each year. Since it began in 1974, it has grown to become a global platform for public outreach that is widely celebrated across the globe.

Biodiversity Award For Arunachal Reserve

Context:

- Singchung Bugun Village Community Reserve in Arunachal Pradesh has been awarded the India Biodiversity Award for its effort to conserve the critically endangered bird – Bugun liocichla.

About Bugun liocichla:

- Bugun Liocichla (Liocichla bugunorum) was discovered in 2006 in West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh. The bird has been named in honour of the efforts of the Bugun community of Singchung village in West Kameng district in conserving the wildlife and forest of the area.
- The known population of this species is between 14 and 20 individual birds and occupies an extremely small (3 to 4 square kilometre) area in the temperate forest around 2,200m which is entirely within the traditional lands of Singchung village.
- The International Union for the Conservation of Nature has classified this species as critically endangered.

About SBVCR:

The Singchung Bugun village community reserve was formally created on February 6 last year following intensive conservation efforts by the Arunachal forest department. The SBVCR, 17 square kilometre in size, is the core area of a larger conservation area on traditional Bugun lands.

What are community reserves?

- Conservation reserves and community reserves in India are terms denoting protected areas of India which typically act as buffer zones to or connectors and migration corridors between established national parks, wildlife sanctuaries and reserved and protected forests of India.
- Such areas are designated as conservation areas if they are uninhabited and completely owned by the Government of India but used for subsistence by communities, and community areas if part of the lands are privately owned. Administration of such reserves would be through local people and local agencies like the gram panchayat, as in the case of communal forests.
- The 2002 Amendment to the Indian Wildlife Protection Act (1972) calls for a new category of protected areas, a ‘Community Reserve’ (CR).

Clean Air India Initiative’ launched

Context:

way.

- Clean Air India initiative was recently launched by Prime Minister of Netherlands Mark Rutte, who is in India on a two-day visit.

About Clean Air India initiative:

- The Clean Air India Initiative is a collaborative project between Get In The Ring, a platform for start-ups, the government of the Netherlands, Start-up India, and INDUS Forum, an online matchmaking platform of Indian and Dutch businesses.
- The campaign aims to curb air pollution in Indian cities by promoting partnerships between Indian start-ups and Dutch companies and build a network of entrepreneurs working on business solutions for cleaner air.

Way ahead:

- Governments need to be articulate about the problems they want to solve, bring together the right partners, and channelise entrepreneurs in the right direction to find solutions to global problems.”
- “Sustainable businesses present an opportunity to do social good, as they represent a for-profit orientation in the right framework. They advance the U.N.’s Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] in a smartly profitable

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Community Forest Resource

Why in news?

Recently, People's Forests Report was released by Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) on Community Forest Resource (CFR) management.

Background

- **National Forest Policy, 1988**, had paved the way for semi-decentralization of forest governance in the country, leading to the emergence of **joint forest management (JFM)**. It led to increased availability of non-timber forest produce (NTFPs) and fuelwood and improved forest protection.
- In 2006, The **Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act** or the **Forest Rights Act (FRA)** was passed which provides for recognition of forest lands as **community forest resources (CFR)**.
- As of 2016, a little over 1.1 million hectares (ha) of forestland had been brought under CFR management. However, as per an estimate by **Community Forest Resource-Learning and Advocacy**, 45 % of India's total forest area, should be recognised as CFR.

states.

- **Global Acceptance of CFR:** As of 2013, at least 15.5%, of the world's forests were under some form of community control.
- **CFR governance helping forest conservation:** Forest-dependent communities have adopted an innovative practice to manage their CFR areas, among which protection from forest fires and the protocols for sustainable harvest of NTFPs are common to most Gram Sabhas.
- **Improving Livelihood:** CFR has increased collective bargaining power of community which has helped in alleviating poverty and reverses the trend of migration from forest areas.
- **Increasing new employment opportunities in CFR areas:** A bottom-up approach plans by Gram Sabha for development plan is creating huge employment opportunity for its members in the CFR areas.
- **Strengthening PVTG Status:** Members from particularly vulnerable tribal group (PVTG) are benefitted from inclusive approach under Act, which provide them a sustain source of livelihood and mainstreaming in the development process of country.

Finding of report

- **Poor implementation:** Only seven states have formally recognized the rights of forest dwelling communities (Only 3% of potential areas) to manage and govern their forest resources with huge disparities among

Challenges

- **Operational Challenges:** Communities have often faced **stiff resistance** from forest departments in attempts to assert CFR rights despite approval from gram sabhas.

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- **Administrative reluctances:** The state and district administration have taken little initiatives to scale up the recognition of CFR rights or support CFR management in the country.
- **Fencing of CFR areas** to avoid case of ‘encroachment’, when a group of outsiders from a nomadic community camped inside the village’s CFR with their livestock.
- **Unscientific Plans:** Concerns among the department officials about ecological integrity and scientific rigour in the CFR plans of gram sabhas, as sometimes their plans are for short term gains rather than long-term sustenance.

aware of the full potential of CFR rights

- **Infrastructure and Marketing constraints:** Connectivity to market is a major challenges as it constraint future prospect of minor produce sale and production.

Way Forward

- **Convergence of Plans and procedure:** CFR management should be integrated into existing government’s programmes like MGNREGA, National Bamboo Mission, National Horticulture Mission, Aspirational District program etc. so that the flow of funds to gram sabhas becomes an institutionalized practice.
- **Use of technology:** GPS devices can be used by the villages in identifying and mapping locations in their CFR areas that need intervention.
- **Adopting best practices:** Many states can learn from other in effective implementation of FRA, as CFR rights can revitalise rural economy, create employment and develop sustainable business models from forestry.
- **CAMPA fund** can be utilized strengthening CFR activities like fund for fire protection work in the CFR areas.
- **Develop guidelines for the role of government departments in CFR areas** to explicitly clarify the role of government as facilitator and support CFR governance processes without undermining the autonomy and authority of gram sabhas
- **Develop a new framework for CFR**

Conflicting legislations and orders:

- **Conflicts between Ministry of Tribal Affairs and MoEF&CC:** National Tiger Conservation Authority order in March 2017, denied forest rights to communities in critical tiger habitats.
- **Indian Forest Act (IFA), 1927,** prohibits (and prescribes punishment) for activities such as grazing and removal of forest produce, FRA, on the other hand, legitimizes the use of forests for grazing and collection and sale of NTFPs
- Different legislations in states for collection and trade of NTFP's.
- **Poor Financial health of concerned departments in States:** A total of Rs 26.54 crore have been approved to five states which is insufficient for proper implementation of ACT.
- **Lack of Awareness:** Most gram sabhas eligible for CFR rights are not

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governance: Ministry of Tribal Affairs should develop a framework to ensure ecological sustainability, financial transparency and social equity in CFR governance.

- **Build capacity and leadership of CFRMCs:** To provide them information on the best methods to tap the potential of these areas to improve their livelihoods as well as health of the forests.
- **Resolve the timber debate in CFR areas:** Gram sabhas should be allowed to sustainably harvest and sell timber in their CFR areas with proper checks and balances mechanism in place to ensure that illegal timber exploitation does not happen inside CFR areas.
- **Develop a multi-tier FRA monitoring and information system:** rigorous well-designed web-based information system is needed to ensure successful implementation, disseminating cross learning and monitoring the impact of FRA initiatives on local livelihoods and forest health.

National Policy On Biofuels-2018

Why in news?

The Union Cabinet recently approved National Policy on Biofuels – 2018 to encourage the generation and use of biofuels.

Background

- The government has also formulated National Policy on Biofuels earlier in 2009. The policy included features like:
 - An indicative target of 20% blending of biofuels both for biodiesel and bioethanol by 2017
 - Biodiesel production from non-edible oilseeds on waste, degraded and marginal lands to be encouraged.
 - MSP for non-edible oilseeds to ensure fair price to farmers.
 - Minimum Purchase Price (MPP) for purchase of bio-ethanol and bio-diesel.
 - Major thrust on R&D with focus on plantations, processing and production of bio-fuels, including Second Generation Bio-fuels.
 - Financial incentives for second generation bio-fuels.
 - National Biofuel Coordination Committee, headed by the PM to provide policy guidance and coordination.
 - A Biofuel Steering Committee, chaired by Cabinet Secretary to oversee implementation of the Policy.
 - However, the Biofuels programme

in India has been largely impacted due to the sustained and quantum non-availability of domestic feedstock for biofuel production.

- In India, industrial-scale availability of ethanol so far has been only from sugar factories, which were free to divert it to other users such as alcohol producers, who would pay more.
- The **National Policy on biofuels-2018** tries to address these supply-side issues by encouraging alternative feedstocks with an aim to reduce the cost of producing biofuels and improve affordability for consumers as well as developing biofuel production into a vibrant Rs 1 trillion industry in the next six years.

Salient Features of the National Policy on biofuels, 2018

Categorisation of biofuels to enable extension of appropriate financial and fiscal incentives under each category. The two main categories are:

- **Basic Biofuels-** First Generation (1G) bioethanol & biodiesel
- **Advanced Biofuels** - Second Generation (2G) ethanol, Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) to drop-in fuels, third Generation (3G) biofuels, bio-CNG etc.
- **Expands the scope of raw material for ethanol production** by allowing use of Sugarcane Juice, Sugar containing materials like Sugar Beet, Sweet Sorghum, Starch containing materials like Corn, Cassava,

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Damaged food grains like wheat, broken rice, Rotten Potatoes, unfit for human consumption for ethanol production.

- **Allows use of surplus food grains for production of ethanol** for blending with petrol to ensure appropriate price to farmers during surplus. However, it needs the approval of National Biofuel Coordination Committee.
- **Thrust on Advanced Biofuels:** Viability gap funding scheme for 2G ethanol Bio refineries of Rs.5000 crore in 6 years in addition to additional tax incentives and higher purchase price as compared to 1G biofuels.
- **Encourages setting up of supply chain mechanisms** for biodiesel production from non-edible oilseeds, used Cooking Oil, short gestation crops.
- **Synergising efforts** by capturing the roles and responsibilities of all the concerned Ministries/Departments with respect to biofuels in the policy document itself.

Potential Benefits of the policy

- **Reduce Import Dependency:** The large-scale production of biofuels would reduce import dependency on crude oil and save forex.
- **Cleaner Environment:** By reducing crop burning & conversion of agricultural residues/wastes to biofuels there will be reduction in GHGs emissions and other particulate matters.
- **Municipal Solid Waste Management:** It is estimated that,

annually around 62 MMT of Municipal Solid Waste gets generated in India. The policy promotes conversion of waste/plastic, MSW to drop in fuels (hydrocarbon fuels from solid waste).

- **Infrastructural Investment in Rural Areas:** addition of 2G bio refineries across the Country will spur infrastructural investment in the rural areas.
- **Employment Generation:** the establishment of bio-refineries would create jobs in Plant Operations, Village Level Entrepreneurs and Supply Chain Management.
- **Additional Income to Farmers:** Farmers can capitalize on agricultural residues /waste which otherwise are burnt by them. They can sell their surplus output to ethanol making units when price dump, thus, ensuring appropriate price.

Challenges and way forward

- **Abuse of policy especially when prices of crude oil soar** as farmers would find it economically more rewarding to convert farm produce into ethanol for doping with petrol.
- **Need of improvement in technological and financial feasibility** with respect to production of biofuels. Thus, industry academic collaboration should be enhanced in an integrated manner.
- **Inadequate supply-chain infrastructure** to deliver biofuels to the final consumer. Hence, improved investment should be done in building robust infrastructure.
- **Limits on private investment:** The

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government should also take steps to remove policy barriers that have discouraged private investment in building supply chains for tapping India's huge biofuel potential.

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Animal Testing

- Animal Testing or Experimentation involves the use of animals to develop and test safety of new medicines, drugs, cosmetics, medical procedures and other industry products.
- Animals are subjected to pain, stress, ear-notching, genetic manipulation, physical restraint, food-and-water deprivation, asphyxiation and other manipulations.

Ethical questions and concerns involved:

- **What is the moral status of an animal?**
 - Given the animals' capacity to suffer, to enjoy life etc., shall we equate their moral status to that of humans?
- **Do they have innate rights?**
 - Animals lack cognitive abilities and full autonomy, unlike humans. Hence, humans have limited obligations towards them.
- **How does one distinguish between animals and infants or disabled humans?**
 - It is **speciesism** (a concept akin to racism) to experiment on animals while refraining from human experiments.
- Inability of the animals to consent.
- Animals are subjected to unnatural state of existence.
- It is also argued that there is lack of proven benefits to humans, out of these methods.

The issue invokes the following two of the Seven Sins, outlined by Gandhi ji:

- Science without humanity
- Knowledge without Character

Related Facts

- Supporters of animal testing, such as the British Royal Society, argue that virtually every medical achievement in the 20th century relied on the use of animals in some way.
- It is estimated that more than 115 million animals worldwide are used in laboratory experiments every year.
- Most animals are euthanized after being used in an experiment.
- National Institutes of Health (US) has noted that 95% of all drugs that are shown to be safe and effective in animal tests fail in human trials because they do not work or are dangerous.

Speciesism: It is about giving sanction to the idea that being human is a good enough reason for human animals to have greater moral rights than non-human animals.

It legitimizes the principle of Homo-centrism or Anthropo-centrism.

ETHICAL DILEMMA		
Using animals as scientific resources to further medical science and save lives	V	Treating animals with due regard to their existence, pain and suffering as living beings, and avoiding unnecessary abuse
Ends i.e. benefits for human beings	E	
Human rights	R	Means i.e. use of 'lesser' living beings
Religious traditions allow for human dominion over animals	S	Animal rights
	S	Religious traditions also tell us to be merciful to animals and refrain from cruelty against them

PRINCIPLE OF 3Rs

Reduction:

- Use less complex animals wherever possible e.g. bacteria over mammals
- Minimize the number of animals used
- Share the results with other researchers

Refinement:

- Use animal subjects/models only to obtain information not already available in the scientific community
- Use less invasive techniques

Replacement:

- Use animal testing only in the absence or non- viability of alternative methods.

3. Engagement of human volunteers e.g. micro-dosing

Use of human-patient simulators for medical training.

What can be done to overcome the ethical dilemma?

Using animals for research should evolve out of a strong sense of **ethical introspection**, which involves a careful self-analysis of one's own personal and scientific motives. Further, following would help in better treatment of animals:

- Deploying the Principle of 3Rs (see Box); this has also been adopted as a legal requirement in the European Union and other nations.
- Adopting standard guidelines for animal testing, such as:
 1. Monitor and improve the conditions of laboratory animals
 2. Use anaesthesia appropriately
 3. Deploy trained personnel to handle animals
- **Alternatives to animal testing:**
 1. *In vitro* methods i.e. using human cell cultures and tissues e.g. organs-on-a-chip
 2. *In silico* methods i.e. advanced computer-modelling

Arguments for Animal testing	Arguments against Animal testing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Leads to many life-saving cures and treatments <input type="checkbox"/> No adequate alternative to testing on a living, whole-body system <input type="checkbox"/> Overcome ethical considerations involved in the use of human subjects <input type="checkbox"/> Shorter life cycles make animals better research subjects <input type="checkbox"/> Benefits animals also, as animal treatments are developed during their experimentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Time- and resource-intensive <input type="checkbox"/> Provide little understanding of how chemicals behave in the body <input type="checkbox"/> In many cases, do not correctly predict real-world human reactions and do not ensure safety <input type="checkbox"/> Anatomic, metabolic, and cellular differences from humans, make animals poor models <input type="checkbox"/> Medical progress is, at times, held back by inadequate animal models or due to delays in requisite permissions/ licence to carry out animal testing.

Social Licence To Operate (SLO)

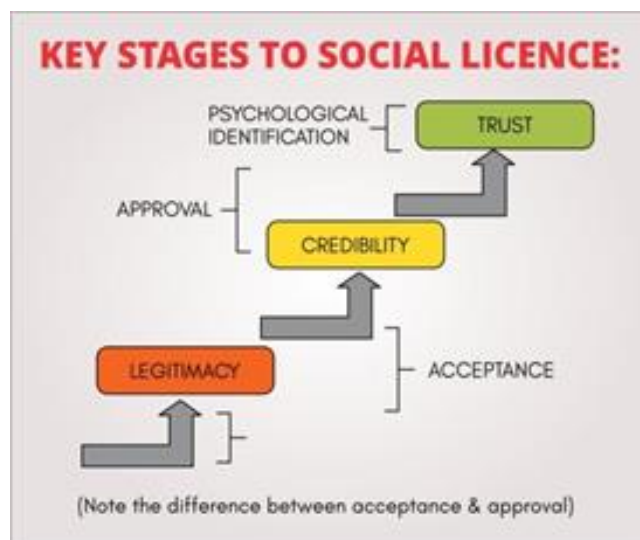


Why in news?

Tamil Nadu government announced the closure of Sterlite copper plant in Thoothukudi post-violence that claimed 13 lives, in June 2018. The violence is a clear manifestation of loss of SLO by Sterlite Industries.

What is Social Licence (SLO)?

- Acceptance of upcoming or ongoing business/ project within the pre-existing social contracts that bind communities.
- SLO engages stakeholders, employees and the general public.
- Its nature is dynamic and non-permanent, requiring constant maintenance.
- It relates to the concepts of **sustainability** and **triple bottom line** (a measure of company's economic value, environmental impact and degree of social sustainability).
- 'Social' can be said to be derived from common law, while 'licence' is derived from civil law – thus SLO enjoys acceptance by a vast network.



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15th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas

Context:

- 15th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas will be held in the holy city of Varanasi in January. It will be organised by the Ministry of External Affairs in association with the Uttar Pradesh government.
- **Theme:** “Role of Indian Diaspora in building a New India”.

About Pravasi Bharatiya Divas:

- Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) is celebrated every year on January 9 to mark the contribution of overseas Indian community in the development of India.
- **January 9** was chosen as the day to celebrate this occasion since it was on this day in 1915 that Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest Pravasi, returned to India from South Africa, led India’s freedom struggle and changed the lives of Indians forever.
- These conventions provide a platform to the overseas Indian community to engage with the government and Indian communities in India for mutually beneficial activities.
- These conventions are also very useful in networking among the overseas Indian community residing in various parts of the world and enable them to share their experiences in various fields.

Exercise Vijay Prahar

Context:

- Formations of South Western Command are carrying out Exercise VIJAY PRAHAR in the Mahajan Field Firing Ranges close to Suratgarh in Rajasthan. The month-long exercise is essentially to practice the troops in penetrative manoeuvres across the obstacle ridden terrain under a nuclear umbrella.

Aim:

The exercise is aimed to orchestrate wide spectrum of threats which are planned to be tackled through high tempo joint air and land operation involving hundreds of aircrafts, thousands of tanks and artillery pieces supported by real time intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and just in time logistic support.

Committee formed to commemorate Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary

Context:

- A government committee has been formed to coordinate year-long celebrations of Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary from October 2, 2019.
- The Committee will guide and approve policies, programmes,

activities for the commemoration and will also supervise implementation of the decisions taken from time to time.

Key facts:

- The Committee has a total of 125 members, including 116 from India and encompasses the President (as chair), the Vice-President, Prime Minister, Union Ministers, former Prime Ministers, Chief Ministers,

senior MPs and political leaders from across party lines.

- It also includes **eminent Gandhians**, social thinkers and activists representing a cross-section of Indian society and regional diversity.
- The Committee also has **nine international members**, including two former Secretaries General of the United Nations – Mr Kofi Annan and Mr Ban Ki-moon – and Nobel laureates Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa and former US Vice-President Al Gore.

Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI)

Context:

- The Union Cabinet has approved the Mutual Recognition Agreement between the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) and The South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA).

About ICAI:

ICAI is a statutory body established by an Act of Parliament of India, The Chartered Accountants Act, 1949, to regulate the profession of Chartered Accountancy in India.

APStar-6C

Context:

- China has launched the APStar-6C communications satellite on a Long March- 3B/G2 ‘Chang Zheng-3B/G2’ launch vehicle.

Key facts:

- APSTAR-6C is based on CASC DFH-4 platform equipped with 45 transponders in C, Ku, and Ka bands, with a designed service life of 15 years.
- The satellite will replace the in-orbit APSTAR-

6 satellite in 2018, providing high power transponder services to customers across the Asia-Pacific region for VSAT, video distribution, DTH and cellular backhaul applications.

- The DFH-4 (DongFangHong-4) platform is a large telecommunications satellite platform from a new generation that keeps high capability in output power and communication capacity ranking with

international advanced satellite platforms. The DFH-4 satellite also features strong capabilities against

hostile disturbance and jamming.

The applications for the DFH-4 platform aren't limited to high capacity broadcast communication satellites and can be used for tracking and data relay satellites, regional mobile communication satellites, etc.

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GravityRAT

What is it?

- It is a malware allegedly designed by Pakistani hackers.
- The RAT was first detected by Indian Computer Emergency Response Team, CERT-In, on various computers in 2017.
- It is designed to infiltrate computers and steal the data of users, and relay the stolen data to Command and Control centres in other countries.
- The ‘RAT’ in its name stands for Remote Access Trojan, which is a program capable of being controlled remotely and thus difficult to trace.

Why in news?

- It has recently been updated further and equipped with anti-malware evasion capabilities.
- The latest update to the program by its developers is part of GravityRAT’s function as an Advanced Persistent Threat (APT), which, once it infiltrates a system, silently evolves and does long-term damage.

Operation Insaniyat

Context:

India has sent Bangladesh its second relief consignment under Operation Insaniyat to help tens of thousands of displaced Rohingya Muslims who fled Myanmar into Bangladesh following military crackdown in the country.

In news- Mount Merapi

What is it?



It is an active stratovolcano located on the border between Central Java and Yogyakarta provinces, Indonesia. It is the most active volcano in Indonesia and has erupted regularly since 1548.

In news- What is the ‘Castle doctrine’ in Law?

- Also known as the **castle law** or the **defense of habitation law**, this refers to a doctrine in the common law tradition which states that a person who acts in self defence against an intruder into his personal property has the right to legal immunity for his actions.
- A person who is defending his home against an intruder can use deadly force to protect himself and still be exonerated for his actions under the law. The defendant employing the castle doctrine will have to justify his action with sufficient evidence and also explain the use of deadly force as an appropriate and reasonable response to the particular threat that was facing him.

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First all- woman Post Office Passport Seva Kendra

Context:

The 192nd Post Office Passport Seva Kendra, opened recently in Phagwara in Punjab, will be the first in the country to have all-women staff.

Mt. Bhagirathi 2

Context:

- Indian Army Women Officers' Mountaineering Expedition to Mt. Bhagirathi-II (6512 metres) consisting of nine women officers, was recently flagged off.



Key facts:

- Mt. Bhagirathi-II is located in the Garhwal Himalayas in Gangotri National Park.
- The peak rises right above the Gangotri glacier which sets new challenges for the climbers.
- The summit is challenging owing to its technical requirements, vertical ascents, inclement and unpredictable weather conditions.

National Dengue Day 2018

National Dengue Day is observed on May 16 in order to create awareness regarding the viral disease.

- **Spread of the disease:** It is contagious and can easily be spread from one person to another. The disease is mainly caused by 1 of the 4 closely related dengue viruses. The fever is transmitted when *Aedes mosquito* infected with dengue virus bites a person.
- **Symptoms:** High fever, severe headaches, nausea, joint and muscle pain are some of the symptoms of the disease, which typically starts after 6 days of being infected with it. Those with weak immune system are at the higher risk of dengue.
- **Prevention:** The best way to prevent the disease is to try the best not to get bit by mosquitoes. Keep your surrounding clean and increase the usage of mosquito repellents. Avoid roaming in grassy areas in night. Don't forget to close door and windows of your house. To prevent breeding of mosquitoes, avoid still water near your surroundings.

Cyclone sagar

Context:

Jawahar tunnel's elevation, which

Cyclone 'Sagar' is a tropical cyclone in Arabian Sea. It is the first cyclonic storm of the season to develop in the Indian waters. Presently in Gulf of Aden, Cyclone Sagar is also expected to affect Somalia; Ethiopia, Djibouti.

Background:

Tropical cyclones are most common in the Arabian Sea in spring and autumn, during the transition periods between the strong southwest flow of the summer monsoon and the strong northeast flow that predominates in winter. On average, the Arabian Peninsula is affected by a tropical cyclone every year or two.

Banihal-Qazigund tunnel

Context:

would make it less prone to avalanches.

NHAI has said that the Banihal-Qazigund tunnel will be operational by next year.



About the tunnel:

- It is a 8.45 km road tunnel in the Pir Panjal range in Jammu and Kashmir connecting Banihal and Qazigund.
- It is a double tube tunnel consisting of two parallel tunnels – one for each direction of travel.
- It is 400 m lower than the existing

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India to host World Environment Day 2018

Context:

- India is the global host of 2018 World Environment Day which will take place on June 5, 2018.

Theme: “Beat Plastic Pollution”.

Background:

World Environment Day is a UN **Environment**-led global event, the single largest celebration of our environment each year, which takes place on June 5 and is celebrated by thousands of communities worldwide. Since it began in 1972, it has grown to become a global platform for public outreach that is widely celebrated across the globe.

Sherpa

Context:

- The Everest industry is suffering from a dangerous shortage of its most important resource: experienced Sherpa guides.
- Sherpas have been helping Everest climbers since the first British teams set their sights on the summit in the 1920s.
- Their unique physiology, adapted over thousands of years of living at high altitudes, has made them essential since. A recent British study found that Sherpas use oxygen more efficiently than lowlanders.
- Regions with significant Sherpa populations: Nepal, China (Tibet), Bhutan and India.



Who are Sherpas?

Sherpas are the people living in the high-altitude regions of the Himalayas who support climbing teams as porters, guides, rope-fixers, cooks and cleaners.

First Commercial Flight Lands In Arunachal Pradesh

Arunachal Pradesh has been put on the aviation map of the country with the state's first commercial flight landing at Pasighat in the north-east state's East Siang district, 305 kilometres from state capital Itanagar.



‘Nidaan’

What is it?

- It is a new software launched in Rajasthan for presumptive diagnosis and monitoring of seasonal and non-communicable diseases as well as the trends of ailments found in specific areas. It is expected to help in formulation of specific action plans for control of diseases.
- It will facilitate online entries of as many as 46 diseases and healthcare services available for their treatment in different institutions.

‘Black Panther’

What is it?

- It is a new specialised anti-Naxal combat for Chhattisgarh.
- It is on the lines of the Greyhounds unit. The Greyhounds is a special force in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh that specialises in anti-insurgency operations against Naxals and Maoists.

Nari Shakti Puraskar

Context:

- Nari Shakti Puraskar 2017 was recently presented to the INSV Tarini Team. The President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind, had conferred the Nari Shakti Puraskars on International Women’s Day (08th March 2018) in Rashtrapati Bhavan. As the INSV Tarini team was sailing then, the award could not be presented to the team.

About Nari Shakti Puraskars:

- To acknowledge Women’s achievements, the Government of India confers Nari Shakti Puraskars on eminent women and institutions in recognition of their service towards the cause of women empowerment. The Nari Shakti Awards were initiated in the year 1999.
- The Ministry of Women and Child Development announces these national level awards for eminent women, organisations and institutions.

The Nari Shakti Puraskar carries a cash award of Rs.1 Lakh and a certificate for individuals and institutions.

SURYA KIRAN-XIII

What is it?

- It is a joint Military Exercise between India and Nepal that will be conducted at Pithoragarh.

About Surya Kiran:

- The Surya Kiran series of Exercises are being conducted annually, alternatively in Nepal and India. Notably in the series of military training exercises undertaken by India with various countries, Surya Kiran series with Nepal is the largest in terms of troop's participation.
- The aim of this exercise is to conduct battalion level joint training with emphasis on Counter Terrorism in mountainous terrain. Aspects of Disaster Management have also been included in the exercise.
- The Joint Battalion Level Exercise will enhance defence co-operation and relations between the two nations. It is an ideal platform for the contingent of both nations to share their experience and gain mutually. The Exercise will be yet another step towards taking traditional friendship between the two nations to greater heights.

S-400 Triumf air defence missile systems

Context:

- India has concluded price negotiations with Russia for a nearly Rs 40,000 crore deal to procure S-400 Triumf air defence missile systems for the Indian Air Force.



Key facts:

- In 2016, India and Russia had signed an agreement on the ‘Triumf’ interceptor-based missile system which can destroy incoming hostile aircraft, missiles and even drones at ranges of up to 400 km.
- S-400 is known as Russia’s most advanced long-range surface-to-air missile defence system.

Braille-enabled signboards to be used during Maheshtala bypoll

Context:

- Election Commission of India** for the *first time* will start the use of **Braille-enabled signboards for visually challenged voters** in the upcoming **Maheshtala Assembly by-election** in West Bengal.
- The initiative of Braille-enabled signboards was part of the drive to **make elections more accessible** to persons with disabilities (PWD).
- The decision to use Braille-enabled signboards is a State-specific measure
- to ensure hassle-free polling experience for visually impaired voters.

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Andhra Pradesh gets new state bird, state flower

Four years after the bifurcation of **Andhra Pradesh**, the government of the residual state has announced its state symbols.



- **State bird:** Rama Chiluka (psittacula krameri) or rose ringed parakeet.
- **State animal:** Blackbuck (antelope cervicapra) or Krishna Jinka.
- **State tree:** Neem (azadirachta indica) or Vepa Chettu.
- **State flower:** Jasmine (Jasminum)

State symbols of Telangana:

- **State bird:** Palapitta.
- **State animal:** Jinka or spotted deer.
- **State tree:** Jammi Chettu (prosopis cineraria).
- **State flower:** Tangidi Puvvu (senna auriculata).