

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

MARCH

2018

PT-MAINS

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INTEGRATED SCHOOL EDUCATION SCHEME

Why in news?

Government has decided to subsume Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Teacher Education (TE) which were operational since more than 15 years under an integrated school education scheme.

Objectives of the Scheme

The integrated scheme will be in place from 2018 to 2020, with an estimated allocation of Rs. 75,000 crores over the period, a 20% increase over the current allocation. The objectives include:

- Provision of quality education and enhancing learning outcomes of students;
- Bridging Social and Gender Gaps in School Education;
- Ensuring equity and inclusion at all levels of school education;
- Ensuring minimum standards in schooling provisions;
- Promoting vocationalization of education;
- Support States in implementation of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009; and
- Strengthening and up-gradation of State Councils for Educational Research and Training (SCERTs)/State Institutes of Education and District Institutes for Education and Training (DIET) as nodal agencies for teacher training.

Potential Benefits

- **Flexibility to States/UTs** to plan and prioritize their interventions within the scheme norms and the overall resource envelope available to them.
- **Integrated administration looking at 'school' as a continuum**- It will help improve the transition rates across the various levels of school education and aid in promoting universal access to children to complete school education. There has been inclusion of senior

secondary levels and pre-school levels in support for school education for the first time.

- **Enhanced Capacity Building of Teachers** through strengthening Teacher Education Institutions like State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) and District Institute for Education and Training (DIET).
- It would lead to an **optimal utilization of budgetary allocations** and effective use of human resources and institutional structures created for the erstwhile Schemes.
- **Other benefits** include an enhanced use of technology in education, support 'Swachh Vidyalaya', improved

quality of infrastructure in schools, preference to Educationally Backward Blocks, etc.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)

SSA is being implemented since 2001 for universalization of elementary education. After enactment of Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 which confers the right to elementary education on all children, in the age group of 6-14 years, SSA became the central programme to fulfil its objectives.

Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan

- RMSA was launched in 2009 with the objective to enhance access to secondary education and improve its quality.
- The scheme envisages to enhance the enrolment by providing a secondary school with a reasonable distance of habitation, with an aim to ensure GER of 100 per cent and universal retention by 2020.

Centrally Sponsored Scheme for Teacher Education:

- **Strengthening Teacher Education:** The Centrally Sponsored Scheme for Teacher Education was initiated in 1987 pursuant to the formulation of the National Policy of Education, 1986. It aims to establish District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) in all districts created up to 2011, strengthen Colleges of Teacher

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Education (CTEs), Institutes of Advanced Studies in Education (IASEs) and establish Block Institutes of teacher education (BITEs) in identified SC/ST/ minority concentration districts.

- **Quality in Teacher Education:** Creation of Separate Cadre for teacher educators and strengthen the cadre of teacher educators with a view to achieving planned and co-ordinated development of the teacher education system throughout the country,

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RASHTRIYA UCHCHATAR SHIKSHA ABHIYAN

Why in news?

Recently Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved continuation of centrally-sponsored Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) till 2020.

Important Initiatives under RUSA 2.0

With a view to ensure greater resource flow to the State higher education sector, RUSA 2.0 will encourage states and institutions to undertake projects in a public- private partnership mode based on viability gap funding

- It seeks to increase gross enrolment ratio by 30 per cent during this period, creation of 70 new model degree colleges and 8 new professional colleges.
- Besides, it seeks to enhance quality and excellence in 10 select State universities and 70 autonomous colleges, providing infrastructural support to 50 universities and 750 colleges.
- An **on-line virtual platform of infrastructure** and equipment (inventory) will be created so that institutions can share these resources.
- The scheme will give **priority to the Aspirational Districts**, identified by the NITI Aayog to improve access and equity through improved enrolment and retention.
- Creation of **National Higher Education Resource Centre (NHERC)** to be a resource centre for Research, Policy Advocacy, Capacity Building and providing well-informed policy and evidence-based research inputs.
- Components of Institutional Reforms and Restructuring, Capacity Building and Management Information Systems have been merged into one single component.
- It will enhance ongoing **mechanisms for Monitoring and Evaluation** and look at innovative ways of scaling up Monitoring and Evaluation, such as Fund Tracker, Reform Tracker, Bhuvan-RUSA and PFMS, so that projects can be completed by their scheduled time.

6TH EDITON OF INDIA BY THE NILE FESTIVAL

Context: Sixth edition of the India by the Nile (IBN) festival 2018 is being held in Cairo, Egypt.

About India by the Nile festival:

- The annual festival showcases a range of Indian cultural output, including contemporary and classical music, dance, puppet theatre, visual arts, food and yoga.
- It is the biggest foreign festival in Egypt and encourages artistic collaborations between the two countries.
- This year, the festival will also bring two new events, a fashion show and screening of the Indian movies.
- The festival is organised by the Embassy of India in Egypt and the Maulana Azad Centre for Indian Culture in collaboration with entertainment company Teamwork Arts.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** India by the Nile festival.

For Mains: Cultural linkages between India and Egypt.

NATIONAL ACADEMIC DEPOSITORY (NAD)

Why in news?

The recently launched NAD has been integrated with the e-SANAD portal.

*repository will also be available to students through **Digi Locker**.*

About NAD

NAD will be a 24x7 online store house of academic awards digitally lodged by various academic institutions/school boards/eligibility assessment bodies. Employers and other person with prior approval of the concerned student can verify the authenticity of any academic award.

Other Details

All the Central and State Universities, Deemed to be Universities, CBSE, State School Education Boards will participate in the depository.

- The UGC will be authorised body to operationalise the NAD.
- It will comprise of two inter-operable digital depositories i.e. NSDL Database Management Ltd (NDML) and CDSL Venture Ltd (CVL).
- NAD being an online, permanent and safe record will eliminate the need for issuing duplicate academic awards and any risk of losing, spoiling, damaging or forging the awards, will provide convenience in the availability of academic awards.

***e-Sanad** is a project aimed at online submission/ verification of documents with an ultimate object to extend contactless, cashless, faceless and paperless document attestation service for apostille and normal attestation to applicants in India (to be extended to Indians residing abroad as well in a phased manner). It is designed and developed by NIC. The e-Sanad service will start with CBSE depository.*

Parinam Manjusha

- It is **CBSE's digital repository** of academic records
- Employers and Educational Institutions can use this repository to **verify academic records of CBSE students online**.
- The digital academic records of this

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NABAKALEBAR FESTIVAL

Context:

- Commemorative coins in denominations of ₹10 and

₹1000 have been released on Lord Jagannath's Nabakalebar festival.

About Nabakalebar festival:

- The Nabakalebara is **an ancient ritual associated with most of the Jagannath Temples** when the Idols of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarshan are replaced by a new set of Idols.
- A year with an extra Ashadha masa/month as per Hindu Calendar is considered auspicious for conducting the ceremony. This usually occurs every twelve to nineteen years.
- The Deities are made from a scstype of Neem wood known as **Daru Bramha**.
- The most recent ceremony was in 2015, following the 1996 ceremony.
- This festival is celebrated at the Jagannath Temple in Puri, Orissa.

What's important?

For Prelims: Nabakalebar festival, Daru Bramha.

STATUS OF ANGANWADI CENTRES

Why in news?

Recently, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Human Resource highlighted the infrastructure status of Anganwadi Centres.

Highlights of the report

- There is a gap between the number of sanctioned and operational AWCs. The gap is maximum in the states of Bihar (20%) and J & K (7.3%).
- Around 4.5 lakh Anganwadi centres lacked both drinking water and toilet facilities. It adds that nearly 25 percent of Anganwadi centres don't have drinking water facilities and 36 per cent of these don't have toilets.
- Large number of posts of supervisors, AWWs and AWHs are lying vacant.

About Anganwadi Centres (AWCs)

- It is a courtyard play centre - located within the village or a slum, for providing various services as specified under ICDS scheme.
- **Responsibilities** of Anganwadi Workers(AWW) include quick survey of all the families, organise non- formal pre-school activities at AWCs, campaign for family planning & birth preparedness, check the child's nutrition progress (**National Nutrition Mission**), to assist in preparation of Village, Health Plan **Depot Holder** of Medicine Kit/Contraceptives of ASHA/AMN & under ICDS, assist in implementation of Kishore Shakti Yojana (KSY), etc.

Challenges faced by AWCs

- **Shortage of fund and implementation tools:** various reports highlighted about the problem of delay in receiving funds for necessary items.
- **Incentives**— AWWs are classified as 'voluntary' workers and their pay is treated as an 'honorarium', despite

being worked for over 10 hours daily. They even fulfil the extra duties like surveying public toilets, pregnant women, and supervising the quality of drinking water.

- **Lack of supervision:** Anganwadi centres have very less or nil supervision by the higher officials, which leads to poor performance and implementation of ICDS.
- **Inadequate knowledge** – Various studies show that Anganwadi workers don't have any knowledge regarding the revised norms for calories, protein and funds allocated for nutrition for each beneficiary.
- **Social-Religious prejudices:** A report by the Institute of Human Development showed how caste and religious prejudices in many villages have affected service delivery at Anganwadi centres, due to caste-based discrimination against children, as well as lack of cooperation between Asha workers and AWWs of different castes and communities.
- **Corruption:** It is being noticed that there is corruption in the appointment of Anganwadi workers, black marketing of rations, illegal diversion of medical kits and funds.

Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS)

- Launched in 1975, for children (6 months to 6 years) and pregnant & lactating mothers irrespective of their economic and social status.
- Categorized as **Core Scheme** under Centrally Sponsored Scheme.
- Intended to achieve the **Goals 2 and 3 of SDGs** (improvement in nutrition and ensuring healthy lives & promoting well-being for all at all ages respectively).
- Provides an **integrated package of six**

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services which include; i) Supplementary nutrition programme; (ii) Referral services (iii) Pre-school non-formal education (iv) Immunization; (v) Health check-up; (vi) Nutrition & health education.

- Services **related to health** and are provided by Ministry/Department of Health and Family Welfare.
- 5-tier monitoring and review mechanism at National, State, District, Block and Anganwadi Levels.

Way forward

- **PPP modal for Anganwadi-** Haryana based modern and model Anganwadi centre ‘**NandGhar**’ -build on the lines of public private partnership should be extended to other states.
- **Regular training** should be provided to AWC workers and their supervisors. Further they should also get refresher training to handle various register works independently.
- **Comprehensive assessment** of all the services and facilities along with knowledge and practice of the AWWs is need of the hour.
- **Dedicated programme** for the extension of IT-enabled services such as smartphones and tablet devices to update data on child nutrition, unique identification code and geo-mapped of Anganwadi centres, should be rolled out on pan Country scale.

HINDU NEW YEAR

- Hindu New Year was welcomed in different parts of the country with traditional festivities and celebrations.
- The Chaitra Sukladi, Ugadi, Gudi Padava, Navareh, Navroz and Chetti Chand are the same festivals in different names, marking the occasion.
 - Andhra Pradesh and Telangana: **Ugadi.**
 - Karnataka: **Yugadi /Ugadi.**
 - Maharashtra: **Gudi Padwa.**
 - Sindhis: **Cheti Chand.**
 - Manipuris: **Sajibu Cheiraoba.**
 - Hindus of Bali and Indonesia also celebrate their new year on the same day as **Nyepi.**

JACKFRUIT TO BE KERALA’S STATE FRUIT

- **Context:** Jackfruit is set to be declared as the official fruit of Kerala. The core objective of the government was to give a fillip to the production and sale of jackfruit and its value-added products.
- **Facts:** Elephant is the state animal of Kerala, while ‘great hornbill’ is the state bird and ‘kanikkonna’, the official flower. The state had also recently declared pearl spot, popularly known as ‘karimeen’, as its official fish.

CHILD MARRIAGE NUMBERS DROP SHARPLY

Why in news?

- The proportion of girls getting married in India has nearly halved in a decade, the United Nations children's agency UNICEF said recently.
- 25 million child marriages were prevented worldwide in the last decade, with the largest reduction seen in South Asia — where India was at the forefront.

Drivers of high prevalence

- **Deeply entrenched and widely practised social customs** with wide social approval is a major, often the most critical, driving factor of high prevalence of child marriage in states such as Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat.
- **Poverty, high wedding costs and other economic considerations:** political economy of child marriage is also determined by high demand for labour and high female work participation in certain geographic areas.
- **Lack of easy access to schooling, especially at secondary level:** According to UNICEF, a girl with 10 years of education has a six times lower chance of being pushed into marriage before she is 18.
- **Political patronage** due to social acceptance as politicians find it difficult to oppose the practice of child marriage as it may mean losing votes and support.
- Child marriage is also widely reported to be used as a **disguise to traffic girls from poor and tribal families**

for either the sex trade or as cheap labour.

Efforts to reduce child marriage

- The Women and Child Development Ministry has taken a number of steps to enhance the status of girl child and to address the problem of child marriage:
 - o Every year, State Governments are requested to take special initiative to delay marriage on AkhaTeej— the

traditional day for such marriages, by coordinated efforts.

- o It has developed a convergent national strategy- **“National Strategy Document on Prevention of Child Marriage”** and is currently drafting a plan of action on child marriage to guide all states in the implementation of strategies to prevent the problem. The suggested strategic areas of intervention to prevent child marriage are-

- **Law Enforcement- The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act,** main piece of legislation to prevent child marriage, 2006 makes it illegal for girls to marry under 18 years and for boys under 21 years. Such laws need to be enforced by ensuring appointment of Child Marriage Prohibition Officers, awareness of the law among communities and individuals, capacity building for the same, etc.
- **Access to quality education** and other opportunities since Education can be an important refraining factor from early marriage.
- **Changing mindsets and social norms-** Perceptions about gender and the role of women in the family and society, practices around marriage and puberty, and wide acceptance that marriage should be performed after puberty all contribute to child marriage.
- **Empowerment of adolescent girls** through schemes like **SABLA** which promote life skills training among girls.
- Knowledge and Data are at the base of shaping evidence-base interventions.
- Developing Monitorable Indicators in order to understand the impact of interventions on prevention of child marriage.

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Other laws that may provide protection to a child bride include the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000, the Domestic Violence Act, 2005, and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012.

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‘ADOPT A HERITAGE PROJECT’

Context:

- Letter of Intent has been issued to 24 agencies for the Submission of Vision Bids for 75 sites under the Adopt a Heritage Project.
 - The private players will undertake gap analysis of the actual requirement of the basic and advanced amenities, within the permissible guidelines of Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and prepare a Vision Bid Proposal accordingly for the site opted by them.
 - Once vision bid is accepted, MoU will be signed with the related party for upkeep of the Monument for overall enhanced tourist experience.

also look after the operations and the maintenance of the amenities. The ‘Monument Mitras’ would associate pride with their CSR activities.

What’s important?

- **For Prelims:** Adopt a Heritage, Monument Mitras and World Tourism Day.

For Mains: Need for conservation of heritage sites.

Adopt a Heritage Project:

- **What is it?** The ‘Adopt a Heritage Scheme’ of Ministry of Tourism was launched on *World Tourism Day i.e. 27th September, 2017*. This project is *a key initiative of Ministry of Tourism in close collaboration with Ministry of Culture and Archeological Survey of India (ASI)*, to develop the heritage sites / monuments and making them tourist-friendly to enhance the tourism potential and their cultural importance in a planned and phased manner.
- **How it works?** The project plans to entrust heritage sites/monuments and other tourist sites to private sector companies, public sector companies and individuals for the development of tourist amenities. The project aims to develop synergy among all partners.
- **Monument Mitras:** Successful bidders selected for adopting heritage sites / monuments by the Oversight and Vision Committee shall be called as Monument Mitras. The basic and advanced amenities of the tourist destinations would be provided by them. They would

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KARNATAKA GOVT CLEARS MINORITY STATUS FOR LINGAYATS

Context:

- The Karnataka government has decided to declare Lingayats as a religious minority and include the Veerashaivas who follow Basavanna as a group within the community.
- The state government will, now, recommend to the Centre that the community be granted religious minority status.

Background:

- The community has been demanding status of a separate religion for a long time. One part of the community demands the minority status for both Veerashaiva and Lingayats considering them the same, while another wants it only for the Lingayats as it considers Veershaivas to be Hindus.
- **Karnataka State Minorities Commission had formed a seven-member committee, headed by retired high court Judge HN Nagamohan Das** on the issue. The Nagamohan committee has recommended minority status for only the Lingayats and has kept Veershaivas out.

Who are Lingayats?

- Lingayats are followers of 12th-century social reformer Basavanna and his vachana (verses) philosophy. Their beliefs, practices and faith are different.
- Veerashaivas worship Lord Shiva, the one mentioned in Hindu mythology. However, the Shiva that Basavanna referred to in his vachanas (verses) is not the Hindu god Shiva but the ishtalinga (formless God), which people of the community wear around their neck.

Who are Veerashaivas?

- Veerashaivas are a sub-sect of Lingayats and ardent followers of Lord Shiva. They preceded Basavanna, the founder of Lingayatism.
- Veerashaivism has its roots in the Vedas and Agamas, and Veerashaivas do not

worship any god other than Shiva; they can be found spread across Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Who is Basavanna?

- Basavanna was a 12th-century social reformer. The revolution that Basavanna led came years after the Buddha.
- It was Basavanna and his contemporary Sharanas who launched a very strong spiritual, social and religious rebellion against Brahminical hegemony. Basavanna had declared that “work is worship”.
- He gave women equal status in his movement through the vachanas (verses). In order to take the social movement closer to the people, Basavanna and all the other Sharanas voiced their concerns in simple Kannada vachanas so that even lay people could comprehend them.

What's important?

- **For Prelims:** Minority status.

For Mains: Need for minority status- issues and challenges.

PASSIVE EUTHANASIA

Why in News?

The Supreme Court has recently given judgement on Passive IMP.

More about the Judgement

- The bench upheld that the **fundamental right to life and dignity includes right to refuse treatment and die with dignity** because the fundamental right to a "meaningful existence" includes a person's choice to die without suffering (including terminally ill).
- The judgment includes **specific guidelines to test the validity of a living will**, by whom it should be certified, when and how it should come into effect, etc.
- The guidelines also cover a situation where there is no living will and how to approach a **plea for passive euthanasia**.
- A person need not give any reasons nor is he answerable to any authority on why he should write an advanced directive.
- But the judge held that **active euthanasia is unlawful**.

Background

- The 196th Law Commission of India report in 2002 advocated passive euthanasia. However, it decided not to make any laws on euthanasia.
- In the Aruna Shanbaug's case in (2011), a major milestone, the Supreme Court decided to legalise passive euthanasia by means of withdrawal of life support to patients in a persistent vegetative state (PVS). According to the Court, the decision of the patient must be an informed decision.
- The Law Commission, later in its 241st report came out in favour of allowing
- withdrawal of life support for certain categories of people — like those in persistent vegetative state (PVS), in irreversible coma, or of unsound mind,

What is Euthanasia?

Euthanasia, also known as **assisted suicide**, and more loosely termed **mercy killing**, means to take a deliberate action with the expressed intention of ending a life to relieve intractable (persistent, unstoppable) suffering.

In **active euthanasia** a person directly and deliberately causes the patient's death. In **passive euthanasia** they don't directly take the patient's life, they just allow them to die. India is witnessing a debate on whether right to die is a part of right to life under **Article 21**.

who lack the mental faculties to take decisions.

- The Supreme Court guidelines form the law of the land regarding euthanasia, till the time. Active euthanasia is still not legal in the country.
- Recently, the Central government, objected to legalising the concept of 'Living Will' — an advance written directive to physicians for end-of-life medical care.
- **Arguments in favour of Passive Euthanasia**
- Some believe that every patient has a right to choose when to die similarly as they have right to life enshrined in the constitution.
- Proponents believe that euthanasia can be safely regulated by government legislation. Passive euthanasia has already been practised in various cases around the world.
- In case of palliative sedation, widely used across the world, many of the sedatives used carry a risk of shortening a person's lifespan. So, it could be argued that palliative sedation is a type of euthanasia.

Arguments against Passive Euthanasia

- Alternative treatments are available, such as palliative care and hospices. We do not have to kill the patient to kill the symptoms. Nearly all pain can be

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relieved.

- There is no ‘right’ to be killed’. Opening the doors to voluntary euthanasia could lead to non-voluntary and involuntary euthanasia, by giving doctors the power to decide when a patient’s life is not worth living.
- The assumption that patients should have a right to die would impose on doctors a duty to kill, thus restricting the autonomy of the doctor. Also, a ‘right to die’ for some people might well become a ‘duty to die’ by others, particularly those who are vulnerable or dependent upon others.

NATIONAL CULTURAL AUDIOVISUAL ARCHIVES (NCAA)

Context:

- **National Cultural Audiovisual Archives (NCAA)** project of the **Ministry of Culture**, Government of India, implemented by Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) has been certified as the **world's first Trusted Digital Repository as per ISO 16363:2012 standard, granted by Primary Trustworthy Digital Repository Authorisation Body Ltd. (PTAB), United Kingdom.**

ISO 16363:

- ISO 16363 for the Audit and Certification of Trustworthy Digital Repositories grew out of the Trusted Digital Repositories and Audit Checklist (TRAC) and is supported by ISO 16919 (Requirements for Bodies providing Audit and Certification) and managed by the Primary Trustworthy Digital Repository Authorisation Body (ISO- PTAB).
- PTAB has been accredited by the National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies of India (NABCB) to conduct ISO 16363 audits worldwide utilizing ISO standard 17021, as extended by ISO 16919.

About National Cultural Audiovisual Archives (NCAA):

- **IGNCA is implementing the National Cultural Audiovisual Archives project.** The primary objective of the NCAA is to identify and preserve the cultural heritage of India available in audiovisual form through a process of digitization and making it accessible to the people.
 - At present, NCAA has a total of twenty-one (21) Partnering Institutions from across the country, covering

11 governmental and 10 non-governmental cultural organisations. The digitization and metadata standards followed by the Project are in

parity with international standards within the overall framework of the OAIS model.

The digitization standards are in concordance with those prescribed by *the International Association of Sound & Audiovisual Archives (IASA)* and the metadata schema is extended Dublin Core, followed by galleries, libraries, archives and museums worldwide.

MADHAVPUR MELA

Context:

- Ministry of Culture is organizing the *Madhavpur Mela in Madhavpur Ghed, District Porbandar in Gujarat* in a grand way.

About Madhavpur Mela:

- The purpose of this integration is to bring various parts of the country especially the North-East, close to each other under the banner of *Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat* announced by the Prime Minister.
- The Madhavpur Mela of Gujarat shares its connect to the Mishmi Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh.* The Mishmi Tribe traces its ancestry to the legendary King Bhishmak and through him to his daughter Rukmini and Lord Krishna.

About Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat:

What is it?

- “Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat” was announced by Hon’ble Prime Minister on 31st October, 2015 on the occasion of the 140th birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. Subsequently, the Finance Minister announced the initiative in his Budget Speech for 2016-17.

What is it for?

- Through this innovative measure, the knowledge of the culture, traditions and practices of different States & UTs will lead to an enhanced

understanding and bonding between the States, thereby strengthening the unity and integrity of India.

Implementation:

- All States and UTs will be covered under the programme. There will be pairing of States/UTs at national level and these pairings will be in effect for one year, or till the next round of pairings.
- The State/UT level pairings would be utilized for state level activities. District

level pairings would be independent of the State level pairings.

Significance:

The activity will be very useful to link various States and Districts in annual programmes that will connect people through exchanges in areas of culture, tourism, language, education trade etc. and citizens will be able to experience the cultural diversity of a much larger number of States/UTs while realising that India is one.

DRAFT DIGITAL INFORMATION IN HEALTHCARE SECURITY ACT (DISHA)

X Why in news?

Recently draft of Digital Information in Healthcare Security act (DISHA) was released by the Central Government.

Important Provisions

- It lays down that any health data including physical, physiological and mental health condition, sexual orientation, medical records and history and biometric information are the **property of the person who it pertains to**.
- It envisages a **health information exchange, a State Electronic Health Authority and a National Electronic Health Authority** which jointly will have responsibility to protect the privacy, confidentiality and security of the owner's digital health data.

Relevance of Digital Health Data

- The recent advances in computing technology can be exploited for better health. Smartphones could become advanced tools in the hands of thousands of patients and practitioners. Equipped with the right software, they could provide easily to use, out-of-the-box solutions to major medical challenges - preventing the over-prescription of medication, promoting patient self-care, introducing positive lifestyle changes and warning of the early signs of health problems.
- Use of big data analytics can help in identifying emerging social changes and lifestyle trends in the communities. Being forewarned of patterns of change will give health authorities time to respond. New technologies could also provide significant savings in healthcare costs through identifying inefficient and wasteful practices.

Various Government Initiatives within Digital

Healthcare

- **e-Hospitals:** includes patient care, laboratory services, work flow-based document information exchange, human resources, and medical records management.
- **NIKSHAY:** a web enabled and case-based monitoring application, developed by the National Informatics Centre (NIC) to effectively monitor the Revised National Tuberculosis Programme (RNTCP). It also includes sms services to interact with patients.
- **Digital AIIMS:** an effective linkage between AIIMS, Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) and the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeiTY) has been made within this. A unique identification number is generated for every patient visiting AIIMS on an Aadhar platform.
- **Mother & Child Tracking System (MCTS):** It is an initiative by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare which uses information technology for ensuring healthcare and immunization services to pregnant women and children up to 5 years of age.

MP'S BLACK CHICKEN KADAKNATH WINS GI TAG

Context:

- Madhya Pradesh has won the Geographical Indication (GI) tag for Kadaknath, a black-feathered chicken known for its flavourful meat.
- The GI tag will ensure that no one else can use the name Kadaknath while selling any other black chicken and will also translate into higher prices for producers.



Key facts:

- It is found mainly in the tribal district of Jhabua.
- Kadaknath is in demand not only because of its taste but also due to its low cholesterol and high protein content.

INDIA'S FALLING SEX RATIO

Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB): The SRB is the number of girls born for every 1,000 boys.

What's the concern now?

- A recent report from the NITI Aayog said sex ratio at birth (SRB) nationwide had dropped from 906 in 2012- 2014 to 900 in 2013-2015. In all, 17 of 21 large Indian States saw a drop in the SRB, with Gujarat performing the worst, declining 53 points.
- Also, newer data from India's Sample Registration System show the SRB fell even further in 2014-2016, from 900 to 898.

Why is this a unique case for India?

- The number of girls born is naturally lower than the number of boys, and demographers speculate that this may be nature's way of offsetting the higher risk that men have of dying — male babies are biologically weaker than females, and men have historically seen higher mortality rates owing to risk-taking behaviour and participation in wars.
- This evens out the sex ratio of a population as it grows older. But India is a special case. Its SRB is far lower than 952 because of the preference for the male child. This means we are killing girl children in the womb.
- As on today, around 63 million girls are estimated to be 'missing' in India because of such actions.

Why does it matter?

- Low SRBs starting from the Seventies have led to large numbers of “surplus men” today in countries like India and China. There are concerns that skewed sex ratios lead to more violence against both men and women, as well as human-trafficking.
- In India, some villages in Haryana and Punjab have such poor sex ratios that

men “import” brides from other States. This is often accompanied by the exploitation of these brides.

Performance of PC- PNDT:

- From female infanticide till 1970s to the emergence of sex selection technologies in 1980s, people have always found ways to have male child.
- A thriving market for sex selection sprung up with doctors openly advertising their services.
- In 1994, the government took notice and introduced the Prenatal Diagnostics Techniques Act which punishes healthcare professionals for telling expectant parents the sex of a child with imprisonment and hefty fines.
- In 2003, when technologies that allowed gender-selection even before conception became available, the act was amended to become the Prenatal Conception and Prenatal Determination Act (PC-PNDT).
- By any token, this Act has been a failure. In November 2016, a report from the Asian Centre for Human Rights noted that between 1994 and 2014, 2,266 cases of infanticide were registered in India, against 2,021 cases of abortion under the PC-PNDT, even though abortions outnumber infanticides today. In all, 17 out of 29 States had either not registered any case, or had zero convictions.
- The PHFI report in 2010 found major gaps in the training of personnel implementing PC-PNDT. Poor training meant that they were unable to prepare strong cases against violators to secure convictions.

Way ahead:

Now, India must implement the PC-PNDT more stringently, but must also dedicate more resources to fighting the preference for boys.

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LAQSHYA PROGRAM

Why in news?

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare recently launched ‘LaQshya’ Program.

More about the Program

- ‘LaQshya’ will **improve quality of care during delivery** and immediate post-partum period thus providing **Respectful Maternity Care (RMC)** to all pregnant women attending public health facilities. This will reduce maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality.
- It aims at implementing ‘fast-track’ interventions for achieving tangible results within 18 months.
- A multi-pronged strategy has been adopted such as improving infrastructure upgradation, ensuring availability of essential equipment, providing adequate human resources, capacity building of health care workers and improving quality processes in the labour room.
- It is being implemented at all Medical College Hospitals, District Hospitals and First Referral Unit (FRU), and Community Health Center (CHCs).
- The Quality Improvement in labour room and maternity OT will be assessed through NQAS (National Quality Assurance Standards).
- India has come a long way in improving maternal survival as Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) has reduced from 301 maternal deaths in 2001-03 to 167 in year 2011-13, an impressive decline of 45% in a decade.

#YesIBleed Campaign



The poster features a white silhouette of a person holding a large white circle. Inside the circle, the text reads: **Menstrual Hygiene Scheme aims to impart education on**. To the right of the circle, a list of objectives is provided. The background is purple with a faint watermark of a hand. Logos for 'संस्कार भारत' (Sanskara Bharat), 'एन सी ई आर' (NCERT), and 'NATIONAL HEALTH MISSION' are visible in the top corners. The website www.mohfw.gov.in is at the bottom left.

- Menstrual Hygiene Management related training with school girls
- School WASH facilities
- Assure clean WASH facilities, operation and maintenance
- Sustain supply of water and soap
- Safe disposal of used menstrual absorbent
- Provision of emergency sanitary napkins

www.mohfw.gov.in

Context: The government has launched the #YesIBleed menstrual hygiene campaign.

What is it?

- “#Yes I Bleed” aims to create a holistic approach to the issue of menstruation, which is an experience that transcends culture, class, and caste. The campaign has been initiated formally across all multi-media platforms, including Facebook and YouTube to spread awareness about the issue.

Background:

- The United Nations has recognised menstrual hygiene as a global public health and a human rights issue yet

across the globe. “Period poverty” as some call it, is a reality for millions of women and girls.

Concerns:

- Today, in India, approximately 35 crore women menstruate and it is estimated that only 12% use proper menstrual hygiene practices and menstrual products. The remaining 88% having no access whatever. They find sanitary pads unaffordable.
- In India’s rural areas, with the lack of resources, education and awareness about personal hygiene, not just lack of information about hygiene products, the women don’t even have any

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conversation around menstruation.

- For the less privileged, periods are the few ‘cursed’ days of the month. A woman on her periods cannot enter the temple, kitchen or take part in any auspicious occasion – because she is ‘impure’.
- The 88% who do not have access to sanitary pads use unsanitised cloth, husk sand, tree leaves and even ash. These can cause severe reproductive health problems and infections, and can also lead to cervical cancer.
- Also, there is the issue of school dropouts and poor attendance because of inadequate menstrual hygiene management. This also is one of the causes for loss of wages for women labourers.
- Equally important is the safe disposal of used sanitary pads, which actually are an environmental disaster. In villages, the used pads often end up in village ponds, exposing every human being and animal to the risk of infection.

Way ahead:

- Menstruation is still a taboo subject in our country and a topic that even women are uncomfortable discussing in public. This was a much-needed awareness campaign, and added that the subject of menstrual hygiene is “more about a change of mindset than simply about the use of proper menstrual products”. Mindset change is happening, but much more needs to be done.
- It is high time people dispel the misconceptions that surround the normal physiological process of menstruation and discard the restrictions imposed on women during “the time of the month”.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY 2018

Context:

- International Women’s Day is being celebrated on March 8 across the world. It is an annual marker that aims to bring attention to women’s accomplishments and obstacles.

Theme:

- The theme for International Women’s Day 2018 is ‘Time is Now: Rural and urban activists transforming women’s lives’. The theme aims to encourage women to raise voice for their rights and promote growing global movement to support gender parity.

How it all began?

- The first Women’s Day was celebrated on February 28, 1909, in New York by the Socialist Party of America. The day was dedicated to the 15,000 women who marched through New York in 1908 as part of the garment strike.
- In 1910, a German activist Clara Zetkin proposed the idea of celebrating Women’s Day in March at the 1910 International Conference of Working Women in Copenhagen.
- On March 19, 1911, Women’s Day was celebrated in Austria, Denmark, Germany, and Switzerland.

In 1975, the United Nations declared March 8 as the official date to celebrate Women’s Day.

WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP PLATFORM

Context:

- **NITI Aayog** has launched the Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP), on the occasion of International

Women's Day.

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.

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.

Way ahead:

- Women entrepreneurs have been carving out a niche for them across the globe, including India especially in niche and unconventional businesses.

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

SUVIDHA

Why in news?

Recently, Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilizers has launched 100% Oxo-biodegradable sanitary napkin, under the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana.

About SUVIDHA

- It is an **affordable sanitary napkin** launched to ensure ‘**Swachhta, Swasthya and Suvidha**’ for the **underprivileged Women** of India.
- The initiative has been taken by **Department of Pharmaceutical** and has been manufactured by **Bureau of Pharma Public Sector Undertaking of India**.
- It has been launched on World Women’s Day and is currently available at 3200 Janaushudhi Kendras.
- **Significance –**
 - o **Accessibility-** The move is significant as it will increase accessibility. The recent NFHS (2015-16) data shows that about 4 out of 10 women do not use hygienic method of protection during menstrual cycle.
 - o **Disposability-** According to Menstrual Health Alliance India data shows that around 13% of menstrual waste is thrown in open spaces such as rivers, lakes etc., 10% waste is disposed in toilets, 9% is burnt and 8% is buried.
 - o **Menstrual Hygiene-** It would also prevent fungal infections, Reproductive Tract Infection, Urinary Tract Infection, Cervical cancer caused by unhygienic protection methods used during menstrual cycle and also make women less vulnerable to infertility.

‘WOMENINTECH’ FORUM

Context:

- RBS India in association with prominent technology corporates, Academia and government participation has setup an exclusive ‘By Invite Only’ platform ‘*Women In Tech*’ with the agenda of working towards encouraging more women to take up careers in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) as a key career choice.

more women in tech for enhanced profitability and innovativeness, the percent continues to be low and the pipeline often inconsistent and unavailable.

Lack of mentoring and lack of female role models are two of the most quoted barriers that women in technology workspace identify.

About the forum:

- WomenInTech has been conceived in association with a number of technology corporates, academia and NGOs.
- The forum has been designed “to help accelerate the national agenda of Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao and further to work in alignment with the UN’s focus area this year – ‘Turning promises into action’.
- It would “address the need for policy making collectively as an industry to ensure that workplaces prod more girls to take up careers in STEM on one end and on the other hand are conducive for working women to aspire for senior level roles”.
- One of its initiatives is to build an independent corpus of funds, in collaboration with education NGOs, to sponsor the tertiary education of at least three young women to begin with from economically weak backgrounds in the field of engineering to top universities in the United States and United Kingdom.

Concerns:

- According to the World Bank, women make up 40% of the world’s workforce. Yet, the tech field is notoriously male-dominated at all levels and fares considerably worse than non-technology industries. Tech industry has merely 10 – 15% female workforce.
- While studies continuously corroborate a strong business case for inclusion of

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Anandibai Gopalrao Joshi

- **Who is Anandibai Gopalrao Joshi?**
She was India's first female doctor and first woman to obtain a degree in western medicine.

Why in news? Google Doodle celebrated her 153rd Birthday on March 31st. Anandi Joshi was born on 31st March 1865 in Maharashtra.



ANNUAL SURVEY OF INDIA’S CITY-SYSTEMS (ASICS)

Context:

- The fifth edition of the *Annual Survey of India’s City-Systems (ASICS)* by *Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy* has been released.

About the survey:

The objective of the survey was to measure the preparedness of cities to deliver high quality infrastructure and services in the long term by evaluating “city systems”.

- The survey spans 23 Indian cities and factors in answers to 89 questions. The cities were scored based on the quality of laws, policies, institutions and institutional processes that together help govern them.
- ASICS groups questions into four categories:** urban planning & design; urban capacities & resources; transparency, accountability & participation; and empowered & legitimate political representation.

Performance of various cities:

- Pune, Kolkata and Thiruvananthapuram top the country in terms of urban governance.
- Delhi and Mumbai figure in the sixth and ninth positions respectively.
- Among the medium cities (with a population of up to one million), Ranchi has broken into the top 10 with a score of 4.1. Bengaluru and Chandigarh (perceived as a planned city) figured at the bottom of the list.
- On a scale of 10, the 23 cities – many of which are part of the government’s flagship smart cities mission – scored between 3 and 5.1 on four key components of governance.

Concerns and challenges:

- A majority of its cities “grossly underprepared” to deliver a high quality of life in the long term. And many surveyed cities are far behind cities such

as London, New York and Johannesburg, which topped global benchmarks with 8.8, 8.8 and 7.6 points respectively.

- The cities assessed in the study are found to be generating only 39% of the funds they spend on an average, with Patna raising just 17% on its own. Only Mumbai, Delhi, Hyderabad and Pune generate over 50% of the amount they spend from their own revenue.
- The study found that in several cities, their own revenues did not even cover staff salaries. “Lack of adequate revenue sources of their own severely constrains the ability of our cities to invest in infrastructure and service delivery.
- The pace of reforms in India has been painfully slow. Recurring floods, garbage crises, air pollution, fire accidents, building collapses and dengue outbreaks are symptoms of this deeper governance crisis in our cities.
- The survey also found urban capacities across cities suffering from rampant staff vacancies, inadequate domain experience of senior municipal officers, and powerless mayors and councils. Commissioners were found to have only have 2.7 years of experience in urban management on an average. Average staff vacancy stood at 35%, with Guwahati bottoming out at 60%.
- The mayor and councils in our cities are toothless. They don’t have full decision-making authority over critical functions such as planning, housing, water, environment, fire and emergency services.
- No city in India has effective policies to deter plan violations, a deficiency that leads to the mushrooming of slums and unauthorised colonies. While all its 23 cities scored zero on this parameter, London, New York and Johannesburg notched a perfect 10 out of 10.

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- Moreover, most of the country's town and country planning acts date back to the previous century. It has one planner per four lakh citizens (as opposed to 48 in the United States and 148 in the United Kingdom).

Way ahead:

Lack of legislative imagination and political will has resulted in state governments not fixing city governance. The need now is to fix city governance on a war footing. There will be no change unless the state government empowers municipalities..

GENDER PAY DISPARITY

Why in news?

Recently **World Bank report** indicated a bias towards men over women in the workplace, both in terms of hiring and salaries offered.

Related Data

- Globally, the unemployment rate for women stands at 6.2% in 2017, higher than the male unemployment rate of 5.5 per cent.
- In India there exists:
 - **Low Property right:** Women contribute almost 40% of agricultural labour but control only 9% of land.
 - **Financial Dependence:** Nearly half of the women do not have a bank or savings accounts for their own use, and 60% of women have no valuable assets to their name
 - **Low Economic Activity:** Women's contribution to the GDP is only 17% while the global average is 37%.
 - **International Labour Organisation (ILO) survey** in 2017 had ranked **India's Female Labour Force Participation (FLFP)** rate at 121 out of 131 countries in 2013.
 - **Reverse Trend:** Between 2004 to 2011 Indian economy grew 7%, however, instead of increase in female participation in the country's labour force, there was a decline in from over 35% to 25%.
 - India also ranked poorly at 108 on the **World Economic Forum's "Global Gender Gap Report 2017"**.
 - **According to Monster Salary Index, 2018**, women in india earn 20% less than men.

Challenges Faced by working women

- **Legal Restriction:** According to a study by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), almost 90% of the 143 economies have at least one important, gender-based legal restriction.
- **Patriarchal attitudes:** From NSSO data

of 2011, it was found that women from higher castes and higher income families spent less time working outside the house.

- According to the **2012 "Gender Pay Gap in the Formal Sector" report**, pay gap increases with women's age, work experience, educational qualifications and rise in occupational hierarchy.
- **Biased human capital model** in country which focuses on gender differences in skills, education and experience.
- **Workplace insecurity:** The rate of crimes against women in India stands at 53.9%
- **Other challenges:** Lack of attractive job alternatives and income security, inadequate travel and transport facilities, Societal perception of women who work long hours, lack of crèches facility at workplace etc.

Increase in female enrolment in education: According to some research, one plausible explanation for the recent drop in FLFP is that with the recent expansion of secondary education, as well as rapidly changing social norms in India, more working age young females (15 to 24 years) are opting to continue their education rather than join the labour force early.

Monster Salary Index (MSI), 2018

- According to it, women in India earn 20% less than men.
- However, gender pay gap has narrowed by about 5% points from 24.8% in 2016 and there was a marginally inverted pay gap in the experience group of 3-5 years, where women earned more.

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Steps taken to close Gender Gap in India

Constitutional

- **Article 39 (d) under DPSP:** According to it, the state shall, in particular, direct the policy towards securing that there is equal pay for equal work for both men and women.

Judicial

- **Randhir Singh vs. Union of India and Grih Kalyan Kendra vs. Union of India-** SC held that the principle of “equal pay for equal work” as a constitutional goal and, therefore, capable of enforcement under article 32 of the constitution.

Legislative

- **Equal Remuneration Act of 1976-** aims to provide equal remuneration to men and women workers and to prevent discrimination on the basis of gender in all matters relating to employment and employment opportunities.
- **Maternity Benefit Act** was amended in 2017, to increase the duration of maternity leave from 12 weeks to 26 weeks.
- **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 [SHW ACT]:** it was enacted to implement the Vishakha Guidelines and to ensure a safe workplace for woman.
- **Other Steps:** Government of India's **MUDRA scheme** to support micro and small enterprises and direct benefit transfers under the **Jan Dhan Yojana** seeks to empower women. Women entrepreneurs account for about 78% of the total number of borrowers under MUDRA.

maternal leave will help women to reintegrate into the workforce after childbearing and allowing men to take on the responsibility of parenthood.

Step by Companies: Corporate India need to step up and implement pragmatic policies to bridge the pay gap, change employee perception of a healthy work culture and foster equal opportunities.

Way Forward

- **Formalization of Workforce** to create better job opportunities for women and streamlining labour laws.
- **Skill Development:** Vocational and technical training, life skills and financial literacy programmes for women to help them develop marketable skills and better decision-making abilities.
- **Mandating parental leave** rather than

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‘BOMB CYCLONE’

Context:

- A winter storm – also known as a “bomb cyclone” –has slammed into the northeast United States. The storm has roughly 80 million people along its path, with 22 million of those affected by a coastal flood warning.

Northeast Pacific. Cyclones are formed over the South Pacific and Indian Ocean. Typhoons are formed over the Northwest Pacific Ocean.

What is a Bomb cyclone?

- The term is used by meteorologists to indicate a mid- latitude cyclone that intensifies rapidly.
- A bomb cyclone happens when atmospheric **pressure in the middle of the storm drops** at least 24 millibars over 24 hours, quickly increasing in intensity. The **lower the pressure, the stronger the storm.**

How it works?

- Deep drops in barometric pressure occur when a region of warm air meets one of cold air. The air starts to move and the rotation of the earth creates a cyclonic effect.
- The direction is counterclockwise in the Northern hemisphere leading to winds that come out of the northeast.

What’s the difference between hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons?

- Hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons are all tropical storms.
- They are all the same thing but are given different names depending on where they appear. When they reach populated areas they usually bring very strong wind and rain which can cause a lot of damage.
- Hurricanes are tropical storms that form over the North Atlantic Ocean and

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GENDER VULNERABILITY INDEX

Why in news

Recently, first-ever gender vulnerability index (GVI) was released by Child development NGO Plan India.

Highlight

- Index is aimed at comprehensively understanding the dimensions of various **problems affecting children**, particularly girls, in difficult circumstances.
- It identifies the **challenges women face** with respect to four parameters — education, health, poverty and protection against violence
- Index can be used to **assist policy makers** mark out priorities.
- The study's dataset was **based on 170 indicators** for which data is available across all states, including Census 2011.
- Goa, Kerala and Mizoram are among the top three while Bihar, UP and Delhi are the bottom three states.

GEOMAGNETIC STORM

Context:

- There were reports that Earth will be hit by a massive magnetic storm on March 18. However, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has found that there was no basis for recent reports saying Earth would be hit by a massive geomagnetic storm.

What are Geomagnetic Storms?

- Geomagnetic storms are caused when events such as solar flares can send higher than normal levels of radiation towards Earth. This radiation interacts with the Earth's magnetic field causing a geomagnetic storm.

Effects of Geomagnetic storms:

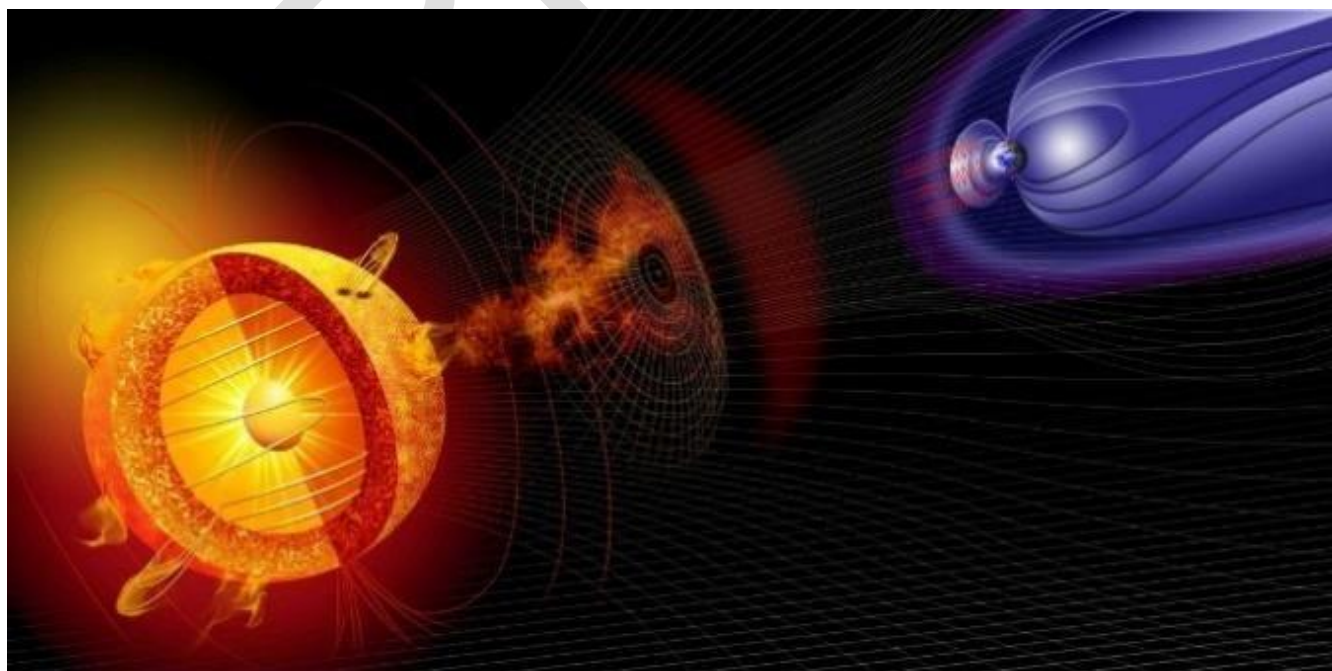
- Effects from the geomagnetic storm can range from the appearance of auroras or the northern and southern lights to disruptions in communications systems due to high radiation.
- This would make it difficult to communicate with others on Earth.

Classification of Geomagnetic storms:

- Geomagnetic storms are classified according to a scale that measures the

effect that storms will have.

- At its safest level, a G1 storm affects power grids by causing weak fluctuations, minor impacts on satellite operations, and causes the northern and southern lights to occur.
- At its most extreme, G5, there would be voltage control problems with some grid system collapses or blackouts, radio waves wouldn't be able to travel for one to two days, low-frequency radio would be out for hours, and the auroras would be able to be seen at lower latitudes than usual.



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NIRBHAYA FUND

Why in news?

Recently, Government has approved projects worth Rs.2919 crore under Nirbhaya Fund for creating ‘safe cities’.

More from news

- The move is aimed at **women safety** in public spaces and **quick response systems** to create deterrence against crime after the recommendations of **Empowered Committee**.
- The initiative will take shape in 8 cities namely – Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Ahmedabad, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Lucknow.
- Plans for safe cities have been prepared in accordance and **coordination with Municipal and police commissionerates** of these cities.
- The proposals have been approved for a **period of three years** on a **cost sharing basis** of 60:40 ratio with states. The plan is to enhance the use of technology for surveillance, training investigation officers and creation of safety islands in vulnerable places.

Nirbhaya Fund

- It was created after its **announcement in 2013** Union Budget with a corpus of 100 crore for empowerment and safety of girl child and women.
- It is administered by Dept of Economic Affairs.

WORLD HAPPINESS REPORT 2018

Why in news?

Recently World Happiness Report was released by United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

Agreement.

About World Happiness Report, 2018

- It is an **annual publication** which ranks countries based on their **level of happiness**.
- This is the **sixth edition** of World Happiness Report while the first report was released in 2012. The report **ranks 156 countries** by happiness level and 117 countries by the happiness of their immigrants.
- Key **variables of well-being** are - GDP per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, social freedom, generosity, and absence of corruption.
- The main **focus of this year's survey** apart from the above- mentioned variables is **migrations** within and between countries.

India has been ranked low at 133rd position highlighted by low scores on generosity, perception on corruption, freedom to make life choices, life expectancy etc.

- It lagged far behind neighbouring countries such as China (86th), Pakistan (75th) and Nepal (101st) and behind all the SAARC nations.

Key Findings of the Report

- Finland has topped the report replacing Norway followed by Denmark. Burundi is the unhappiest country preceded by Central African Republic.
- Ten happiest countries are also top eleven spots of happy immigrants.
- The countries with the happiest immigrants are not the richest countries instead the countries with a more balanced set of social and institutional support for better lives.

United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network

It has been operating since 2012 under UN Secretary- General.

It mobilizes global scientific and technological expertise to promote practical solutions for sustainable development, including the implementation of SDG and the Paris Climate

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KUTHIYOTTAM

Why in news?

- Kerala State Commission for the Protection of Child Rights registered a suo motu case in connection with the **Kuthiyottam ritual**.

Background

- The Kuthiyottam ritual has been under scanner for **violating child's rights and not taking child's consent into account**.
- Kerala State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (KSCPCR) banned the ritual at Chettikulangara temple in Alappuzha district in 2016 citing violation of child rights.

About Kuthiyottam Ritual

- The Kuthiyottam ritual is usually performed every year during the **Pongala festival at the Attukal Bhagavathy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala**.
- Nearly 1,000 young boys undertake a seven-day penance before Pongala day. These boys are said to represent the wounded soldiers of the goddess.
- The boys have to observe strict discipline and stay inside the temple for seven days. They are made to wear

thin towels (thorthu).

- They have to sleep on the floor, have measly meals and bathe three times a day. They also have to prostrate 1,008 times before the deity
- The ritual also involves piercing the child's side with a small hook and knotting a thread through it to symbolise their bond with the Goddess. This ritual is performed at various temples all across Kerala. It is also called **choral muriyal** in several parts of the state.
- This ritual is performed at various temples all across Kerala. It is also called **choral muriyal** in several parts of the state.
- the state.

SAORA PAINTINGS

KUT Why in news?

Recently, it was reported that the demand for Saora paintings of Odisha has been rising in international and domestic markets.

Saora Paintings

- Saora Paintings are **traditional murals** (made on walls) and are locally called as **Idital** and the painters are known as **iditalmar**.
- **Features of Saora Paintings –**
 - They are painted with **figurative patterns and figures** which are drawn in stylized manner.
 - Each painting has a **rectangular frame** and has icons of **deities and motifs from nature**.
 - **Purpose of the painting** – to please Gods and ancestors, averting diseases, promoting fertility, honour deceased etc.
 - **Central theme** – Idital is a house which is represented by a circle. The figures are placed in panels like circles, triangular around the Idital.
- **Process of making Saora Painting**
 - Before painting the walls are cleaned and smeared with locally available red soil and the rice paste is applied as white colour. The Iditalmars follow a stringent ritual by eating one meal a day for 10-15 days till the painting is complete.
 - For paintings, a brush is made from a bamboo split, black color from soot generated from the lamp. Sun dried rice powder for white, all these are mixed with water and juice from roots and herbs to make a paste.

- *They speak an ancient Mundari dialect of their own called 'saora'.*
- *Saoras depend on land and forest for their subsistence and practice shifting cultivation.*
- *They are enumerated as one among the 13 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups in Odisha.*

Saura Tribe

- *Saura (also called Saora or Lanjia Saora) are one of the tribal communities who inhabit remote ranges near Bansadhara River in southern Odisha.*
- *They have their racial affinity with the proto-Australoid.*

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PRASAR BHARATI

Why in news?

Recently Prasar Bharati (PB) turned down a resolution moved by the ministry of information and broadcasting

(I&B) to appoint a serving IAS officer to its board, and also deferred its proposal to bring in professionals to head the news service units of Doordarshan and All India Radio.

Related Information

- The PB Act states that the President of India will appoint the Board members, decided by a selection committee, which is headed by the Vice President of India and includes the Chairman of the Press Council of India and a nominee of the President.
- The Ministry does not have a direct role in appointment of the chairman and whole-time members of the Board.
- The PBB also disagreed with the ministry's suggestion for immediate termination of the services of the entire contractual staff which by now may be almost three-quarters of the total.
- A manpower audit of the PB, as suggested by various committees, including the **Sam Pitroda committee** (2014), will soon be conducted to identify overstaffed sections.

About Prasar Bharati

- It is a **statutory autonomous public broadcasting agency** which was set up in 1997 under the **Prasar Bharati (Broadcasting Corporation of India) Act, 1990**.
- It comprises **Doordarshan Television Network** and **All India Radio**, which were earlier part of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

Other important Pitroda Panel recommendations (2014)

- The committee has recommended on issues such as governance, funding, content, technology, social media and global

outreach.

- It suggested re-organising the Prasar Bharati board to make it a professionally managed body while setting up a regulator to ensure accountability.
- Develop a funding mechanism for Prasar Bharati that addresses the need for autonomy with financial accountability.
- Expansion of satellite and digital cable TV operations to meet the obligations of public service broadcasting.

Way forward

- The organization currently faces various challenges in terms of financial autonomy, recruitment of staff, competition from private sector and interference by the government.
- Therefore, there is a need for it to be adequately empowered and enabled with independent professionals and financial self-reliance to unleash its creative forces, its ethos, culture and aspirations in order to become a genuine public broadcaster rather than remaining a government broadcaster.

Prasar Bharati Act of 1990 has conferred autonomy upon the corporation and iterated that its board alone will have the final say in matters pertaining to running it. Hence there is a need to implement the PB act along with the Pitroda committee recommendations in this regard.

THE PAYMENT OF GRATUITY (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2017

Why in News?

The Payment of Gratuity (Amendment) Bill, bill was passed by the Parliament.

Key Facts

- It was enacted to provide for a scheme for the payment of gratuity to employees engaged in factories, mines, oilfields, plantations, ports, railway companies, shops or other establishments who have rendered a minimum five years of continuous service with the establishment employing ten or more persons.
- Gratuity is given the force of law by the **Payment of Gratuity Act 1972**, which is further administered and enforced by the Central Government and the designated establishments under its control.
- The Act provides for gratuity of Rs 10 lakh to workers with **five or more years of continuous service. Major Provisions of the Bill**
- It increases the ceiling of **tax-free gratuity amount to Rs 20 lakh** from Rs 10 lakh bringing organized sector workers at par with Central Government employees.
- It **empowers** the Central government to
 - o notify the gratuity ceiling without amending the law.
 - o notify the period of maternity leave eligible for qualifying as continuous service **by removing the reference to 12 weeks** in the 1972 Gratuity Act.

E-OFFICE

Why in News?

- Recently, government awarded certificates of appreciation to 34 central government ministries for implementing “e- office “in departments.

What is e-office?

- It is a project which intends to make transition of government functions from manual to digital ones.
- It is a core mission mode project (MMP) under the **e- Kranti: National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) 2.0**.
- The Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DAR&PG) is the nodal department for implementation of e-office project.

National Informatics Centre (NIC) is the technical partner in this project.

Related Information

- **e-Kranti: National e-Governance Plan 2.0-** It is one of the pillars of Digital India Programme, to ensure delivery of all government services electronically to citizens.
- There are 44 Mission Mode Projects under e-Kranti programme.

ANNUAL SURVEY OF INDIA'S CITY-SYSTEMS (ASICS), 2017

Why in news?

Recently Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy released ASIC, 2017 which evaluated governance in cities.

About ASICS

- It is an annual study which evaluates the City-Systems which comprises of **mainly four interrelated aspects**- urban planning and design, urban capacities and resources, transparency, accountability & participation, and empowered and legitimate political representation.
- The result indicates **the health of the governance system** and its **ability to deliver good quality of life** and aims to push towards **transformative reforms in city governance**.

service levels are not met.

- An **ombudsman**, specifically for resolving citizen's issues, is also missing in all but three Indian cities—

Bhubaneswar, Ranchi and Thiruvananthapuram.

- 19 of the 23 cities don't release even **basic data about their functioning** in usable formats.
- Most Indian cities use **town and country planning acts** which were drafted decades before the economy was liberalized and the lack of a modern, contemporary urban planning framework may be costing India 3% of its GDP every year.

Findings of Report

- **Pune** (score 5.1) topped the survey while Bengaluru (3) was ranked the lowest in the list.
- Comparatively, global benchmarks of Johannesburg, London and New York have scored 7.6, 8.8 and 8.8 respectively whereas Indian cities have barely touched 5.1 (being highest).

Problems Highlighted by the Report

- A meagre increase in the score of few cities in last 3 years is attributed to several flagship urban missions such as Smart City Mission, Swachh Bharat, AMRUT and Housing for All.
- There is a **lack of local democracy**, with only two of the 23 cities putting in place ward committees and area sabhas at least on paper.
- Most cities are **neither financially well-off nor adequately staffed** at the urban body level.
- Only 9 of the 23 cities had a **citizen's charter**. Even in the cities where such a charter exists, there is no mention of service levels, or timelines for service delivery, or mechanisms for obtaining relief when

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INDIA-FRANCE RELATIONS

Why in News?

French President Emmanuel Macron recently visited India.

Important Developments during the Visit

The two countries signed **14 agreements** including those in the field of education, environment, urban development and railways, etc. Important strategic engagements were-

- The **Joint Vision Statement** on the Indian Ocean Region has been laid down.
- Indian PM and the French President **co-chaired the founding conference of the International Solar Alliance (ISA)** and the two leaders also inaugurated a solar power plant at Dadar Kala village in Uttar Pradesh.
- The two leaders welcomed the signing of the "Agreement for the provision of **reciprocal logistics support** between their Armed Forces", which seeks to extend logistical support on reciprocal access to respective facilities for Indian and French armed forces.
- The “**Industrial Way Forward Agreement**” was signed between French utility EDF and India’s NPCIL for the construction of **six nuclear reactors at Jaitapur**.

Background

India and France have traditionally close and friendly relations. In 1998, the two countries entered into **Strategic Partnership** which is based on three pillars of defence cooperation, space cooperation and civil nuclear cooperation. Important relations between the two are-

- **Institutional Dialogue relating to strategic areas-** India-France Strategic Dialogue takes place between NSAs from both sides. Joint Working Group on Counter, Cyber Dialogue, etc. are the other active mechanisms.
- **Defence Cooperation-** Regular exchange of visits at the level of Services Chiefs takes

place. The three services also have regular defence exercises, viz. Exercise Shakti (Army), Exercise Varuna (Navy), Exercise Garuda (Air Force). Also, a civil nuclear cooperation agreement was signed between the two countries in 2008 during the visit of Indian PM to France.

- **Economic Cooperation-** France is the ninth largest foreign investor in India. The trade surplus remains in India’s favour for the past ten years with Indian exports to France in 2016.

Importance of France for India

- **Partnership in the Indian Ocean-** The agreement for the provision of **reciprocal logistics support** between the two is important given the wide range of French military bases in the Indian Ocean (Djibouti, Abu Dhabi, and Reunion Island). It can be a **force multiplier** for India. The development gains importance with increasing Chinese presence in the region.
- **Partnership in ISA-** The ISA, first treaty-based international organization to be based in India, is a major **Indo- French initiative** which is a crucial step towards our commitment towards renewable energy.
- **France’s support on international platforms-** France is among the countries that have consistently supported India’s **permanent membership to UNSC**. Further, France support for India’s inclusion in the **Wassenaar Group** is also worth mentioning. Paris was one of the only Western capitals to comment on the legitimacy of India’s concerns vis-à-vis the refugee crisis in its border regions with Bangladesh.
- **Nuclear Cooperation-** After the nuclear tests in May 1998 when India declared itself a nuclear weapon state, France was the first major power to open dialogue and displayed a far greater understanding of India’s security compulsions compared to other

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countries. It **refused to sermonize India** after the tests, and publicly opposed U.S. sanctions.

- **Defence Cooperation-** Defence cooperation with France began in the 1950s when India acquired the Ouragan aircraft and continued with the Mystères, Jaguar, Rafale, Scorpène submarines, etc.
- **Cooperation in Space and Technology** has continued since the 1960s when France helped India set up the **Sriharikota launch site**, followed by liquid engine development and hosting of payloads. Currently, other projects include joint satellite mission – TRISHNA (for eco-system stress and water use monitoring) and also
- accommodation of French instrument on India’s OCEANSAT-3 satellite.
- **Other areas of cooperation** include their strong **condemnation of terrorism** in all its forms and manifestations including cross-border terrorism and terror-related incidents in France and India.
- Given its expertise in the sphere of urban planning **France is also helping in the Smart Cities Mission**. The three such smart cities are Chandigarh, Nagpur and Puducherry.

Way Forward

- Even though above specified areas provided a robust basis for engagement, it remained primarily at a **government-to-government level**. In recent years, it was clear that for a wider partnership, strengthening business-to-business and people-to-people relationships was essential. Also, the trade between India and France, although growing, is yet to reach its potential.
- As per the speculations **France intends to be India’s gateway to Europe** and to make India France’s first
- strategic partner in Asia.
- The underpinnings of global geopolitics are being rapidly altered with China’s rise, the West being consumed by internal problems and Russia, the “America First” priorities of the US Administration, and growing threats

to globalization. With such background India and France seek each other as desirable strategic partner.

INDIA GERMANY RELATIONS

Why in news?

Recently German President, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, was on a five day visit to India.

Key areas in India Germany Cooperation:

Germany is the most populous country in Europe and its location at the centre of the continent gives it a natural role as a bridge between East and West Europe. It is a global-centre and a pivot for R&D and skills.

- **Strategic Partnership:** India and Germany have a 'Strategic Partnership' since 2001, which has been further strengthened with the Intergovernmental Consultations (IGC) at the level of Head of Governments
- **India-Germany cooperation on cleaning the river Ganga:** The National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) and GIZ Germany signed an Implementation Agreement for Ganga Rejuvenation in 2016 under which Germany committed €3 million for data management and capacity building to deal with the pollution.
- **Bilateral cooperation** on the issue of UNSC expansion within the framework of G-4, consultations with each other in G-20 on global issues such as climate change, sustainable development, etc. and other regional and international issues such as UN issues, International Cyber Issues, Disarmament & Non-proliferation, Export Controls, East Asia, Eurasia, etc.
- **Defence Cooperation:** India-Germany Defence Cooperation Agreement (2006) provides a framework for bilateral defence cooperation.
- **Economic & Commercial Relations:** Germany is India's largest trading partner in Europe.
 - o Germany is the 7th largest **foreign direct investor** in India since January 2000.
 - o An MoU on Indo-German Solar Energy Partnership was signed in 2015 under which German Government is to

provide concessional loan of Euro 1 billion over the next 5 years.

Importance of Indo-German cooperation

- India and Germany have **complementarities** that can make them effective partners. While **German expertise** lies in engineering state-of-the-art products, the futuristic technologies require IT innovations where Germany will need India's IT expertise. India can be a market for high end German goods and in turn a source of skills.
- India can benefit from the **Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)** of the Germany and has thus set up a fast track mechanism to promote the cooperation among both the countries.
- Germany is phasing out its nuclear power plants and replacing them with renewable energy. Since India is also planning to meet 40 per cent of its energy requirement by renewables by 2030 there is a large scope of **bilateral cooperation in energy sector** through organisations such as International Renewable energy agency.
- Germany's support is also important for balanced agreement on **climate change**, taking into account climate adaptation and mitigation as well as finance and technology transfer.
- The two countries also share **security concerns** with Germany affected through refugee crisis and India's concerns arising from Pakistan sponsored terrorism.

Conclusion

- With the **rise of protectionist trade measures** in USA India and Germany both have shown commitment to an international order based on mutual respect and rules, and cooperate for free and fair trade and investment.
- Further there is a large scope of cooperation in security and counter-terrorism,

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innovation and science and technology, cleaning of rivers, skill development (Skill India Mission), urban infrastructure, water and waste management, clean energy, development cooperation, health and alternative medicine etc.

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INDIA-VIETNAM

Why in News?

- Recently, Vietnamese President Tran Dai Quang paid a State Visit to India.

More on News

- The visit also marks 45 years of diplomatic relations between Vietnam and India.
- Both inked three agreements pertaining to-
 - o **Civil nuclear energy MoU** was signed between Global Centre for Nuclear Energy Partnership, India (GCNEP) and the Vietnam Atomic Energy Institute (VINATOM).
 - o **Work Plan for the years 2018-2022** between the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Vietnam.
 - o **MoU on Economic and Trade Cooperation** for enhancing economic relations.
- Both stressed the need for freedom of navigation, over-flight and resolving the South China Sea disputes on mandate of

United Nation Convention on the Law of the Sea. (UNCLOS).

India Vietnam Relations

India and Vietnam have enjoyed close ties based on their shared history of fighting against colonial rule. In addition, there is a deep cultural connection between the two as well.

- **Strategic** - Vietnam is also an important partner in Southeast Asia and is currently the country coordinator for India with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) regional bloc.
- **Defence and Security**- India has been training the Vietnamese military in operating its Russian-built Kilo-class submarines and SU-30 fighter jets.
 - o After the signing of the MoU on Defence Cooperation by the two Defence Ministers in November 2009, the relations have grown from strength to strength.
 - o Vietnam called on India to play a more

proactive role in Southeast Asia while India on the other hand reiterated the importance of international law, especially the **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**, in settling the South China Sea issue.

- **Economic**- India is now among the top ten trading partners of Vietnam. Indian companies registered 17 new projects with a total capital of US\$98.12 million in the areas of food processing, fertilizers, auto components, textile accessories etc.
- **In terms of Multilateral Cooperation**, apart from ASEAN, India and Vietnam closely cooperate in other regional forums such as the East Asia Summit, Mekong Ganga Cooperation, Asia Europe Meeting besides the UN and WTO.

Vietnam's Importance for India

- **Act East Policy**- Vietnam is an important element of India's Act East Policy, which aims to re-invigorate its historical ties with countries in Southeast and East Asia. Also, as a member of ASEAN, it is an important enabler for India's growing trade and investment ties with the rest of Southeast Asia
- **Physical Connectivity**- With the election of a civilian government in Myanmar, there are ample opportunities for closer connectivity between India and Vietnam via Myanmar and existing transit routes in Cambodia and Laos.
- **Energy Cooperation**- India's growing economy needs energy resources and Vietnam has rich hydrocarbon reserves. India's state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) has been searching for oil in disputed waters off Vietnam, though China objected to this.

India's Importance for Vietnam

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□ **Security Reasons-** Responding to China’s aggressive posturing in the South China Sea, Vietnam has called on India to play a more proactive role in Southeast Asia.

- **Capacity Building** is another area in which India has been helping Vietnam through Line of Credit, Scholarship, conducting programs for Vietnamese defense personnel, etc.

Way Forward

- o There are yet various areas that may be improved. For example, India-Vietnam bilateral trade is a miniscule one compared to Vietnam-China bilateral trade, which is around \$70 billion. It is important to help trade and investment pick up in the bilateral context between the two. This could in turn also give fillip to the bilateral strategic engagement, making the relationship a more comprehensive one.

Related Information

Global Centre for Nuclear Energy Partnership (GCNEP)

- It is the R&D unit under the aegis of Department of Atomic Energy (**DAE**).
- Established in 2010, under the aegis of Department of atomic energy.
- It promotes global nuclear energy partnership through collaborative research and training programs.

United Nation Convention on the Law of the Sea

- It was signed in 1984 and came into force in 1994.
- The law set the guideline for nations with respect to **their use** of the **world's oceans**, for businesses, environment, and the management of marine natural resources.
- The law led to introduction of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) which prevents the fishermen to exploit the fish resource of other country.
- Within the EEZ, coastal countries have the right to use the marine resources within 200 nautical mile from their shore.
- The law made the provision for landlocked countries by providing right to access the sea through the territory of the neighbouring coastal country.

ARBITRATION AND CONCILIATION (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2018

Why in news?

The Union Cabinet recently approved the **Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Bill, 2018** for introduction in the Parliament.

Background

- The Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, was amended by the **Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Act, 2015** in order to make arbitration process user friendly, cost effective and ensure speedy disposal and neutrality of arbitrators.
- However, to give a boost to institutional arbitration vis-a-vis ad hoc arbitration and to remove some practical difficulties in applicability of the Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Act, 2015, a **High Level Committee (HLC) under the Chairmanship of Justice B.N. Srikrishna**, was constituted by the Government.
- The proposed amendments are as per the recommendations of the High Level Committee.

Salient features of the Bill

- Facilitate **speedy appointment of arbitrators** through designated arbitral institutions by the Supreme Court or the High Court. Parties may **directly approach arbitral institutions** designated by the Supreme Court for International Commercial arbitration and in other cases the concerned High Courts.
- It provides for **creation of an independent body namely the Arbitration Council of India (ACI)** which will grade arbitral institution and accredit arbitrators by laying down norms and take all such steps as may be necessary to promote the process, maintain an electronic depository of all arbitral awards, etc.
 - o The ACI shall be a **body corporate** whose Chairperson should have been a Judge of the Supreme Court or Chief Justice or Judge of any High

Court or any eminent person. Further, the other Members would include an eminent academician etc. besides other Government nominees.

INDIA JORDAN

Why in News?

Recently, King Abdullah II of Jordan visited India.

India Jordan Relations

- **Political Relations-** In 1950 the two countries established full-fledged diplomatic ties.

- **Commercial Relations-** India-Jordan trade is governed by an agreement signed in 1976.

A

Trade and Economic Joint Committee constituted under the Agreement promote and monitor the progress.

- **Defence-** Jordan has provided critical support to India during the 1991 evacuation of citizens from Iraq and also during the latest crisis in Iraq and Syria.

- o Both face the threat of extremism. Jordan has recently launched the **Aqaba process** to promote deradicalisation in which India is an active participant.

- **Cultural Relations-** There is immense interest in Jordan for Indian art and culture, especially Bollywood films.

- **Diaspora-** Jordan is home to more than 10,000 Indians, who are employed in various industries.

The exchange of bilateral visits at high political and senior official levels declined significantly after King

Abdullah's productive visit in 2006. The relationship has failed to realize the huge, untapped potential.

Importance of Jordan for India

- **To access Palestine (West Bank)** -One can visit Palestine only either through Israel or Egypt and Jordan. Due to political issues between Israel and Palestine, Jordan becomes an important connecting point with West Bank region of Palestine.
- Like India, **Jordan has special ties with both Israel and Palestine.** This can be further important for supporting India's 'De-hyphenation' policy towards the two countries.

- Both the countries share the view that nations must coordinate their positions to **fight against the misuse of religion** by groups and countries for inciting hatred and justifying terrorism. Jordan is crucial to India's effort to gather regional intelligence and enhance counter-terrorism cooperation.
- India can leverage Jordan's unique strategic location in the **Levant, with access to the Red Sea and the eastern Mediterranean.**
- Jordan also plays an important role in **India's food and energy security** through provision of fertilisers and phosphates. It also has one of the largest deposits of oil shale.

The improving relations between the two countries is a testimony to India's "Think West" policy where Jordan has an important place.

INDIA AFRICA DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

Why in news?

- Recently Indian government approved the opening of 18 new Indian missions up from current 29 missions over four years (2018-2021) in Africa with an aim to expand its footprints.

Other Related news

- The **India Development Foundation of Overseas Indians (IDF-OI)** was closed to enhance synergies in channelizing Diaspora's contributions to Government of India's flagship programmes such as National Mission for clean Ganga and Swachh Bharat Mission
- Export-Import Bank (**Exim Bank**) has decided to provide a \$500 million credit facility to ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID) to fund various development projects in the western-south Africa.

Development initiatives between India and Africa:

- **Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program** which aims at capacity building, skill development, transfer of technology and sharing of experiences with the partner countries. Around 5000 scholarships have been offered to officials from African countries under this.
- **Pan-African e-network: This programme is a joint effort of India and African Union with an aim to provide** satellite connectivity, tele-education and tele-medicine services to the African countries by linking them with top educational institutions and super-speciality hospitals in India.
- **Techno-Economic Approach for Africa-India Movement (TEAM-9):**
 - o It was launched by India in 2004 together with eight energy and resource-rich West African countries viz. Burkina Faso, Chad, Cote D'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Senegal, and India.

- o The initiative aimed at engaging the underdeveloped, yet resource-wealthy countries of West Africa, which required both low-cost technology and investment to develop their infrastructure.

- **Focus Africa:** Launched by India in 2002-03, the main objective of the programme is to increase interactions between the two regions by identifying the areas of bilateral trade and investment.
- **Supporting Indian Trade and Investment for Africa (SITA):** It is an International Trade centre supported project which aims at increasing value of business transactions between India and selected East African countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania) with the ultimate objective to create jobs and income opportunities for people in East Africa.
- **Cooperation with African Development Bank (AfDB):** India joined AfDB in 1983 and has contributed to its General Capital increased and has also pledged capital for grants and loans.

Development Assistance:

- India extends development assistance through the Line of Credit extended by the Export-Import (Exim) Bank of India and the traditional technical assistance predominantly managed by the country's ministry of external affairs.
- In **India Africa Forum Summit (2015)**, India announced a US\$ 10 billion line of credit to help financing the projects in African countries, capacity building, IT education, and higher education.
- **Training institutes:** India has set up over 100 training institutes in different African countries, encompassing areas ranging from agriculture, rural development and food processing to information technology, vocational training, and entrepreneurship development.

Other Initiatives:

- **Solar Mamas:** It is group of rural women solar engineers from Africa who have been trained under Government of India-supported programme to fabricate, install, use, repair and maintain solar lanterns and household solar lighting systems in their villages.
- As a part of **Light up and power Africa initiative**, the African Development Bank has entered into partnership with the International Solar Alliance (ISA) to scale up solar energy in Africa.

India Development Foundation of Overseas Indians (IDF-OI)

- It was set up by Government of India in 2008 as an **autonomous not-for-profit Trust**, to facilitate Overseas Indian philanthropy into social and development projects in India.
- It has largely been **unsuccessful in mobilizing funds. Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)**
- It was established in 1975 by 15 West African countries via the treaty of Lagos to **promote regional economic integration.**
- **EBID** is an international financial institution with two funding windows to promote private sector activities and fund the development of the public sector.
- It is headquartered in Lome, Togolese Republic.

INDIA USA SOLAR DISPUTE

Why in news?

WTO has agreed to set up a compliance panel to examine whether India has complied with its ruling in Solar Dispute or not.

Background

- India launched **National Solar Mission in 2011** under National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) to deploy 20,000 MW of grid connected solar power by 2022 which was revised in 2015 to be 100 GW.
- The government offered **financial support** of up to Rs.1 crore per MW to the implementing agency for setting up large solar capacities by placing orders with domestic manufacturers.
- U.S. complained to the WTO in 2013, saying the programme was discriminatory and **U.S. solar exports to India had fallen** by 90 per cent from 2011 and filed a suit in WTO.
- India lost the solar dispute in 2016, after the WTO's highest court the **Appellate Body** upheld a ruling that Domestic Content Requirements (DCRs) under Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission (JNNSM) violated several core provisions on **national treatment and trade-related investment measures** as they favour domestic products over imported products.
- Subsequently India agreed to implement the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) recommendations by 14 December 2017 and filed a report before DSB claiming that it had brought about changes in rules and procedures under the JNNSM and power purchase agreements no longer mandated domestic sourcing of cells and modules
- US continued to disagree with India's claims of compliance thus necessitating the setting up of the compliance panel.

permission to impose trade **sanctions on India** but the legal process in WTO dispute system is likely to continue for a year or more.

2. Such disputes **have wider implications** not only for India but also for many developing countries that are struggling to switch to green economy. Domestic content requirements are envisaged to generate jobs to lift millions of people from abject poverty.

Implication

1. If India is found not to have complied, Washington could ask the WTO for

AFGHANISTAN MAKES A PEACE OFFER TO TALIBAN

Why in news?

Afghanistan has made an offer for unconditional talks to Taliban and offered a pact to recognise the insurgents as a legitimate party in negotiations and end the 16-year old war.

Background

- The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is a landlocked country in South-Central Asia. It was ancient focal point of the Silk Road and migration. It is an important geostrategic location, connecting East and West Asia or the Middle East.
- Afghanistan consists of various ethnic and religious satraps like Pashtuns-Sunni (located in Western Frontier Province of Pakistan and Eastern Afghanistan), Hazara- Shia (Iran's side), Uzbeks and Tajiks (located in central side).
- Afghanistan has been in a state of turmoil for the last 40 years including a Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and withdrawal in 1989.
- The Taliban came to power in 1996 and were later ousted from power by **International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)** in an effort to counter Al-Qaeda in 2001.
- The Taliban has steadily expanded its reach since U.S. and NATO forces formally concluded their combat mission at the end of 2014 and transitioned to a support and counterterrorism role even after the formation of National Unity Government (NUG)
- In current **Kabul peace process**, Afghanistan has offered that in exchange for a ceasefire, the government will allow Taliban members to have a “peaceful and respectful life”, political recognition, prisoner release, passports to Taliban

members and visas to their families, as well as office space in Kabul.

Kabul Peace Process

- It is a gathering of 23 nations, the EU, U.N. and NATO intended to discuss security and political issues in the Afghanistan.

Challenges in Afghanistan peace process:

- **Number of war and civilian casualties** due to suicide bombings are on the rise after the international coalition forces embarked on Operation Resolute Support to “advise, train and assist” the Afghan forces and not to participate in war since 2014.
- **Rise of IS:** Despite the Afghan government's claims of cracking down on militants, threats from the IS and Taliban have only grown both of which have a goal to destabilise the state that and throw the country into further chaos.
- **Failure of USA's strategy:** USA has failed to evolve a cohesive strategy regarding military aid to Pakistan, troop presence in Afghanistan, indiscriminate use of airpower or infrastructure building in the country.
- **Role of Pakistan:** Pakistan has direct links with the Taliban and its allies in the Haqqani network and provides safe havens to terrorist groups within its territory.
- **Legitimacy of the National Unity Government (NUG)** seems eroded due to conflict between Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah and President Ashraf Ghani, corruption, lack of implementation of Electoral reforms and refusal of Taliban to talk to Afghan government which it thinks as artificial, foreign imposed and not representative of Afghan people.

All these factors have contributed to regrouping and strengthening of Taliban which controls more than half of territory in the country.

Conclusion

- The United Nations mission in Afghanistan has welcomed the offer and said it “strongly supports the vision for peace through intra-Afghan dialogue”.
- India supports Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process which has also gained approval from Russia and China.
- United States has also launched a **new regional strategy** wherein it has stepped up assistance to the Afghan military and greatly increased air strikes against the Taliban, in a bid to break the stalemate and force the insurgents to the negotiating table.
- But most importantly The Taliban has refused to negotiate with the government until all foreign forces leave, and still refer to themselves as a government in exile.

NORTH EASTERN COUNCIL (NEC) SCHEMES

Why in news?

The Union Cabinet approved Schemes of **national Eastern Council (NEC)** including continuation of existing Schemes.

More on news

- The Schemes under NEC – Special Development Project will be changed to be a Central Sector Scheme with 100% grant (from current 90:10 between centre and state).
- For other projects funded by NEC – both Revenue and Capital – as 100% Central funding basis, to continue with existing pattern.
- Extension of 100% centrally funded **North Eastern Road Sector Development Scheme (NERSDS)**.
- The Scheme namely **Non Lapsable Central Pool of Resources-Central [NLCPR (Central)]** is also transferred to NEC for implementation.
- NEC schemes as per Expenditure Finance Committee(EFC) are co-terminus with the 14th Finance Commission. So, all NEC schemes have to be completed by March 2020.
- Priority sectors have been identified such as bamboo; piggyery; regional tourism; higher education, tertiary healthcare & special intervention in backward areas; livelihood project; Science & Technology Interventions in NER; Survey & Investigation and NER Promotion.
- The total funds available to NEC are proposed to be bifurcated in two components.
 - o **State component (60%)**- would be utilised for the projects in each State as per their share on normative allocation basis.
 - o **Central component (40%)**- the projects having regional character, requiring Inter-Ministerial intervention are to be taken up.

North Eastern Council (NEC)

- It is the **nodal agency for the economic and social development** of the North Eastern Region which consists of the eight States of the region, with their respective Chief Ministers and Governors representing them.
- It is a **statutory body** established in 1972 via the North Eastern Council Act, 1971 for three key objectives viz. balanced development of the North Eastern Region; effecting better inter-state coordination; and maintaining security and public order in the region.
- In the 2002 amendment of the Act the role of the NEC has been upgraded from advisory body to that of regional planning body.
- It operates under the administrative control of the Ministry of Development of the North Eastern Region (DoNER).

Benefits

- It is expected to **boost the development projects** in North-East thus accruing socio-economic benefits to the people.
- It will **ensure optimization of resources and avoid duplication** through convergence of efforts of various Ministries/Departments.

TIBET FACTOR IN INDIA CHINA RELATIONS

Why in news?

Recently government functionaries were asked to stay away from Thank You India programme 2018 which marked the starting of 60th year of arrival of Dalai Lama.

Historical background

Tibet is bordered by Chinese Turkestan and Mongolia in the north; by China in the east; by Burma, India (Sikkim), Bhutan, and Nepal in the South; and by India (Punjab and Kashmir) in the west.

- 1912- Tibet declared itself an independent republic after a military conflict with China.
- 1951- China forced Tibet to sign “**Seventeen Point Agreement**” which guaranteed Tibetan autonomy and respect the Buddhist religion but also allowed the establishment of Chinese civil and military headquarters at Lhasa.
- 1954- India ceded India’s British-inherited extraterritorial rights in Tibet and accepted its annexation without any quid pro quo.
- 1959- Dalai Lama and his ministers fled to India and established the Tibetan exile administration (**Central Tibetan Administration**) in the north Indian hill station of Mussoorie. As a consequence, India and China went to war in 1962.
- 1965 – Chinese government established Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) making it essentially a province within the People’s Republic of China.
- Currently, the CTA functions from McLeod Ganj, a suburb of Dharamsala and India has played role in rehabilitation of Tibetans.

Tibet as a bone of contention between Indian & China

- Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1951 eliminated a buffer between the two Asian giants and transformed the border dispute in to a rivalry. Further, the entry of Chinese troops in Tibet in the wake of

1956 made the problem more critical.

- Recently, China's military build-up and infrastructure development in Tibet, as well as reported plans to divert or dam rivers that rise in Tibet and flow into India, have raised India's anxieties in the past.
- Conversely India has been unable to assuage China's insecurities about its possible use of the presence of the Dalai Lama in India and its large Tibetan refugee population to create trouble for China in Tibet.

Conclusion

- On one hand experts suggest that India should gradually reclaim its leverage over the Tibet issue by emphasizing its acceptance of China’s claim over Tibet in 1954 in lieu of grant of genuine autonomy to that region.
- But on the other hand, some experts suggest that Tibet has changed a lot since 1959 and India should change its Tibetan strategy proactively considering factors such as:
 - o Infrastructure development in Tibet for e.g. Beijing-Lhasa railway line,
 - o Demographic shift in Tibet with Beijing populating areas with majority ‘Han’ Chinese workers,
 - o China’s promotion of Sino-friendly Kagyu sect of Tibetan Buddhism in Tibet and
 - o Decline in number of refugees from Tibet suggesting it has changed a lot since 1959.

There is an urgent need for community outreach, surveys and a referendum, if necessary, to map what the Tibetan community in India wants in its future as India’s current approach of playing Tibet card may be out of sync with reality.

AMENDMENT IN CHINA'S CONSTITUTION

Why in news?

National People's Congress (the Chinese Legislature) has amended the constitution and has scrapped the two term limit on Presidency and Vice-Presidency. The amendment empowers **President Xi Jinping** to possibly remain in office for life.

Requirement for Constitutional amendment in China

A constitutional change is either proposed by the NPC Standing Committee or by more than one-fifth of all NPC deputies, and then requires the approval of two-thirds or more of NPC deputies during the annual session.

Details

- The current amendment of 2018 is to include **Xi Jinping's Thought on Socialism with Chinese characteristics for a New Era** in the preamble of the constitution. **Prior to Xi, only founding fathers of PRC i.e. Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping had their personal ideologies engraved in Constitution.**
- National Supervisory Commission, as an anti-corruption super agency, has been included as a new type of state organ in the Constitution.
- There is a change in China's Foreign policy to replace the old approach of zero-sum game with **win-win cooperation** like China's Belt and Road Initiative.

China Under XI's Leadership

- As a paramount leader, Xi Jinping **holds all the 3 strongest positions** of the country i.e. he is the General Secretary of Communist Party of China (Only One party exists in China), President of the People's Republic of China (since 2013) and Chairman of the Central Military Commission.
- He **started anti-corruption campaign** which resulted in exit of most of his rivals.

- The **One Belt One Road** project, which extends to more than 60 countries, is his brain child.
- He propagated **China Dream vision** as 'great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation'.
- Under his tenure, China has become **more assertive** in the South China Sea region.
- He became the **first Chinese President to attend** World Economic forum in 2017 in Davos.

Development of 'Socialism with Chinese characteristics'

- **Mao Zedong's Philosophy** was to integrate the universal theory of Marxism-Leninism with China's specific conditions. Mao said that **peasants should be the bulwark of the revolutionary energy**, led by the working class in China.
- **Deng Xiaoping Theory** was to integrate the universal principles of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought with the concrete practice of socialist modernization and develop it under the new historical conditions.
- **Jiang Zemin's "Theory of the Three Represents"** propagated that CPC must always represent 3 values i.e. the development trend of China's advanced productive forces, the orientation of China's advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people in China.
- **Xi Jinping Thought**- It includes-
 - o Following "socialism with Chinese characteristics" with **"people as the masters of the country"**.
 - o To adopt new development ideas based on science.
 - o To promote the **one country two system** for Hong Kong and Macau with a future of **"complete national reunification"** and to follow the **One China Policy** and **1992 consensus** for

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Taiwan.

- o To **strengthen national security** and for that the Communist Party of China should have absolute leadership over China's People's Liberation Army.

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SOUTH ASIA COOPERATIVE ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM (SACEP)

Why in news?

An MoU has been approved by Cabinet between India and SACEP for cooperation on the response to Oil and Chemical Pollution in the South Asian Seas Region.

Details about the MoU

- The MoU intends to promote closer cooperation between India and other maritime nations comprising the South Asian seas region.
- Indian Coast Guard (ICG) will be the nodal agency to respond to oil and chemical spills on behalf of Government of India.
- ICG Maritime Rescue Coordination Centres (MRCCs) will be the national emergency response centre for marine incidents.

About SACEP

- It is an inter-governmental organization, established in 1982 by the governments of South Asia to promote and support protection, management and enhancement of the **environment in the region**.
- It also serves as the secretariat of South Asian Seas Programme (SASP).
- The Governments of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are the members of SACEP.

South Asian Seas Programme

It is one of the 18 Regional Seas Programmes of UNEP. The South Asian Seas Action Plan was adopted in March 1995 and today enjoys the unqualified support of the region's five countries (Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka).

INDUS WATER TREATY

Why in news?

The meeting of the Permanent Indus Commission (PIC) between India and Pakistan was held in New Delhi recently.

More about the news

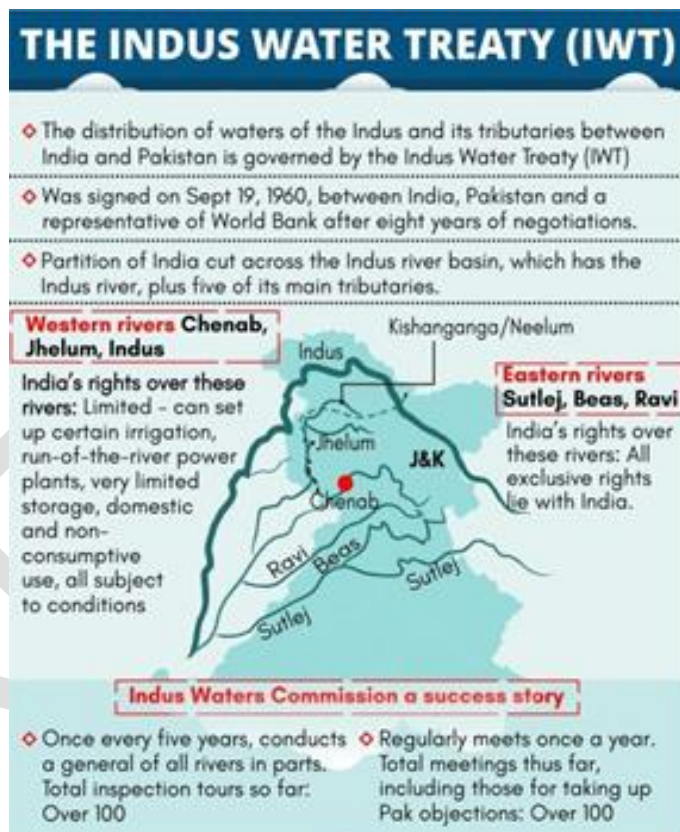
- This was the 114th meeting of the **Permanent Indus Commission (PIC)** that looks into the sharing of the Indus waters since the Indus water treaty (IWT) was signed by the two countries in 1960.
- Pakistan expressed concerns over India's Pakal Dul (1000 MW), Ratle (850 MW) and Lower Kalnai (48 MW) projects — located in Chenab basin – contending they violated IWT.
- India's stand is that designs of the projects are in accordance with the treaty. These are run of the river projects which is allowed under the treaty.

About Indus water treaty

- As per the treaty, control over three eastern rivers Ravi, Beas and Sutlej was given to India. While control over three western rivers Indus, Jhelum and Chenab was given to Pakistan. It allows India to use only 20% of the water of Indus river, for irrigation, power generation and transport.
- It is said to be the **most successful water treaty** in the world. As, it has survived various India-Pakistan wars and other issues. Most disagreements and disputes have been settled via legal procedures, provided for within the framework of the treaty.
- The **Permanent Indus Commission (PIC)** was set up as a bilateral commission to implement and manage the Treaty. The Commission also solves disputes arising over water sharing. It had last met in Islamabad in March 2017.
- The World Bank's role in relation to “disputes” and “differences” with respect

of IWT is limited to the

- designation of people to fulfil certain roles when requested by either or both of the parties.



ROOPPUR NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

Why in news?

Recently, a tripartite MoU was signed between India, Russia and Bangladesh for development of Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant in Bangladesh.

Important Aspects of MoU

- The Rooppur NPP will be built by Russia's **State Atomic Energy Corporation Rosatom** and the **Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL)** will assist in construction, installation and infrastructural assignments.
- Russia will implement designing, manufacturing, and supply of the equipment, construction, erection, start-up, and adjustment, commissioning.
- India will provide the personnel training, consultation support and participate in the construction and erection activity and non-critical materials supply to the site in Bangladesh.
- It is the **first initiative under an Indo-Russian deal** to undertake atomic energy projects in third country and is being developed by Rosatom on a **turnkey basis** under which the contractor will complete the whole project and will be liable to any problems arising in the plant.

Significance for India

1. India's partnership with Russia in developing Rooppur NPP despite India not being a member of NSG is very significant. It enhances India's stature as a **responsible nuclear partner**.
2. This is the **first time** that India will participate in nuclear power project abroad thus **boosting Make in India** initiative through manufacturing some nuclear power reactor equipment in India.
3. It may also strengthen India's case for **entry into NSG and United Nation Security Council** as a permanent member.

Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant

1. It involves **two units each** with a capacity of 1200 MW and is situated in the banks of River Padma and it is being constructed under a contract signed by Russia and Bangladesh in 2005.
2. **90% of the cost** is being provided by Russia which Bangladesh is required to pay back in 30 years with a grace period of 10 years.
3. It will be the **first Nuclear Reactors in Bangladesh** and makes it **third country in South Asia** to have a civil nuclear plant after Indian and Pakistan.
4. The Rooppur NPP will be Water Energetic Reactor of **3+ generation technology** i.e. it has been developed using the 'post Fukushima' safety standards for a nuclear power plant.

As of 2016, **India has signed civil nuclear agreements with 14 countries:** Argentina, Australia, Canada, Czech Republic, France, Japan, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Namibia, Russia, South Korea, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Vietnam.

ARUNACHAL’S 2-TIER PANCHAYATI RAJ

Why in News?

Arunachal Pradesh Assembly passed a bill to do away with the **Anchal Samiti** (Intermediate level) and set up a two-tier system in the state.

Details

- According to the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution, states are required to constitute Panchayats at **three tiers**, i.e., Village, Intermediate and District except the States having a population of less than 20 lakhs, which may not constitute a Panchayat at Intermediate level.
- Arunachal Pradesh has a population of 13.84 lakh which, thus, makes it eligible for having 2-tier government.
- Moreover, it was claimed that plans and policies get delayed at the Anchal Samiti level. Thus, the move is meant to standardize the use of financial resources given the already small resource base.
- Further, planning and execution of schemes would be faster in a two-tier panchayati raj system, as there would be direct connection between Gram Panchayats and Zilla Parishads, the village and district levels of the panchayati raj system.

AUSTRALIA’S 457 VISA

Why in news?

Australia abolished the subclass 457 visa category, popular among skilled overseas workers, especially Indians.

More about the news?

- It has been replaced by **Temporary Skill Shortage (TSS)** visa which would help enable hiring of overseas employees.
- TSS visa has **two main streams**. A **short-term stream** that enables hiring of temporary expat skilled workers for maximum of two years. The second stream is a **medium and long-term stream** where expats can be hired for up to four years.
- Short term TSS visa holders are not eligible to apply for **permanent residence**. The medium or long term TSS visa holder may apply for permanent residence, after having held the TSS visa for a minimum period of three years.

TRANSFORMATION OF ASPIRATIONAL DISTRICTS

Why in News?

Government recently launched the ‘Transformation of Aspirational Districts’ programme.

Background

- The issue of a **widespread disparity in development** indicators among various regions of the country has been dealt with by the policy makers for a long time.
- However, the earlier programmes/schemes were infested by **certain loopholes**, including lack of convergence, absence of centralised monitoring mechanism, only a fraction of sanctioned amount reaching the districts, lack of availability of real time data, lack of people’s participation and above all the ‘one size fits all’ approach.

About the Programme

- Transformation of Aspirational Districts programme aims to quickly and effectively transform the chosen 115 districts, with at least one from 28 states (excluding Goa).
- The broad contours of the programme are **Convergence** (of Central & State Schemes), **Collaboration** (of Central, State level 'Prabhari' Officers & District Collectors), and **Competition** among districts driven by a mass Movement. It will be based on the **real time data** and driven by **Mass Movement**.
- With **States as the main drivers**, this program will focus on the strength of each district, identify low- hanging fruits for immediate improvement, measure progress, and rank districts; while NITI Aayog will **anchor this programme**.
- One of the main elements of the strategy is to identify selected **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)**, monitor the progress made in these indicators and carry out annual ranking on the incremental progress made. The KPIs chosen are to be district specific.

- For this purpose, **5 sectors have been identified**- Health & Nutrition, Education, Agriculture and Water Resources, Basic Infrastructure and Financial Inclusion and Skill Formation.
- The programme includes **appointment of Central and State Government Officers** at the level of Additional/Joint Secretary as the “**Prabhari**” and **Nodal Officers**. These officers are to act as a bridge between centre, state and district.
- A **district level team** would prepare a baseline report of the current status of different indicators and based on the resources available, would also prepare year-wise targets.
- **The central representatives** would be visiting the district at least once in two months and prepare a **report for NITI Aayog**, which after analysing it would place the findings for consideration to the **Empowered Committee of secretaries**.

Related News

The Centre is mulling an initiative similar to the Integrated Action Plan (IAP), used in Left Wing Extremist (LWE) districts, for transforming 115 districts from “backward” to “aspirational”.

What is an Integration Action Plan?

- An Integrated Action Plan (IAP) is a policy instrument that can be used to respond in a concrete way to a policy challenge. Each IAP is unique, in terms of local context, theme and coverage. There is no set template.
- Under IAP, launched in 2010 for LWE districts, additional central assistance with focus on creation of public infrastructure and services is granted to districts with an annual outlay of Rs 30 crore.

Additional Information-

- Out of 115 districts, 30 were identified by the

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NITI Aayog and another 50 districts by Central Ministries and remaining 35 identified by the Ministry of Home Affairs as Left-Wing Extremist districts.

- The **KPIs are a combination** of inputs, outputs, and outcomes across the five specified sectors.

Associated Recent Developments

- **Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI)** has tied with the Common Service Centres (CSC) in these Aspirational Districts to implement a plan to **promote micro enterprises** in 115 aspirational districts across the country to contribute in their development.

Common Service Centre

- It is an information and communication technology (ICT) access point created under the National e-Governance Project. The project plan includes the creation of a network of over 100,000 CSCs throughout the country.

UN BROADBAND COMMISSION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Why in news

Recently, report of the Expert Group to the Broadband Commission recommended to close the broadband gap.

UN Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development

- It was established in May 2010 by ITU and UNESCO as Broadband Commission for Digital Development.
- Following adoption of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals in September 2015, the Commission was re-launched as the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development
- **Aims:** To boost the importance of broadband on the international policy agenda and expand broadband access in every country as key to accelerating progress towards national and international development targets.
- **Report:** 'State of Broadband' is an annual report released by commission.

Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development 2025 Targets:

By 2025-

- All countries should have a funded national broadband plan or strategy or include broadband in their universal access and services definition.
- Entry-level broadband services should be made affordable in developing countries, at less than 2% of monthly gross national income per capita.
- Broadband-Internet user penetration should reach:
 - o 75% worldwide
 - o 65% in developing countries
 - o 35% in least developed countries
- 60% of youth and adults should have achieved at least a minimum level of proficiency in sustainable digital skills.
- 40% of the world's population should be using digital financial services.

- Gender equality should be achieved across all targets.

More on Report

The report sets out specific actions for policymakers and regulators, addressing **four key themes**:

- o Healthy investment climate
- o Lower infrastructure supply costs
- o Better functioning ICT markets
- o Liberating demand for the wider digital economy to encourage supply and investment

About International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

- Based in Geneva, it is the **United Nations' specialized agency** for information and communication technologies – ICTs.
- As the global focal point for governments and the private sector, it's role in helping the world communicate **spans 3 core sectors**: radio communication, standardization and development.
- They allocate global radio spectrum and satellite orbits, develop the technical standards that ensure networks and technologies seamlessly interconnect and strive to improve access to ICTs to underserved communities worldwide.

VIDESH AYA PRADESH KE DWAAR

Why in news?

The **Ministry of External Affairs** recently launched an initiative 'Videsh Aaya Pradesh ke Dwaar' from Hyderabad.

Details

- o It is a part of the **enhanced public diplomacy outreach** to take the objectives of the foreign policy to the common people.
- o The Ministry will have **direct interaction with the Local Media** to communicate foreign policy priorities in **simple terms**, highlight the **benefits** accruing to the common people through diplomatic efforts and bring the domain of foreign policy closer to the people.
- o It also intends to create **a pool of media professionals interested in foreign policy** and guide them on connecting with the MEA.

SPECIAL CATEGORY STATUS (SCS)

Why in news?

- Recently Andhra Pradesh MPs have been protesting for special category status for the state which centre has refused.

More about the news

- The demand is claimed on the basis of Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act which provides that “the Central Government may make appropriate grants and also ensure that adequate benefits and incentives in the form of special development package are given to the backward areas of that State”
- While Centre agreed to provide the **monetary equivalent** of SCS but has refused granting the status on the basis that 14th Finance Commission doesn't provide for such treatment to Andhra Pradesh.

What is SCS?

- The Constitution does not include any provision for categorisation of any State as a SCS. But, recognising that some regions in the country were historically disadvantaged in contrast to others, Central plan assistance to SCS States has been granted in the past by the erstwhile Planning Commission body, National Development Council (NDC).
- The concept of a special category state was first introduced in 1969 by the 5th Finance Commission based on the Gadgil formula. The formula was modified various times to suit the contemporary needs.
- In 1991 the Gadgil-Mukherjee formula was adopted that was in use till the 14th finance commission.
- The rationale for special status was that certain states, because of inherent features, have a low resource base and cannot mobilize resources for development.

and the difference between funds allotted to SCS and other States have been sizeably reduced and the status has remained more of symbol of Political mileage.

- With recent increase in tax devolution to 42% and decrease in normal central assistance to states, the benefits under SCS have reduced. But there is still a need of evolving more equitable methods of fund devolution.
- The recommendations by Raghuram Rajan committee (2013) for the introduction of the "least developed states' category (based on the 10 equally weighted indicators for monthly per capita consumption expenditure, education, health, household amenities, poverty rate, female literacy, percentage of the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe population, urbanisation rate, financial inclusion and physical connectivity) and abolition of "SCS" may be introduced for better understanding the development needs of individual states.

Way Forward

- Since Planning Commission ended there has been a drastic cut in the allocation to SCS

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STUDY IN INDIA PROGRAM

Why in news?

Ministry of Human Resource Development has approved Study in India Program to attract foreign students.

Objective

The ‘Study in India’ programme’s primary objective is to target foreign students by branding India as an attractive education destination.

Details of the Program

- o Meritorious foreign students will be given fee waiver.
- o Deserving students will be selected by the Institution based on their merit e.g. the top 25% student will get 100% fee waiver in tuition fee.
- o The expenditure on the fee waiver will have to be **borne by the Institute concerned**, based on cross- subsidisation or through its existing funding. No additional cash flow from Government is proposed for the same.

RUSSIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Context: Vladimir Putin has won another term as Russia's president.

President of Russia:

- This is the highest office in the country, with *the holder being the head of state and the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces*.
- *Two key powers which allow the President a far-reaching political influence are their right to determine the country's foreign policy stance and their right to nominate candidates for most official state positions*, such as for the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court, and the Federation Council – the upper house of the Parliament.



Who can contest?

- According to the Constitution, any Russian citizen who is more than 35, has permanently resided in Russia for the 10 years leading up to the election, and has committed no serious crime can run for Presidency.
 - However, individuals running as independents or with the backing of a political party which is not represented in the State Duma, the lower house of the Parliament, face an additional obstacle.
 - Those with the backing of a political party have to collect

100,000 signatures in support of their candidacy, while for independents that number goes up to 300,000. Moreover, there is a ban on more than two consecutive terms in office, although Presidents are free to run again for a further third and fourth time after sitting out once full electoral term.

Electoral System:

- **Russian Presidential elections take place every six years in a two-round electoral system.** During the first round, an absolute majority is required to win. If no candidate gets 50%+1 of the votes, a second round is held exactly three weeks later between the two candidates with the most votes.

SOUTH ASIAN COOPERATIVE ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME (SACEP)

Context:

- The Union Cabinet has approved signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and South Asian Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP) for cooperation on the response to Oil and Chemical Pollution in the South Asian Seas Region.
- The MoU intends to promote closer cooperation between India and other maritime nations comprising the South Asian seas region namely Bangladesh, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka for protection and preservation of marine environment in the region.

Implementation:

- **Indian Coast Guard (ICG) will be the Competent National Authority and national operational contact point for implementation of “Regional Oil Spill Contingency**

Plan” under the MoU and shall respond to oil and chemical spills on behalf of Government of India. Further, ICG Maritime Rescue Coordination Centres (MRCCs) will be the national emergency response centre for marine incidents.

Need for special attention:

- South Asia is one of the most diverse regions in the world. Bordered to the north by the Himalayas and to the south by the Indian Ocean, covers a diversity of ecosystems from lush tropical forest to harsh, dry desert. It is also one of the most populous regions, with over 1 billion people living in India alone.
 - Most of the South Asian nations share many similar environmental problems, stemming from poverty and its consequences on natural resources. According to the World Bank, during the past decade, South Asia has been the second fastest economically growing region in the world, and their efforts at increased

production have put increasing pressure on natural resources and the environment.

- Significant natural resource concerns of the region include depletion of water quality and quantity, dwindling forests and coastal resources, and soil degradation resulting from nutrient depletion and salinization.

Facts for Prelims:

- The **Malé Declaration** on control and prevention of air pollution and its likely transboundary effects for South Asia is another significant efforts which encourages intergovernmental cooperation to combat the transboundary air pollution problem.

What’s important?

For Prelims: SACEP, Male declaration, IMO, Regional Oil Spill Contingency plan.

About SACEP:

- In order to promote and support protection, management and enhancement of the environment in the South Asian region, the Governments of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka established the SACEP in 1982 in Sri Lanka.
- The SACEP jointly with the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) developed a “Regional Oil Spill Contingency Plan” to facilitate international co-operation and mutual assistance in preparing and responding to a major oil pollution incident in the seas around the Maritime States of Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

3R REGIONAL FORUM IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Context:

- India is getting ready to host the 8th 3R Regional Forum in Asia and the Pacific in its cleanest city, Indore in the month of April, 2018.

Key facts:

- The event is co-organised by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) Government of India, the Ministry of the Environment, Government of Japan (MOEJ), and the United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD).
- Theme: “Achieving Clean Water, Clean Land and Clean Air through 3R and Resource Efficiency- A 21st Century Vision for Asia-Pacific Communities”.

Participating Countries:

- Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Cook Islands, People’s Republic of China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kiribati, Republic of Korea, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nauru, New Zealand, Nepal, Niue, Pakistan, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Viet Nam

Significance of this event:

- The Forum comes at an opportune time with the Indian government’s focus on scientific management of 100% municipal solid waste through its ambitious Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban).
- Through this Forum, India aims to strengthen this focus through its ‘Mission Zero Waste’ approach thereby encouraging cities, industries and other diverse stakeholders to look at waste as a resource.

About the 3R Regional Forum:

The Regional 3R Forum in Asia and the Pacific was launched in 2009 in **Tokyo**, Japan.

- The United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD) has been organizing International Regional Forum on 3Rs since 2009 with the support of Government of Japan.
- It promotes the concept of Reduce, Reuse, Recycle in industry, service and agriculture sector. The overall objective is to establish sound material cycle society by adopting resource conservation, techniques and technologies.
- It provides a strategic platform for addressing the needs and priorities of 3Rs (reduce, reuse and recycle) in Asian countries and sharing best practices from the region, including emerging concerns in waste management.
- In the last seven years, the Forum has been organised in Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Indonesia, Maldives, Japan and Australia and has been instrumental in providing innovative, effective and smart 3R based solutions.

EXECUTIVE BOARD OF UNESCO

Context:

- The Government of India has decided to nominate Professor J S Rajput, former Director NCERT, as India's representative to the Executive Board (EXB) of UNESCO.
- Professor J S Rajput is an eminent educationist with rich experience in various fields including UNESCO.

- The general conference determines the policies and the main lines of work of the organisation. Its duty is to set the programmes and the budget of the UNESCO. It also elects the members of the executive board and appoints, every four years.

What's important?

For Prelims: UNESCO executive board and general conference.

About the Executive Board:

- The EXB has a four-year term of office and 58 seats.
- The executive board is one of the constitutional organs of UNESCO and is elected by the General Conference.
- The executive board examines the work for the organization and the corresponding budget estimates.
- In practice, the executive board is the main organ responsible for all policies and programmes of UNESCO.

Significance of the membership:

- Being a member of the board enables India in principle to play a role in shaping and reviewing UNESCO's policies and programmes corresponding to its five major programs on education, the natural science, the social and human Sciences, Culture and Communication and Information.

General conference:

- The general conference consists of the representatives of the states members of the organisation.
- It meets every two years, and is attended by member states and associate members, together with observers for non-member states, intergovernmental organisations and non- governmental organisations (NGOs).
- Each country has one vote, irrespective of its size or the extent of its contribution to the budget.

CUVETTE CENTRALE REGION

What is it? It is *the world's largest tropical peatlands in Congo Basin*. **Why in news?**

To protect the Cuvette Centrale region in the Congo Basin from unregulated land use and prevent its drainage and degradation, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Republic of Congo and Indonesia have jointly signed the Brazzaville declaration that promotes better management and conservation of this globally important carbon store.

Global peatland initiative:

- The declaration was signed on the sidelines of the Third Partners Meeting of the Global Peatlands Initiative, taking place in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo.

What are peatlands?

- Peatlands are wetlands that contain a mixture of decomposed organic material, partially submerged in a layer of water, lacking oxygen.
- The complex biodiversity of the peatlands means they are home to a variety of species, but their high carbon content makes them uniquely vulnerable to incineration if they are drained.

About the Global Peatlands Initiative:

- The Global Peatlands Initiative is an effort by leading experts and institutions to save peatlands as the world's largest terrestrial organic carbon stock and to prevent it being emitted into the atmosphere.

KISS to host ‘Commonwealth Big Lunch’

Context:

- *Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS), Bhubaneswar, in partnership with British Council, India, is hosting the ‘Commonwealth Big Lunch’.*
- KISS is the only organisation from Asia to be selected by British Council to host the Commonwealth Big Lunch.

What is it?

- British Council is celebrating 70 years of inception in Commonwealth countries. On this occasion, it has organised a mega lunch. The initiative launched by UK PM Theresa May.
- The motto of the programme is to encourage people to get together to celebrate their Commonwealth connections through food.

The Commonwealth:

- The Commonwealth is a voluntary association of 53 independent and equal sovereign states. It was formally constituted by the London Declaration in 1949, which established the member states as “free and equal”.
- The Commonwealth operates by intergovernmental consensus of the member states, organised through the Commonwealth Secretariat and non-governmental organisations, organised through the Commonwealth Foundation.
- The Commonwealth is home to 2.4 billion people and includes both advanced economies and developing countries. Thirty of our members are small states, many of which are island nations.
- Member countries are supported by a network of more than 80 intergovernmental, civil society, cultural and professional organisations.
- The last country to join the Commonwealth was Rwanda in 2009.

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AFRICAN CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA

Context:

- The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) has been signed by 44 African countries at a summit of the African Union in Kigali, Rwanda. If successful, it will be the biggest trade trade agreement since the formation of the World Trade Organization in 1995.
- *Nigeria, Africa's largest economy and most populous country, as well as a host of others did not sign the agreement.*

opportunities for scale production, continental market access and better reallocation of resources.

Significance of AfCFTA:

- The AfCFTA has the potential to bring over 1.2bn people together into the same market. The bloc of 55 nations would be the largest in the world by member states.
- The AfCFTA could improve trade between African countries, which in 2016 estimates stated accounted for only 10%. By reducing barriers to trade, such as removing import duties and non-tariff barriers, African countries hope to boost intra-continental business.
- Create a single continental market for goods and services, with free movement of business persons and investments, and thus pave the way for accelerating the establishment of the Continental Customs Union and the African customs union.
- Expand intra African trade through better harmonization and coordination of trade liberalization and facilitation regimes and instruments across RECs and across Africa in general.
- Resolve the challenges of multiple and overlapping memberships and expedite the regional and continental integration processes. Enhance competitiveness at the industry and enterprise level through exploiting

INDO-US TECHNOLOGY FORUM FOUNDATION DAY

Context: The Indo-U.S. Science and Technology Forum (IUSSTF) is celebrating its 18th Foundation Day.

About IUSSTF:

- The Indo-U.S. Science and Technology Forum (IUSSTF) was established in 2000 under an agreement between the Governments of India and United States of America.
- It has a mandate to promote, catalyze and seed bilateral collaboration in science, technology, engineering and biomedical research through substantive interaction amongst government, academia and industry.
- *As an autonomous, not-for-profit society*, IUSSTF has the ability, agility and flexibility to engage and involve industry, private R&D labs; and non governmental entities in its evolving activity manifold.
- This operational uniqueness allows the IUSSTF to receive grants and contributions from independent sources both in India and USA, besides the assured core funding from the two governments.
- *IUSSTF currently implements a portfolio of “four” broad program verticals* – Scientific Networks, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Research and Development and Visitation Programs.

INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION NETWORK 2018

Context:

- India is hosting the 17th Annual Conference of International Competition Network 2018 (ICN2018) in New Delhi.

About the 2018 ICN conference:

- **The ICN holds an Annual Conference which is hosted by a member competition agency.** The last such Conference was hosted by Portuguese Competition Authority in 2017 at Porto, Portugal.
- **This is the first time India is hosting the ICN2018 Annual Conference** since it joined International Competition Network (ICN) in 2009.
- The conference will provide an opportunity to exchange ideas and strategies for effective enforcement of competition law and for strengthening cooperation amongst the competition authorities as they strive to promote and sustain competition in rapidly changing markets.

About ICN:

- ICN is an international body comprising 132 members from 120 competition jurisdictions exclusively devoted to international competition enforcement. The ICN's main goal is to improve and advocate for sound competition policy and its enforcement across the global antitrust community.
 - **The ICN is a voluntary, consensus-based organisation. The ICN is not a rule-making organisation** and its work products are not legally binding instruments.
 - ICN provides competition authorities with a specialised yet informal platform for addressing practical competition concerns, sharing experiences and adopting international best practices.

- **Members:** Its members are national competition authorities and NGA (Non-governmental Advisers) which include reputed law firms, eminent persons, and think tanks of international repute.

Why have the ICN?

- Economic globalisation has resulted in an increasing number of investigations and reviews of mergers, cartels and unilateral conduct that transcend jurisdictional boundaries.
- Agencies need to cooperate with each other on cross-border cases in order to reduce the risk of: (i) sub-optimal enforcement if an agency only has a partial picture of the situation; and (ii) inconsistent outcomes if different jurisdictions reach different conclusions about the same practice.
- The ICN helps facilitate cooperation and convergence, where appropriate. This is good for competition agencies, governments, businesses, and ultimately consumers.

PHILIPPINES WITHDRAWS FROM ICC

Context:

- The Philippines is pulling out its support from the International Criminal Court (ICC) in protest against the “baseless” and “outrageous” attacks against the administration as well as violations of due process.
- The decision comes after the ICC said it could investigate Philippines President Duterte for alleged crimes against humanity involving extrajudicial killings resulting from his administration’s campaign against illegal drugs.
- The Court’s management oversight and legislative body, the Assembly of States Parties, consists of one representative from each state party.
- Each state party has one vote and “every effort” has to be made to reach decisions by consensus. If consensus cannot be reached, decisions are made by vote. The Assembly is presided over by a president and two vice- presidents, who are elected by the members to three-year terms.

Background:

- The Hague-based ICC announced last month it was launching a “preliminary examination” of Duterte’s bloody anti-drug crackdown that has drawn international concern.
- Police say they have killed nearly 4,000 drug suspects as part of the campaign, while rights groups claim the toll is around three times the numbers given by authorities.

About ICC:

- The International Criminal Court (ICC), located in The Hague, is the court of last resort for prosecution of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.
- *It is the first permanent, treaty based, international criminal court* established to help end impunity for the perpetrators of the most serious crimes of concern to the international community.
- *Its founding treaty, the Rome Statute*, entered into force on July 1, 2002.
- Although the Court’s expenses are funded primarily by States Parties, it also receives voluntary contributions from governments, international organisations, individuals, corporations and other entities.

INTERNATIONAL AIR TRANSPORT ASSOCIATION (IATA)

Context:

- The International Air Transport Association (IATA) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Civil Aviation and the National Aviation University to enhance human resource availability in India's aviation industry.
- Under the agreement, the signatory institutions would also leverage “the existing infrastructure for training in India to expand the reach of vocational training in aviation disciplines”.

Background:

- India is expected to be the third largest aviation market in the world behind China and the US by 2024, and is forecast to grow to a market size of 480 million passengers in 2036.

About IATA:

- **What is it?**

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) is the trade association for the world's airlines, representing some 280 airlines or 83% of total air traffic. Formed in April 1945, it is the successor to the International Air Traffic Association, which was formed in 1919.

- **What it does?**

IATA supports airline activity and helps formulate industry policy and standards. It also provides consulting and training services in many areas crucial to aviation.

- **Headquarters:**

It is headquartered in **Montreal, Quebec, Canada** with Executive Offices in Geneva, Switzerland.

INTERNATIONAL SOLAR ALLIANCE

Context:

- India, a founding member of the International Solar Alliance, has said that membership of the body will be thrown open to all countries that want to join the grouping, with no restrictions on duration of sunlight or geographical location.
- The alliance now must focus on delivering on its promise to serve as a facilitator to ensure that large swathes of the un-served and underserved population have access to adequate, predictable, and cheap energy.

Who were eligible so far?

When the International Solar Alliance was announced in 2015, 121 nations situated between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn and receiving 300 days of sunlight were deemed eligible for membership.

About ISA:

- The Paris Declaration establishes ISA as an alliance dedicated to the promotion of solar energy among its member countries.
 - The ISA's major objectives include

global deployment of over 1,000GW of solar generation capacity and mobilisation of investment of over US\$ 1000 billion into solar energy by 2030.

- The alliance is a treaty-based inter-governmental organization.
- The alliance is also called International Agency for Solar Policy and Application (IASPA).
- The International Solar Alliance (ISA) is headquartered in India.

Way ahead:

- For ISA, the clock started on December 6, 2017, when the International Solar Alliance Framework Agreement came into force.
- It is now an intergovernmental body registered with the United Nations under Article 102 of the UN Charter.

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NEW WORLD INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION ORDER

- The New World Information and Communication Order (**NWICO** or **NWIO**) aka the **MacBride Commission** is a term that was coined in a debate over media representations of the developing world in **UNESCO** in the late 1970s and early 1980s.
- The term was widely used by the MacBride Commission, a UNESCO panel chaired by Nobel Peace Prize laureate **Sean MacBride**, which was charged with creation of a set of recommendations to make **global media representation more equitable**.
- The MacBride Commission produced a report titled "*Many Voices, One World*", which outlined the main philosophical points of the New World Information Communication Order.

DIGITAL SINGLE MARKET STRATEGY

- Digital Single Market is a policy belonging to the **European Single Market** that covers digital marketing, E-commerce and telecommunication.
- It was announced in May 2015 by the **Juncker Commission**.
- The Digital Single Market is part of the **Digital Agenda for Europe 2020** program of the EU, an initiative of **Europe 2020** proposed strategy.
- It is defined by A **Digital Single Market Strategy** for Europe by the **European Commission**. The three said "pillars" of the European Commission strategy are:
 - Access to online products and services
 - Conditions for digital networks and services to grow and thrive
 - Growth of the European digital economy

they can fully engage in the digital economy, the so-called "**connectivity for a European gigabit society**"

- Adapting **ePrivacy rules** to the new digital environment
- Helping large and small companies, researchers, citizens and public authorities to make the most of new technologies by ensuring that everyone has the necessary **digital skills**, and by funding EU research in health and high performance computing

Objectives of Digital Single Market

- Boosting **e-commerce** in the EU by tackling geoblocking, making cross-border parcel delivery more affordable and efficient
- Modernising the EU **copyright rules** to fit the digital age
- Updating EU **audiovisual rules** and working with platforms to create a fairer environment for everyone, promote European films, protect children and tackle hate speech
- Scaling up Europe's **response to cyber-attacks** by strengthening ENISA, the EU cybersecurity agency, and creating an effective EU cyber deterrence and criminal law response to better protect Europe's citizens, businesses and public institutions
- Unlock the potential of a European **data economy** with a framework for the free flow of non-personal data in the EU
- Ensuring everyone in the EU has the best possible internet connection, so

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EUROPEAN BANK OF RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT (EBRD)

Context:

- India has got the go-ahead to join the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). Shareholders of EBRD have given their consent in this regard.
- Now, India will become EBRD's 69th member, enabling Indian companies to undertake joint investments in regions in which the EBRD operates.

How will this membership help India?

- Membership of EBRD would enhance India's international profile and promote its economic interests. It will also give access to EBRD's Countries of Operation and sector knowledge.
- India's investment opportunities would get a boost. It would increase the scope of cooperation between India and EBRD through co-financing opportunities in manufacturing, services, Information Technology, and Energy.
- EBRD's core operations pertain to private sector development in their countries of operation. The membership would help India leverage the technical assistance and sectoral knowledge of the bank for the benefit of development of private sector.
- This would contribute to an improved investment climate in the country. The membership of EBRD would enhance the competitive strength of the Indian firms, and provide an enhanced access to international markets in terms of business opportunities, procurement activities, consultancy assignments etc.
- This would open up new vistas for Indian professionals on the one hand,

and give a fillip to Indian exports on the other. Increased economic activities would have the employment generating potential. It would also enable Indian nationals to get the employment opportunity in the Bank.

About EBRD:

What is the EBRD?

- The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is an international financial institution that supports projects in over 30 countries, from eastern Europe to central Asia and the southern and eastern Mediterranean. Investing primarily in private sector clients whose needs cannot be fully met by the market, the EBRD promotes entrepreneurship and fosters transition towards open and democratic market economies.

What is the EBRD's mandate?

- The mandate of the EBRD stipulates that it must only work in countries that are committed to democratic principles. Respect for the environment is part of the strong corporate governance attached to all EBRD investments.

What support does the EBRD provide in the countries where it works?

- The EBRD provides project financing for banks, industries and businesses, both new ventures and investments in existing companies. It also works with publicly owned companies, to support privatisation, restructuring state-owned firms and improving municipal services. It uses close

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relationship with governments in the region to promote policies that will bolster the business environment.

Who owns the EBRD?

- The EBRD is owned by 65 countries and two intergovernmental institutions: the European Union and the European Investment Bank (EIB).

How is the EBRD governed?

- The powers of the EBRD are vested in the Board of Governors to which each member appoints a governor, generally the minister of finance.
- The Board of Governors delegates most powers to the Board of Directors, which is responsible for the EBRD's strategic direction.
- The President is elected by the Board of Governors and is the legal representative of the EBRD. Under the guidance of the Board of Directors, the President manages the EBRD's work.

DISPUTE SETTLEMENT BODY (DSB)

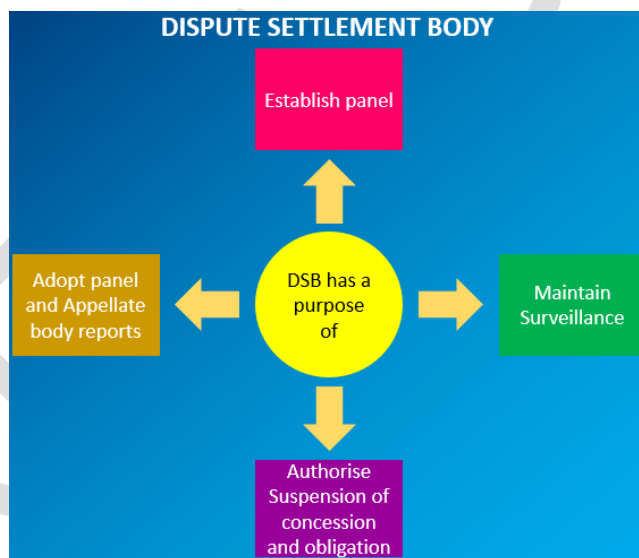
Context:

- The World Trade Organisation's Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) has agreed to India's request for setting up a panel to determine whether the country complied with a previous ruling striking down its domestic content requirements for solar cells and modules.

dispute settlement panels, refer matters to arbitration, adopt panel, Appellate Body and arbitration reports, maintain surveillance over the implementation of recommendations and rulings contained in such reports, and authorize suspension of concessions in the event of non-compliance with those recommendations and rulings.

What's the issue?

- In 2016, New Delhi had lost a case against the US at the WTO after the global trade body stated that power purchase agreements signed by the Indian government with solar firms for its National Solar Mission did not meet international trade norms.
 - The US, which is of the opinion that New Delhi continues to apply the “WTO-inconsistent measures”, had in December last year approached the Geneva-based multi-lateral organisation demanding action against India for non-compliance of the WTO ruling.
 - India, however, has been maintaining that it has complied with the WTO's ruling. India had requested the WTO to set up a panel to determine its compliance with the rulings of the dispute.



Dispute Settlement Body:

- The General Council convenes as the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) to deal with disputes between WTO members. Such disputes may arise with respect to any agreement contained in the Final Act of the Uruguay Round that is subject to the Understanding on Rules and Procedures Governing the Settlement of Disputes (DSU).
- The DSB has authority to establish

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GLOBAL AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY PROGRAM (GAFSP)

Context:

- The Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) is a multilateral mechanism to assist in the implementation of pledges made by the G20 in Pittsburgh in September 2009.

Objective:

- The objective is to **improve incomes and food and nutrition security in low-income countries** by boosting agricultural productivity.

Importance of GAFSP:

- Approximately 75% of the poor live in rural areas and most depend on agriculture for their livelihoods.
- Agriculture growth is two to four times more effective at reducing poverty than growth in any other sector.
- Following aid-effectiveness principles, GAFSP addresses the underfunding of country and regional agriculture and food security strategic investment plans that are already being developed by countries in consultation with donors and other stakeholders at the country-level.

Partners of GAFSP:

GAFSP works in partnership with

- African Development Bank (AfDB)
- Asian Development Bank (ADB)
- **Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)**
- Inter-American Development Bank
- International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)
- **World Bank (WB)**
- World Food Programme (WFP)

GLOBAL STATUS REPORT 2017

Context:

- The ‘Global Status Report 2017: Towards a zero-emission, efficient, and resilient buildings and construction sector,’ published by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), has listed the Energy Management Centre (EMC), an autonomous institution under the Kerala government campus, as one of the recent achievements in the deployment of key technologies for energy-efficiency in buildings.

Higashi-Matsushima Smart ecotown in northern Japan.

Unique features of EMC campus:

- The EMC campus uses daylighting controls, CFC-free heating, ventilation and cooling systems, along with a halogen-free fire-fighting system. Solar reflectance index coating, combined with high-albedo painting and turbo-vents for passive cooling, has been used, and tropical rainforest trees help create cool surroundings.
- Only certified green construction materials, recycled wood boards, low-emitting paints and adhesives, and green-plus certified carpets have been used.
- Built with assistance from the Global Environment Fund, the EMC campus is the only **LEED Gold certified building** in the government sector in Kerala.

Facts for Prelims:

- EMC is the only one from India to figure in the list, along with five other projects worldwide.
- The other five projects recognised by the UNEP include the Sierra Crest development in Fontana, California, the Association of Nubian Vaults in Sub-Saharan Africa, a construction and demolition waste recycling project in Paris, the Palm Tree eco-development project in Hanoi, Vietnam, and the

CP TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP

Context:

- On March 8th trade ministers from 11 countries gathered in Santiago, the capital of Chile, to sign the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, or CPTPP.

the suspended clauses are related to intellectual property (IP) originally inserted at the demand of US negotiators.

- The other nine involve areas like investment, financial services, copyright, telecommunication and government procurement.



What is CPTPP?

- The CPTPP, also dubbed the TPP-11, was negotiated by Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam.
- The revived deal will look to reduce tariffs in economies that together represent 500 million people and account for 13.5 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP) – equivalent to a total of US\$10 trillion.

How is it different from TPP?

- With the exclusion of the US, the CPTPP is putting on hold 20 provisions even as it incorporates the original TPP text by reference. Out of which, 11 of

What next?

- Individual member countries will now begin their respective domestic ratification processes and the CPTPP will enter into force after at least 50% of the signatories complete that. *How does the CPTPP compare with RCEP?*
- The 16-nation Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) covers nearly 3.5 billion people and account for a third of the world's gross domestic product.
- The RCEP was conceived in 2012. If approved, the free trade agreement will be the largest trade bloc in terms of population. The RCEP countries make up 46% of the global population and are worth 24% of global GDP.

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

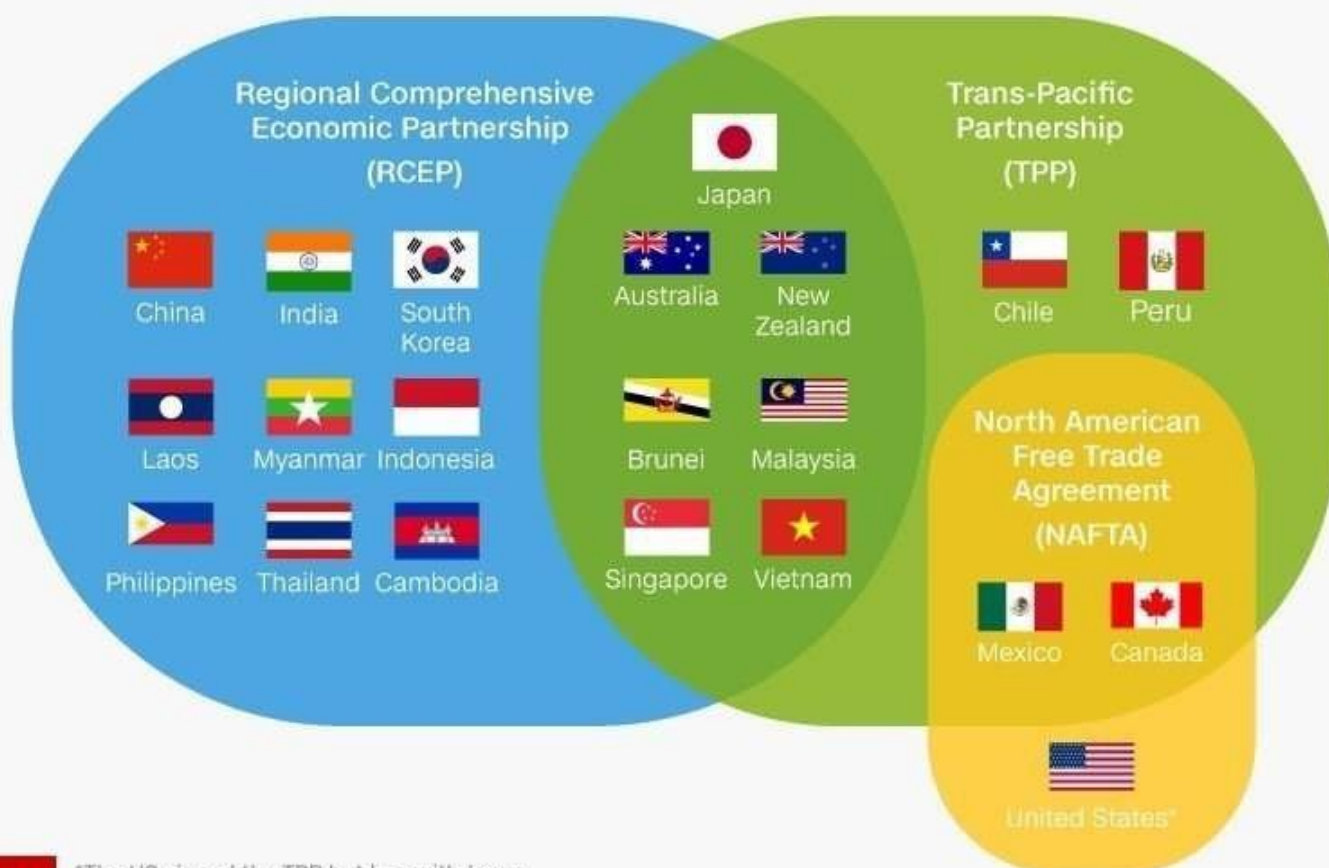
- RCEP seeks to bring into its fold China, Japan, India, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand and Asean countries. Seven of them are also CPTPP members, namely Australia, Brunei, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, New Zealand and Vietnam.

powers, such as the US, are reverting to protectionist trade policies. The head of policy at the Export Council of Australia, Heath Baker, said its symbolism was significant. It shows that despite the protectionism coming out of the US, there is still momentum to increasing shared prosperity through freer trade.

Significance of the deal:

- Even without the US, it's a hugely significant deal and could become a blueprint for future regional free trade agreements. Other nations have the chance to enter at a later time, if they so wish, and there have been suggestions Indonesia and even the United Kingdom may have some interest.
- The TPP also comes at a time when major

Who's involved?



*The US signed the TPP but has withdrawn.
Source: CNN Research

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H-4 VISAS

Context:

- The Trump administration has delayed its decision on terminating the work authorisation of H-4 visa users, spouses of H-1B visa holders, till June as it needs time to review the economic impact of such a decision.
- The extension of decision-making process by four months comes as a temporary relief to the spouses of H-1B visas holders, a significantly large number of whom are Indian workers.

United States and may even enjoy discounted tuition.

Who Qualifies for an H-4 Visa?

- The only people who qualify are dependents.
- In the United States, those people are spouses and unmarried children under the age of 21.

How Long Does an H-4 Visa Last?

No official termination date exists for an H-4 visa. Instead, the holder of the primary visa, the H-1B, will determine length of stay.

When that visa expires, both the H-1B and H-4 holders are no longer eligible for American residency.

What's the issue?

- Since 2015, the spouses of H-1B visa holders waiting for green cards have been eligible to work in the U.S. on H-4 dependent visas, under a rule introduced by the previous Barack Obama administration.
- However, in January 2018, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) reevaluated the rule and determined that significant revisions to the draft proposal were necessary.

What Is an H-4 Visa?

- H-4 visa holders are immediate family members of H-1B visa holders. Most H-4 visa holders are spouses who want to join their partner in a new country.
- They enjoy many of the benefits of living in the United States, but some limitations exist. That's why an H-1B visa is better.

What Are the Rights of an H-4 Visa Holder?

- They can live in the United States on a continuous basis. They can also travel to and from the country as needed.
- H-4 visa holders can either join their spouse immediately or choose to move to America at a later date. They also have the right to attend college in the

INDIA DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

Context:

- The Union Cabinet has given its approval for closure of India Development Foundation of Overseas Indians (IDF-OI) to enhance synergies in channelizing Diaspora's contributions to Government of India's various flagship programmes.

What necessitated this move?

- As the Foundation received only Rs. 36.80 Lakhs between December 2008 and March 2015 as donation from overseas Indian community, a comprehensive review of IDF-OI was undertaken in 2015.
- Although, between April 2015 and March 2018, the Trust received Rs.10.16 crore, most of the contribution received were for either projects related to National Mission for Clean Ganga or Swachh Bharat Mission, which are separately administered by their respective Administrative Agencies.
- Therefore, in order to enhance synergies, improve efficiencies and avoid duplication of work, it was decided that the Trust would be closed.

About IDF- OI:

- IDF-OI was set up by Government of India with the approval of Cabinet in 2008 as ***an autonomous not- for-profit Trust***, to facilitate Overseas Indian philanthropy into social and development projects in India.
- Later, promotion of Government of India's Flagship programmes – National Mission for Clean Ganga and Swachh Bharat Mission; and Social and Development projects identified by State Governments – was added to the mandate of IDF-OI.
- IDF-OI receives a Grant-in-Aid from the Government of India for meeting its operational expenses and administrative costs for its activities and outreach. Therefore, ***IDF-OI does not deduct any operational or administrative charges*** from the contributions it receives from Overseas Indians.
- ***The Trust is exempt from provisions of the Foreign Contributions Regulation Act (FCRA), 2010*** of the Ministry of Home Affairs which enables IDF-OI to receive foreign contributions.
- ***Chairperson:*** IDF-OI is chaired by External Affairs Minister.

AVOIDANCE OF DOUBLE TAXATION

Context:

- The Union Cabinet has approved an Agreement for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal Evasion with respect to taxes on income between **India** and **Iran**.

Benefits of the agreement:

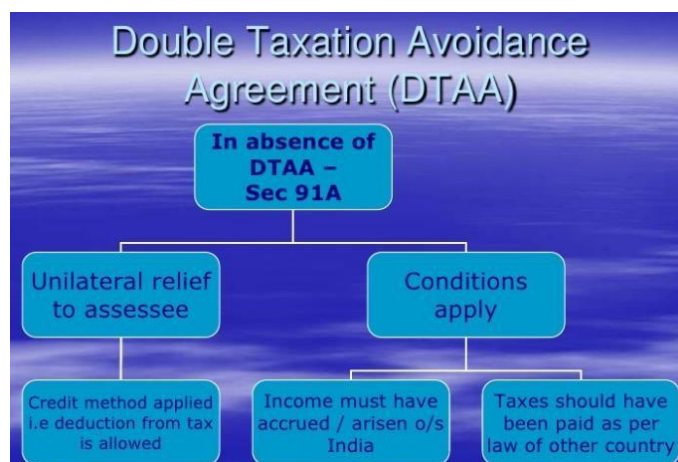
- The Agreement will stimulate flow of investment, technology and personnel from India to Iran & vice versa, and will prevent double taxation.
- The Agreement will provide for exchange of information between the two Contracting Parties as per latest international standards. It will thus improve transparency in tax matters and will help curb tax evasion and tax avoidance.

Why is it important?

- DTAAs are intended to make a country an attractive investment destination by providing relief on dual taxation. Such relief is provided by exempting income earned abroad from tax in the resident country or providing credit to the extent taxes have already been paid abroad.
- DTAAs also provide for concessional rates of tax in some cases.

Legal provisions in this regard:

- In so far as India is concerned, the Central Government is authorized under Section 90 of the Income Tax Act, 1961 to enter into an Agreement with a foreign country or specified territory for avoidance of double taxation of income, for exchange of information for the prevention of evasion or avoidance of income-tax chargeable under the Income-tax Act, 1961.



- The proposed Agreement also meets treaty related minimum standards under **G-20 OECD** Base Erosion & Profit Shifting (BEPS) Project, in which **India** participated on an equal footing.

BEPS: BEPS refers to tax avoidance strategies that exploit gaps and mismatches in tax rules to artificially shift profits to low or no-tax locations.

What is DTAA?

- A DTAA is a tax treaty signed between two or more countries. Its key objective is that tax-payers in these countries can avoid being taxed twice for the same income.
- A DTAA applies in cases where a tax-payer resides in one country and earns income in another.
- India has DTAAs with more than eighty countries, of which comprehensive agreements include those with Australia, Canada, Germany, Mauritius, Singapore, UAE, the UK and US.

INDO-FRENCH KNOWLEDGE SUMMIT

Context:

- The first ever Indo-French Knowledge Summit was held recently at New Delhi. The summit coincided with the state visit of French President Emmanuel Macron to India.

Outcomes of the summit:

- The summit ended with a landmark agreement on mutual recognition of educational qualifications between the two countries and a record 15 other MoUs between universities and research institutions on joint initiatives and partnerships.

Significance of mutual recognition of educational qualifications:

- Agreement on mutual recognition of academic qualifications will go a long way in boosting the educational relationship between the two countries and will encourage mobility of students from both the countries by facilitating possibilities for them to continue their studies in the other country and would also promote excellence in higher education through cooperation, university and research exchanges.

Franco-Indian Education Trust:

- A Franco-Indian Education Trust was also unveiled at the closing session of the summit. It will be **funded by the Indian industry and French Companies in India** to offer educational scholarships and merit based financial support to Indian students.

About the summit:

- **The Knowledge Summit is the First Franco-Indian Summit for university, scientific and technology cooperation** with the broader objective to design a roadmap of Franco-India

cooperation for the next five years, in collaboration with companies.

- o The objective of the Knowledge Summit is to design a roadmap of Franco-Indian cooperation for the next five years, in collaboration with companies.
- o This event offers a common moment for a common goal; increase student mobility, enlarge Research & Development collaborations and link campuses to companies by focusing on employability.
- o The summit was organized by the French Embassy in India and co-hosted by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.
- o More than 350 people from nearly 80 Indian Institutions and 70 French Institutions along with key enterprises participated in the Summit.

MAHANADI WATER DISPUTES TRIBUNAL

Context:

- The Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation has issued a notification constituting the Mahanadi Water Disputes Tribunal. The Tribunal will have its headquarters at Delhi.

The Tribunal will comprise of:

- Justice A.M. Khanwilkar, Supreme Court Judge (Chairman).
- Justice Ravi Ranjan, Patna High Court Judge.
- Justice Indermeet Kaur Kochhar, Delhi High Court Judge.

Background:

- **The Tribunal has been constituted following orders of the Supreme Court.** The Government of Odisha had sought to refer the water dispute regarding the inter-state river Mahanadi and its river valley to a Tribunal for adjudication under the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956.

Legal provisions in this regard:

- The tribunal will be formed according to the provisions of the *Inter-State River Water Disputes (ISRWD), 1956*.
- *It will have a chairperson and two other members nominated by the Chief Justice of India from among the judges of the apex court or high courts.*
- As per provisions of the ISRWD Act, 1956 the Tribunal is required to submit its report and decision within a period of 3 years which can be extended to a further period not exceeding 2 years due to unavoidable reasons.

What's the dispute?

- Odisha and Chhattisgarh are locked in a dispute over the Mahanadi waters since the mid-80s. Odisha claimed that Chhattisgarh government has been constructing dams in the upper reaches of the Mahanadi, depriving its farmers who are heavily dependent on the rivers

waters.

- Chhattisgarh has been against the setting up of a tribunal, and argued that the water sharing agreement was with the erstwhile Madhya Pradesh government, before the state was carved out in 2000.

What else is needed?

- To chalk out the future course of action in view of the disputes regarding the use of Mahanadi river water, a well-rounded strategy that includes both the people and policymakers is needed.
- The strategy must allow for dialogue by rebuilding trust and should look at arbitration and negotiation as methods of conflict resolution.
- It is necessary to evolve a strategy that optimises the rational usage of Mahanadi water to benefit people from both Chhattisgarh and Odisha, coupled with the implementation of a multi-stakeholder forum that finds peaceful solutions and minimises areas of contention in a negotiable and consensual manner.

KARNATAKA GOVT. UNVEILS STATE FLAG

Context:

- Karnataka government has unveiled the State flag for Karnataka. If approved by the Centre, Karnataka will be the second State to have a flag after Jammu and Kashmir.
- The proposal will be now sent to the Union Home Ministry for approval since a State has no powers to announce its own flag.



The flag:

- The red-white-yellow flag has the State emblem at the centre. The State flag will fly below the national flag as prescribed.
- In the tri-colour State flag, white symbolises peace with State emblem. While yellow symbolises the auspiciousness and well-being of Kannadigas, the red colour symbolises courage.

Are states permitted to have their own flags?

- In *S.R. Bommai v/s Union of India* (Supreme Court 1994) case, the Supreme Court has declared that federalism is a basic feature of the Constitution and States are supreme in their sphere.
- This being the Constitutional position, there is no prohibition in the Constitution for the State to have its own flag. However, the manner in which the State flag is hoisted should not dishonour the national flag.
- It has to be always below the national flag. The national flag code specifically authorises use of other flags subject to the regulation by the court. So, State flag is not unauthorised.

NO CONFIDENCE MOTION

Context:

- The YSR Congress has proposed a no-confidence motion against the NDA government on the issue of granting special category status to Andhra Pradesh.
- The motion will be the first such move during the tenure of this NDA government.

What is a no-confidence motion?

- A no-confidence motion is a parliamentary motion which is moved in the Lok Sabha against the entire council of ministers, stating that they are no longer deemed fit to hold positions of responsibility due to their inadequacy in some respect or their failure to carry out their obligations.
- No prior reason needs to be stated for its adoption in the Lok Sabha.

How it works?

- At least 50 MPs would need to stand up and support the move. If there are 50 MPs in favour, the motion is admitted and the speaker allots a date for discussion on the motion.
- The prime minister or ministers reply to the charges made.
- The mover has the right to reply. After the debate, the speaker puts question to the house and ascertains the decision of the house by voice vote or a division.

Grounds:

A Motion of No-confidence need not set out any grounds on which it is based. Even when grounds are mentioned in the notice and read out in the House, they do not form part of the no-confidence Motion.

- The government is expected to **resign** if it loses a trust vote. In case its refuses to do so, the President has the power to remove the prime minister. In the

history of Indian Parliament, no Prime Minister has been forcibly removed so far. After a government loses a trust vote and resigns, it continues to function, but as a caretaker government with almost the same powers as it had before the voting.

- However, a caretaker government wouldn't have the power to take any major policy decisions since Parliament remains dissolved. A new government gets elected after the general elections.

RAJYA SABHA ELECTIONS

Context: Elections for 25 Rajya Sabha seats were held recently.

What is the strength of the House?

- The Strength of Rajya Sabha is maximum 250 out of which 238 are state and UT representative and 12 are nominated by the President.
- At Present, Rajya Sabha has 245 member out of which 229 are representative and rest nominated

What is the qualification of an RS member?

- He must be a citizen of India and must not be less than 30 years of age. He must possess qualifications as may be prescribed under any law made by Parliament.

Who can vote to elect Rajya Sabha member?

- Elected representatives of state legislatures vote in elections to the Upper House.

Rajya Sabha election process:

- Members of state assemblies elect Rajya Sabha members by a process of indirect voting in what is called proportional representation with a single transferable vote. Each voter ranks his preference, and if the first candidate on the list has enough votes to win or no chance of winning, the vote is transferred to the next choice and so on.

Tenure of Rajya Sabha members:

Rajya Sabha members are elected for a six-year term. One-third of the members of the Upper House of parliament retire after every two years.

OFFICE-OF-PROFIT

Context:

- The Delhi High Court has quashed a notification issued by President Ram Nath Kovind disqualifying 20 AAP MLAs for holding offices of profit as Parliamentary Secretaries.
- The court has reinstated all 20 MLAs, holding that the opinion of the Election Commission of India to the President to disqualify the legislators was “vitiated and bad in law for failure to comply with the principles of natural justice”.

Why was the notification quashed by the court?

- The High Court noted that the Election Commission failed to give oral hearing and opportunity to address arguments on merits to the AAP MLAs before arriving at its opinion that they held ‘office of profit’.

What next?

- The court has asked the Election Commission to first decide the “all important and seminal issue; what is meant by the expression ‘office of profit held under the government’.”
- Then, “re-examine the factual matrix to decide whether the petitioners (MLAs) had incurred disqualification on appointment as Parliamentary Secretaries, without being influenced by the earlier order or observations on the said aspect in this order”.

What’s the issue?

- The Delhi government, led by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, appointed the parliamentary secretaries attached to government ministries after coming to power in March 2015.
- The Election Commission had recommended that 20 MLAs of the Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi be disqualified as they held offices of profit while being legislators.

What is the underlying principle for including ‘office of profit’ as criterion for disqualification?

- Makers of the Constitution wanted that legislators should not feel obligated to the Executive in any way, which could influence them while discharging legislative functions.
- In other words, an MP or MLA should be free to carry out her duties without any kind of governmental pressure.

What is an ‘office of profit’?

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

SPECIAL STATUS TO ANDHRA PRADESH

Context:

- Andhra Pradesh government has asked the Centre to expedite resolution of all provisions in the AP Reorganisation Act, 2014, including according special category status to the state.

Background:

- Andhra Pradesh has been demanding a Special Category State (SCS) status from Centre ever since it was decided to carve out Telangana along with capital city Hyderabad.
- Following the bifurcation of A.P., Andhra lost a large volume of its revenue due to Hyderabad remaining the capital of Telangana.

What is SCS?

- The Constitution does not include any provision for categorisation of any State in India as a Special Category Status (SCS) State.
- But, recognising that some regions in the country were historically disadvantaged in contrast to others, Central plan assistance to SCS States has been granted in the past by the erstwhile Planning Commission body, National Development Council (NDC).
- The NDC granted this status based on a number of features of the States which included: hilly and difficult terrain, low population density or the presence of sizeable tribal population, strategic location along international borders, economic and infrastructural backwardness and non-viable nature of State finances.

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.

COOPERATIVE ELECTION AUTHORITY

Context:

- The Haryana government has announced that a Cooperative Election Authority would be set up in the State for supervising the election process in cooperative bodies.

Constitution 97th Amendment Act:

- The Constitution (Ninety Seventh Amendment) Act 2011 relating to the co-operatives is aimed to encourage economic activities of cooperatives which in turn help progress of rural India. It is expected to not only ensure autonomous and democratic functioning of cooperatives, but also the accountability of the management to the members and other stakeholders. As per the amendment the changes done to constitution are:
- In Part III of the constitution, after words “or unions” the words “Cooperative Societies” was added.
- In Part IV a new Article 43B was inserted, which says: The state shall endeavour to promote voluntary formation, autonomous functioning, democratic control and professional management of the co-operative societies”.
- After Part IXA of the constitution, a Part IXB was inserted to accommodate state vs centre roles.

INCOME TAX APPELLATE TRIBUNAL

Context:

- A recent decision of the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal's Pune bench allowing pharmaceutical companies to account for their spending on doctors as a deductible expenditure has sparked off a fresh debate on ethics.

What's the concern now?

- Since the companies are out of the purview of the Medical Council of India (MCI), money spent on promotions, which in some cases could be gifts, travel, hospitality and so on for doctors, besides medical conferences and samples, can be claimed as deductible expenditure.
- Doctors accepting such promotions may be violating the code of ethics of the MCI.

How can ITAT's performance be enhanced?

- Commonly suggested remedies include increasing the number of judges or the number of benches to deal with increased caseload.
- Additionally, solutions to delays in ITAT lie in prioritizing and scheduling the workload properly. Although ITAT is a specialized court, there are variations in the complexity and urgency of the cases that come before it. Therefore, it may be useful to frame rules on how different types of cases would be prioritized.
- Qualitative aspects of rulings, factors influencing them and most frequently litigated subject-matters will also be useful in deciding the policy strategy for improving India's tax environment.

- Also, more studies should be conducted to identify the exact institutional weaknesses in tax administration, improving which could help improve India's abysmally low ranking on the "Paying Taxes" parameter in the Ease of Doing Business Index, and ensuring that citizens have access to an independent and impartial appeals mechanism.

About ITAI:

- ITAT is a quasi judicial institution set up in January, 1941 and specializes in dealing with appeals under the Direct Taxes Acts.
 - It was set up by virtue of section 5A of the Income Tax Act, 1922.
 - The orders passed by the ITAT are final, an appeal lies to the High Court only if a substantial question of law arises for determination.

It functions under the Department of Legal Affairs in the Ministry of Law and Justice.

Way ahead:

- Indian tax administration and adjudication needs urgent reforms. For this, a comprehensive performance analysis of ITAI is necessary.

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NATIONAL FINANCIAL REPORTING AUTHORITY

Context:

- The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal for establishment of National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA). The decision aims at establishment of NFRA as an independent regulator for the auditing profession which is one of the key changes brought in by the Companies Act, 2013.

quality of audits to strengthen the independence of audit firms, quality of audits and, therefore, enhance investor and public confidence in financial disclosures of companies.

Impact:

The decision is expected to result in improved foreign/domestic investments, enhancement of economic growth, supporting the globalisation of business by meeting international practices, and assist in further development of audit profession.

About NFRA:

- What is it?**
- Reporting Authority (NFRA) is a body proposed in Companies Act 2013 for the establishment and enforcement of accounting and auditing standards and oversight of the work of auditors.
- Functions:** It would be an overarching watchdog for auditing profession and once set up, the current powers of the ICAI to act against erring chartered accountants will be vested with the new regulator. The NFRA will have powers to debar an erring auditor or auditing firm for up to ten years besides slapping heavy penalties.
- Jurisdiction:** The jurisdiction of the NFRA will extend to all listed companies as well as large unlisted public companies. Besides, the government can refer other entities for investigation by the NFRA where public interest would be involved.
- Composition:** The regulator will have 15 members, including a chairperson and three full-time members. Besides, there would be a secretary.

What necessitated this move?

- The need for establishing NFRA has arisen on account of the need felt across various jurisdictions in the world, in the wake of accounting scams, to establish independent regulators, independent from those it regulates, for enforcement of auditing standards and ensuring the

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NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY AUTHORITY

The government of India has only approved the import of 92 species of ornamental fish but the number of ornamental fish species being imported and in trade is somewhere between 200-300. The huge market for Invasive Alien Species (IAS) is turning out to be major threat to India's aquatic biodiversity. Several studies have disclosed the occurrence of exotic ornamental fish in many inland aquatic systems, including biodiversity-sensitive areas such as the Western Ghats.

Facts for Prelims:

- CEBPOL is a bilateral collaboration between the Indian and Norwegian governments, and focuses on biodiversity policies and laws.

Way ahead:

- While the number of publications on IAS has increased over the past few years, there has been no coordinated effort for the management of IAS.
- Statisticians and biologists need to come together for distribution mapping and the application of statistical approaches in the management of IAS.
- Besides legislative measures, there is the need for educating and creating awareness among Customs officials at airports and seaports. Most of the fish are imported from Southeast Asian countries.

About NBA:

- The National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) was established by the Central Government in 2003 to implement India's Biological Diversity Act (2002).
- The NBA is a Statutory Body and it performs facilitative, regulatory and advisory functions for the Government of India on issues of conservation, sustainable use of biological resources and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the use of biological resources.

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GM SOYBEAN

Context:

- The Union environment ministry has asked the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) to stop imports of genetically modified (GM) soybean for food or feed without the approval of the regulator for transgenic products.
- GEAC, which is the regulatory body for Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) and products thereof, has not authorized or approved GM soybean or any other products derived from GM soybean seeds for import or cultivation in India.

GM foods in India:

- The issue of GM foods has been controversial in India, with cotton being the only transgenic crop which is allowed to be cultivated.
- The environment ministry is yet to take a final call on allowing the commercial cultivation of GM mustard.

GM Soybean:

- GM soybean is one of the most widely planted genetically modified plants in the world today. The GM soybean, otherwise called as the Roundup Ready (RR) soybean, was developed by the biotech giant Monsanto and made it commercially available to farmers in 1996. It was developed to make the plant survive being sprayed on with the non-selective herbicide, Roundup, which can kill conventional soybean plants.

GM Soybean was developed by introducing a copy of a gene from the Agrobacterium sp. strain CP4. Conventional soybean has a similar gene in its DNA but is sensitive to glyphosate, the active ingredient of the herbicide Roundup. With the insertion of the CP4 version of the gene, the GM soybean was able to develop resistance to the Roundup herbicide.

INDIAN RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (IREDA)

Context:

- European Investment Bank (EIB) and Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency (IREDA) Ltd. have signed a loan agreement for a second line of credit (LoC) of Euro 150 million on non-sovereign basis.
- The line of credit is for tenure of 15 years including a grace period of 3 years, and it will be used for financing Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency projects in India. More than 1.1 million households are expected to benefit from clean energy produced with these funds.

Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency Ltd:

- Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency Limited (IREDA) is a **Mini Ratna** (Category – I) Government of India Enterprise under the **administrative control of Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE)**. IREDA is a Public Limited Government Company established as a **Non-Banking Financial Institution** in 1987 engaged in promoting, developing and extending financial assistance for setting up projects relating to new and renewable sources of energy and energy efficiency/conservation with the motto: **“ENERGY FOR EVER”**.

The main objectives of IREDA are:

- To give financial support to specific projects and schemes for generating electricity and / or energy through new and renewable sources and conserving energy through energy efficiency.
- To maintain its position as a leading organization to provide efficient and effective financing in renewable energy and energy efficiency / conservation projects.
- To increase IREDA's share in the

renewable energy sector by way of innovative financing.

- Improvement in the efficiency of services provided to customers through continual improvement of systems, processes and resources. To strive to be competitive institution through customer satisfaction.

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NATIONAL CRIME RECORDS BUREAU (NCRB)

Context: National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) celebrated its 33rd Inception Day, on March 11, 2018.

About NCRB:

- NCRB is the *Nodal Agency for authentic source of Data on crime, accidents, suicides, and prisons for policy matters and research*. It was set-up in 1986 to function as a repository of information on crime and criminals so as to assist the investigators in linking crime to the perpetrators.
- It was set up based on *the recommendations of the National Police Commission (1977-1981) and the MHA's Task force (1985)*.
- It was set up by *merging the Directorate of Coordination and Police Computer (DCPC), Inter State Criminals Data Branch of CBI, Central Finger Print Bureau of CBI, and Statistical Branch of BPR&D*.

Important functions:

- Bureau is implementing & monitoring agency for implementation of Crime & Criminal Tracking Network System (CCTNS), a Mission Mode Project under the National e-Governance Plan of Government of India. The project aims at creating a comprehensive and integrated system for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of policing in the country.
- NCRB also imparts training in Information Technology (IT) and Finger Print Science for Indian Police Officers as well Foreign Police officers.
- Central finger print bureau is under the administrative control of NCRB.

Important publications:

- NCRB publishes 4 annual publications on Crime, Accidental Deaths & Suicides, Prison Statistics and Finger

Prints.

- These publications serve as principal reference points on crime statistics not only police officers but also for criminologists, researchers, media and policy makers not only in India but abroad well.

CENTRAL COUNCIL FOR RESEARCH IN AYURVEDIC SCIENCES (CCRAS)

AYUSH -56 AN AYURVEDIC ANTI-EPILEPTIC DRUG		AYUSH-82 FOR DIABETES MELLITUS	
DRUG	: AYUSH -56 [Nardostachys jatamansi & Marsellaminuta] (N=273)	DRUG	: AYUSH-82 [Mangifera indica, Syzygium cumini, Gymnema sylvestris, Momordia charantia]
Adult 2 tablets of 50mg. TDS for 6 months Children – 1 tablet TDS (<11 years)		FINDINGS	: Fall in FBS, PPBS after treatment was significant (0.001) besides 75% good response on subjective assessment.
FINDINGS	: SIGNIFICANT DECREASE IN FREQUENCY OF ATTACKS & DURATION OF SEIZURE. • Post seizure symptoms like headache, confusion, excitement, sleeplessness, excessive sleep, anorexia, lethargy, amnesia, irritability and mood changes etc. also decreased considerably in epileptics after treatment with Ayush -56. • No Drug interaction or toxic effects were observed even after prolonged used up to 10 years.		(open study)
Ref: CCRAS Research An Over View, Central Council for Research in Ayurveda and Siddha, Janakpuri, New Delhi-2002		Ref: CCRAS Research An Over View, Central Council for Research in Ayurveda and Siddha, Janakpuri, New Delhi-2002	

Context: CCRAS has developed and commercialized the following two drugs:

1. AYUSH 82 An Anti Diabetic Ayurvedic Formulation.
2. AYUSH SG An Anti-Rheumatoid Arthritis preparation.

Background:

- CCRAS is actively involved in scientific process of drug development adopting prevalent guidelines such as Good Clinical Practices Guidelines for ASU drugs (GCP-ASU), Ministry of AYUSH and National ethical guidelines for Bio-Medical Research (ICMR), WHO guidelines for traditional medicines etc. as per requirement and as feasible through its peripheral institutes.

About CCRAS:

- The Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (CCRAS) is an **autonomous body of the Ministry of AYUSH** (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy), Government of India.
 - It is an apex body in India for the formulation, coordination, development and promotion of research on scientific lines in Ayurveda and Sowa-Rigpa system of medicine.
 - Research activities of the Council include Medicinal Plant Research

(Medico-Ethno Botanical Survey, Pharmacognosy and Tissue Culture), Drug Standardization, Pharmacological Research, Clinical Research, Literary Research & Documentation and Tribal Health Care Research Programme.

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NATIONAL BUILDING CONSTRUCTION CORPORATION (NBCC)

Context:

- The government is considering handing the task of maintaining, managing and earning revenue from immovable properties attached in money laundering cases to the National Building Construction Corporation (NBCC).
- **What's the proposal?** The proposal is to manage the seized land, which can often measure several thousand acres, as well as numerous factories, flats, buildings and shops taken over by the ED.

nomination basis.

NBCC is also designated as the implementing agency for executing projects under Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojna (PMGSY), Solid Waste Management (SWM) and developmental work in North Eastern Region.

What necessitated this move?

- The proposal to mandate NBCC to do the job was at the behest of the ED and mooted by the finance ministry about six months ago. It was felt that lack of proper maintenance led to decay of the properties and the agency had to continuously spend on their upkeep.
- As of now, the ED manages the properties confiscated by it but does not have experience in how to do so and there is no provision under PMLA for rental to earn revenue.

About NBCC:

- NBCC (India) Limited, formerly known as National Buildings Construction Corporation Ltd., is a **blue-chip Government of India Navratna Enterprise under the Ministry of Urban Development**.
- It engages in the Real Estate Development & Construction business and also provides Project Management Consultancy. It is the sole land authorised agency for central undertakings.
- The Company has been notified as a **Public Works Organization (PWO)** explicitly, a construction agency, as per which Government Department(s)/ PSUs and Autonomous Bodies can award the works to NBCC on

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“E-TRIBES INDIA”

Context:

- The government has launched “E-Tribes”, TRIFED’s websites. It includes www.tribesindia.com, www.trifed.in and Retail Inventory Software and M-commerce app.

Significance of this move:

- Going Digital will lead to expansion of tribal commerce and the availability of tribal products over large area, reaping greater benefits for tribal artisans. Retail Trade of tribal products would expand all over the country and the world.

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 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.

SOCIAL SECURITY SCHEME

Context:

- The labour ministry has proposed a comprehensive social security system to provide retirement, health, oldage, disability, unemployment and maternity benefits to 50 crore workers in the country.

Implementation of the scheme:

- The scheme will be implemented in three phases over 10 years, after which the government hopes to make it universal. The scheme will be implemented in four tiers with the government wholly financing the cost for people below the poverty line.
- The first phase of the scheme will cost Rs 18,500 crore. The first phase will see all workers getting the bare minimum, which includes health security and retirement benefits. The second phase will see unemployment benefits being added to it while in the third phase, other welfare measures can be added.

Funding:

- The scheme will be largely funded from the Building and Construction Worker Cess and funds allocated to other scattered schemes through the National Stabilisation Fund set up for the purpose.
- Its implementation would be regulated and monitored by an overarching regulatory body called the National Social Security Council to be chaired by the prime minister with finance minister, health minister and chief ministers of all states along with workers and employers as its members.

Classification of workers:

- The 50 crore beneficiaries will be classified into four tiers.
 - The first tier will comprise destitute and people below poverty line who cannot contribute for their security and hence the cost will be entirely

borne by the government under tax-based schemes.

- Workers in the unorganised sector who have some contributory power but are not self-sufficient may be covered under the subsidised schemes in the second tier.
- The third tier of beneficiaries will include those who either by themselves or jointly with their employers can make adequate contribution to the schemes, so as to be self-sufficient.
- The fourth tier will comprise comparatively affluent people who can make their own provisions for meeting the contingencies or risks as they rise.

Need for a social security scheme:

- India's total workforce stands at around 500 million. A little over 10% of this is in the organised sector, where workers enjoy social security of some sort under EPFO and ESIC.
- But a major portion of the total workforce is still in the unorganised sector, where workers do not often get even the minimum wage and lack any kind of social security cover.

BETI BACHAO BETI PADHAO

Context:

- The government has expanded the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao programme from 161 districts to all the 640 districts in India.

Background:

- Initial focus of BBBP had been on the districts which were either below national average or were the worse in their own states in terms of absolute values of CSR.
- However, looking at the magnitude and criticality of the problem and its spread across the country, it was felt that no district can be left out of BBBP ambit to make a real dent on overall child sex ratio.

Concerns:

- The low and falling child sex ratio in the country is a matter of policy concern, not only because it violates the human rights of unborn and infant girls but also because it deprives the country of the potential economic and social contribution of these ‘missing women’.
- In addition, there may be longer-run adverse impacts from a marriage market squeeze caused by an excess supply of male relative to female youth. Already, states like Haryana and Punjab, where the sex ratio has been extremely distorted for several decades, have been experiencing bride trafficking.

Way ahead:

- Declining sex ratio is a silent emergency. But the crisis is real, and its persistence has profound and frightening implications for society and the future of humankind.
- Clearly, there is a need to go beyond slogans and institute tangible schemes.
- Enforcement of the law that prohibits determination of the sex of the foetus must go hand in hand with massive social investments to protect both immediate and long-term prospects of

girls — in the form of cash incentives through registration of births, a continuum of health care, early educational opportunities and social protection.

- Half-measures cannot produce a dramatic reversal of the shameful national record.

SCHEME FOR CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

Context:

- The Supreme Court has directed the Centre to frame a model scheme before September 30 to address the issues of education, health, social security and pension for construction workers, saying they build not just infrastructure, but also the nation.

What has the court said?

- Frame a scheme to ensure workers receive proper education, health, social security, old age, disability pension and other benefits necessary to live a dignified life.
- All state governments and union territories should

constitute an expert committee and bring out statutory rules within six months.

Concerns:

- The Centre and states are not addressing the plight of construction workers despite Parliament framing Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act in 1996 for levy and collection of 1% cess on cost of construction.
- Around Rs 37,400 crore have been collected from cess over the years but only about Rs 9,500 crore have been utilised and Rs 28,000 crore remain unutilised.

Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act:

- BOCW Act is a welfare legislation intended and enacted for the benefit of the unorganised sector of building and construction workers.
- It has a strong flavour of social justice and is a serious attempt by Parliament to ensure that building and construction workers are not exploited because of their poverty and their children do not suffer their fate in terms of education, healthy living and whatever it takes to

live a life of dignity.

Way ahead:

- It is quite clear that insofar as the rights of construction workers are concerned, that vulnerable section of the society has been badly let down by the governance structure.
- Unless there is effective and full compliance of the provisions, thousands of beneficiaries will be denied what is constitutionally and statutorily due to them.

TRAFFICKING OF PERSONS BILL, 2018

Context:

- The Union Cabinet has approved the Trafficking of Persons (Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2018 for introduction in the Parliament.

Highlights of the Bill:

- Forms of trafficking:** The Bill identifies various forms of trafficking, including for the purposes of bonded labour and begging. Listing out the ‘aggravated forms of trafficking’, the bill also speaks of offences such as intimidation, inducement, promise of payment of money, deception or coercion. It mentions trafficking after administering any drug or alcohol or for the purpose of marriage or under the pretext of marriage.
- Punishment:** Whoever commits the offence of aggravated form of trafficking of a person shall be punished with rigorous imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than 10 years, but which may extend to life imprisonment and shall be liable to fine that shall not be less than Rs 1 lakh. For repeat offenders, it suggests imprisonment for life “which shall mean imprisonment for the remainder of that person’s natural life”, apart from a fine that will not be less than Rs 2 lakh.
- Anti- trafficking bureau:** The bill proposes the establishment of a national anti-trafficking bureau, which shall be entrusted with the gamut of issues aimed at controlling and tackling the menace under various forms. Functions include coordination, monitoring and surveillance of illegal movement of persons and prevention. The bureau will also be entrusted with increasing cooperation with authorities in foreign countries for boosting operational and long-term intelligence for investigation of trafficking cases, and driving in

mutual legal assistance.

- State level measures:** The bill also aims at having state-level anti-trafficking officers who shall also provide relief and rehabilitation services through district units and other civil-society organisations.
- Relief and rehabilitation:** The bill also spells out measures towards relief and rehabilitation for the victims of trafficking, and seeks the formation of a committee for this purpose. The committee is proposed to be headed by the women & child development secretary and would have members from the ministries of home; external affairs; labour and employment; social justice and empowerment; panchayati raj; and health and family welfare.

Background:

- As per data released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), human trafficking numbers rose by almost 20% in 2016 against the previous year. NCRB said there were 8,132 human trafficking cases last year against 6,877 in 2015, with the highest number of cases reported in West Bengal (44% of cases), followed by Rajasthan (17%). Of the 15,379 victims who were caught in trafficking, 10,150 were female and 5,229 males.
- Currently, there is no single law dealing with human trafficking and the crime is covered under different acts administered by at least half-a-dozen ministries, including WCD, home, labour, health, Indian overseas affairs and external affairs. More often than not, this results in lax enforcement.

Significance of the Bill:

- Trafficking in human beings is the third largest organized crime violating basic human rights. However, there is no specific law so far to deal with this

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crime.

- The new Bill addresses one of the most pervasive yet invisible crimes affecting the most vulnerable persons especially women and children.
- The new law will make India a leader among South Asian countries to combat trafficking. Trafficking is a global concern also affecting a number of South Asian nations.

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RAJASTHAN PASSES BILL TO GIVE DEATH PENALTY FOR CHILD RAPE

Context:

- Rajasthan has passed a Bill providing for death penalty to those convicted of raping girls of 12 years and below.
- The State Assembly passed the Criminal Laws (Rajasthan Amendment) Bill, 2018 seeking to amend the Indian Penal Code with the insertion of new provision by voice vote.

Key facts:

- The Bill is aimed at protecting the girl child by laying down a deterrent punishment, including death sentence, to the offenders.
- The Bill provides for capital punishment or rigorous imprisonment ranging between 14 years and lifelong incarceration.
- It also makes a similar provision for gang-rape of a girl child, while laying down death penalty or imprisonment from 20 years to lifelong incarceration for those convicted of the offence. Each of the persons constituting the gang will be deemed to be guilty of the offence.
- The Bill will become a law after it gets the Presidential assent.

Background:

- According to the National Crime Records Bureau's 2016 report, the cases of crimes against children have seen a steady increase in Rajasthan.
- The State recorded 4,034 such cases in 2016, which was 3.8% of the crimes against children registered across the country. In 2015, the State had registered 3,689 cases of crimes against children.

Facts for Prelims:

Rajasthan has become the second State, after Madhya Pradesh, to pass a Bill providing for death penalty to those convicted of raping girls of 12 years and below.

80:20 GOLD SCHEME

Context:

- The government has announced that it will review the circumstances under which Premier Trading Houses (PTH) and Star Trading Houses (STH) allegedly earned windfall gains under the 20:80 gold import scheme implemented by the previous government.

subject to some restrictions. Under the earlier scheme, only state-owned entities were allowed to initially import the yellow metal. Later, the scheme was scrapped.

What's the issue?

- The previous government had, in May 2014, allowed PTHs and STHs to import gold under the 20:80 scheme, which was earlier restricted only to banks and public sector enterprises.
- This, the government has said, resulted in these PTHs and STHs earning a 'windfall gain'.
- A CAG report published in 2016 found that the 80:20 scheme had resulted in a loss of Rs 1 lakh crore to the exchequer.

About 80:20 gold scheme:

- The scheme was introduced in August 2013 with the aim of curbing gold imports.
- Under the scheme, up to 80% of gold imports could be sold in the country and while at least 20% of imports had to be exported before bringing in new consignments of the yellow metal.*
- Further, the permission to import the next lot given only upon fulfilment of the export mandate. The policy was aimed at tackling the widening fiscal deficit.
- Later, the RBI relaxed the rules with the aim to facilitate gem and jewellery export, which had declined due to the import curbs. Following relaxation of the rules, private firms were allowed to import gold under the scheme. In May 2014, the RBI had allowed certain premier export houses to import the gold

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DRAFT POLICY ON DEFENCE PRODUCTION

Context:

enablers, among others.

- The defence ministry has come out with a draft policy on defence production. The aim is to make India one of the top five manufacturers of defence platforms with active participation of public and private sectors. At present, India is one of the world's largest importer of military platforms and weapons.

Highlights of the policy:

- It envisages achieving a turnover of Rs 1,70,000 crore in military goods and services by 2025 by promoting the domestic defence industry.
- The policy lists as a major aim achieving export of Rs 35,000 crore in military equipment and services by 2025 by promoting the domestic defence industry.
- According to the policy, the government aims to make India self-reliant in defence production as well as fulfil demand of other friendly countries.
- The policy says the licensing process for defence industries will be liberalised and the list of items requiring licences will be reviewed and pruned.
- The policy says the tax regime will be rationalised to make domestic manufacturing attractive by ensuring that there is no tax inversion. Taxes on import of capital goods and services, inputs and components used in defence production will be rationalised.
- The government identified 12 military platforms and weapons systems for production in India to achieve the aim of “self-reliance”. They are fighter aircraft, medium lift and utility helicopters, warships, land combat vehicles, missile systems, gun systems, small arms, ammunition and explosives, surveillance systems, electronic warfare (EW) systems and night fighting

NEW VEHICLE SCRAPPAGE POLICY

Context:

- Government's New Vehicle Scrappage policy was recently cleared by the Prime Minister's Office and is awaiting the approval of the GST Council.

Highlights of the policy:

- The policy targets to take polluting vehicles out of the roads and help the automobile industry register higher sales.
- The policy mentions about vehicles older than 20 years becoming eligible for benefits under the scrappage scheme.
- The scheme would now come in effect from April 1, 2020, coinciding with the implementation of the BS-VI norms.

Concerns:

- The new vehicle scrappage policy of the Centre is unlikely to have any significant impact on the automobile industry in terms of increased demand, according to rating agencies.
- Also, analysts say the benefit offered under the scrappage policy would be 15% of the vehicle's price. But this advantage would be muted as prices of diesel vehicles were expected to rise 10-15% once the new norms (BS-VI) come into force.
- The total population of commercial vehicles that will be older than 20 years in fiscal 2021 would be 50,000 vehicles, much lower than the government's earlier estimate of 2.8 crore vehicles. In any case, 70,000 to 90,000 vehicles are scrapped every year. So, it is believed that the impact of the scrappage policy will be limited.
- Also, the proportion of commercial vehicles above 20 years would be

one lakh to two lakh units. Besides, most of these older vehicles are used in rural areas and smaller towns by small fleet operators who operate used vehicles and have limited financial resources to purchase new vehicles. Thus, the proposed scrappage policy is unlikely to be materially positive for commercial vehicle demand.



ENEMY PROPERTIES

Context:

- The government has initiated the process of sale of more than 9,400 enemy properties by issuing guidelines and directing the office of the custodian to submit the list of all such movable and immovable assets within three months. The sale of enemy properties is expected to fetch around Rs 1 lakh crore for the government exchequer.
- The move comes after *the amendment of the Enemy Property (Amendment and Validation) Act 2017 and the Enemy Property (Amendment) Rules, 2018*, which ensured that the heirs of those who migrated to Pakistan and China during partition and afterwards will have no claim over the properties left behind in India.

government.

Enemy properties Act:

- After the Indo-Pakistan War of 1965, the Enemy Property Act was enacted in 1968, which regulates such properties and lists the custodian's powers.
- The government amended the Act in the wake of a claim laid by the heirs of Raja Mohammad Amir Mohammad Khan, known as Raja of Mahmudabad, on his properties spread across Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.
- *The government has vested these properties in the Custodian of Enemy Property for India*, an office instituted under the Central government.

Background:

- There are 9,280 properties left behind by Pakistani nationals and 126 properties which belonged to Chinese nationals.

What are enemy properties?

- When wars broke out between India and China in 1962, and India and Pakistan in 1965 and 1971, the central government took over properties of citizens of China and Pakistan in India under the Defence of India Acts. These Acts defined an 'enemy' as a country that committed an act of aggression against India, and its citizens.
- *The properties of enemies in India were classified as enemy property.* The properties included land, buildings, shares held in companies, gold and jewellery of the citizens of enemy countries. The responsibility of the administration of enemy properties was handed over to the Custodian of Enemy Property, an office under the central

ATAL INNOVATION MISSION

Context:

- NITI Aayog’s Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) has announced the signing of a Statement of Intent (SOI) with SAP Global to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.

Significance of the SOI:

- As part of the SOI, SAP in 2018 will adopt 100 Atal Tinkering Laboratories (ATL) for five years to nurture the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) learning among secondary school children across India.
- This aims to enable students to learn advanced technology topics relevant to digital transformation and the Internet of Things, e.g. Design Thinking methodology, introduction to programming languages and experiential science learning.

initiative to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in the country.

- AIM is mandated to create an umbrella structure to oversee innovation ecosystem of the country and revolutionizing the innovation eco-system – touching upon the entire innovation life cycle through various programs.
- Atal Tinkering Laboratories (ATLs) create innovators, Atal Incubation Centre and support to Established Incubation Centre will take the innovations to the market and a network of Incubators shall help create enterprises around these innovations.

What are tinkering labs?

- **ATLs are innovation play workspaces for students between Class 6 to 12**, stimulating innovations combining science and technology.
 - These open-ended innovation workspaces are equipped with state-of-the art technologies like 3D printers, robotics, sensor technology kits, Internet of Things, miniaturised electronics etc, to enable students to learn and solve local community problems using emerging technologies.
 - The aim of Atal Labs is to promote innovation and entrepreneurship in schools, universities and industry with a vision to “cultivate one million children in India as the innovators of tomorrow”.

About AIM:

- The Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) is Government of India’s flagship

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DIABETES HAS FIVE TYPES, SAY SCIENTISTS

Context:

- Scientists have unveiled a revised classification for diabetes. There are five distinct types of diabetes that can occur in adulthood, rather than the two currently recognised.

Currently, the disease is divided into two sub-types:

- **With type-1** — generally diagnosed in childhood and accounting for about 10% of cases — the body simply doesn't make insulin, a hormone that helps regulate blood sugar levels.
- **For type-2**, the body makes some insulin but not enough, which means glucose stays in the blood. This form of the disease correlates highly with obesity and can, over time, lead to blindness, kidney damage, and heart disease or stroke.

The New Clusters are :

- **Cluster 1** – severe autoimmune diabetes is broadly the same as the classical type 1 – it hit people when they were young, seemingly healthy and an immune disease left them unable to produce insulin
- **Cluster 2** – severe insulin-deficient diabetes patients initially looked very similar to those in cluster 1 – they were young, had a healthy weight and struggled to make insulin, but the immune system was not at fault
- **Cluster 3** – severe insulin-resistant diabetes patients were generally overweight and making insulin but their body was no longer responding to it
- **Cluster 4** – mild obesity-related diabetes was mainly seen in people who were very overweight but metabolically much closer to normal than those in cluster 3

- **Cluster 5** – mild age-related diabetes patients developed symptoms when they were significantly older than in other groups and their disease tended to be milder.

Background:

- People with diabetes have excessively high blood glucose, or blood sugar, which comes from food.
- Some 420 million people around the world today suffer from diabetes, with the number expected to rise to 629 million by 2045, according to the International Diabetes Federation.

India's concern:

- Today, Diabetes has become a major public health concern in India.
- According to the International Diabetes Federation, over 66 million people in India live with this metabolic disease; an almost equal number has pre-diabetes which is an immediate precursor to diabetes.
- It is predicted that by 2030 diabetes mellitus may afflict up to 79.4 million individuals in India.

Way ahead:

- India currently faces an uncertain future in relation to the potential burden that diabetes may impose upon the country.
- If this continues unchecked, an already overloaded and inefficient health system will run out of solutions.
- Many influences affect the prevalence of diabetes throughout a country, and identification of those factors is necessary to facilitate changes in the healthcare system.

FESTIVAL OF INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Context:

- The Festival of Innovation and Entrepreneurship was recently inaugurated by President Ram Nath Kovind.
- It is being organised by *Rashtrapati Bhavan in association with the Department of Science and Technology and the National Innovation Foundation-India.*

About the Festival Of Innovation And Entrepreneurship:

- It is a celebration of country's Innovation potential, particularly those ideas which stem from grassroots level including the citizen at the last mile and also a reflection of power of children's creativity.
- It is an initiative to recognise, respect, showcase, reward innovations and to foster a supportive ecosystem for innovators.

Significance of the Festival:

- FINE would provide an excellent platform to the innovators for building the linkages with potential stakeholders whose support can improve their prospects in coming years for the larger social good.
- It will also help in promoting lateral learning and linkages among the innovators to enrich the ecosystem for new India.
- It would also be a great opportunity to create awareness about the importance of various Ministries of Government of India attaches to their effort and participation in the FINE.

‘SATH-E’ PROGRAM

Context:

- NITI Aayog has released comprehensive roadmaps and detailed timelines for its initiative ‘Sustainable Action for Transforming Human Capital in Education (SATH-E)’.

Key facts:

- *These roadmaps, which operate between 2018 to 2020*, lay out detailed interventions which will be taken by the *three participating States- Jharkand, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha* – aiming to become ‘Role Model States’ in school education.
- These roadmaps present the first-of-its-kind, customized, action-oriented programmes, outlining interventions at the individual, district and State level, it said.
- The roadmaps were jointly prepared by NITI Aayog, the three States and the knowledge partners of the SATH Initiatives, the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and Piramal Foundation For Education Leadership (PFEL).

About SATH-E Program:

- **What is it?** SATH-E has been envisaged as a programme which aims to transform elementary and secondary school education across the selected states. SATH-E roadmap refers to a time-bound, goal-driven exercise that will reach its logical culmination by the end of the academic year 2020.
- **Implementation:** The SATH-E initiative is based on formal agreements with the States and will be funded through a cost-sharing mechanism between NITI Aayog and the participating states. The Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and Piramal Foundation for Education Leadership (PFEL) were chosen as knowledge partners for the project facilitating

review, data collection and implementation.

- **Significance:** SATH-E aims to create role model States for education and mainstream ‘islands of excellence’ across the country to facilitate qualitative and quantitative transformation of learning outcomes. Marrying technology with need-based, data-driven assessment and a ‘giving it what it takes’ approach – be it innovation, incubation, external third party funding and Public-Private-Philanthropic Partnership (PPPP) experimentation – SATH-E puts the States in the driver’s seat to transform education at scale.

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60 HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS GRANTED AUTONOMY

Context:

- In a historic decision, the University Grants Commission has granted autonomy to sixty Higher Educational Institutions which have maintained high academic standards.

Criteria for granting autonomy status:

- Autonomy is granted to institutes based on the parameters of excellence in academic performances, capability of self-governance and enhancement in the quality of education, and it can be seen as a great opportunity to meet the emerging and evolving needs, in sync with the industry.

Implications:

- These universities will remain within the ambit of UGC but will have the freedom to start new courses, off campus centers, skill development courses, research parks and any other new academic programs.
- They will also have the freedom to hire foreign faculty, enroll foreign students, give incentive based emoluments to the faculty, enter into academic collaborations and run open distance learning programmes.
- The eight autonomous collages, granted autonomy, will be free to set their own syllabus, hold examinations, carry out evaluation as well as declare results. In this case, only the degree will be awarded by the respective university.

Why higher educational institutions need greater autonomy?

- Higher education plays a crucial role in the realisation of India's potential for economic and technological growth. Autonomy helps institutionalise quality and accountability, thereby encouraging institutions to incorporate unique

pedagogical developments and practices into the curriculum.

- Management education is meant to be contemporary in nature and thus dynamic. Frequent changes are required in pedagogy, curriculum and other aspects. An autonomous status expedites these operations and thus enthuses constant fluidity in the pattern and curriculum, apart from accelerating and improving evaluation.

Significance of autonomy:

- While expanding new horizons for higher education and strengthening the quality and relevance, autonomy can be considered a possible solution to enhance the quality of education and incorporate methods of skilling the students, thus contributing to creating a knowledge-based economy and paving the way to gear up the young workforce for Industry 4.0.

Way ahead:

- It is essential that Indian institutes are given the freedom to work with a greater agility in realising the larger goals of the education space in the country.
- Government impetus for autonomy can propel the global ranking of Indian institutions and push India higher on the world charts for education.
- By bringing this into effect, there are high chances of reducing the brain drain, turning it into a brain gain.

KRISHI VIGYAN KENDRAS

Context:

- The ministries of agriculture and skill development have signed a pact to conduct programmes for training in farm and allied sectors at 690 Krishi Vigyan Kendras across the country.

Need for skill upgradation:

- About 40% of the country's workforce is linked to agricultural knowledge activities. The government aims to double farmers' income. However, without skill upgradation, this is not possible.
- There are rapid technological strides in the agriculture sector; therefore, upskilling is needed.

Activities:

- KVKs provide several farm support activities like providing technology dissemination to farmers, training, awareness etc.
- To achieve the set objectives KVKs undertake following types of activities in the adopted villages: (1) Farm Advisory Service (2) Training programme for different categories of people. (3) Training programme for the extension functionaries. (4) Front Line Demonstration (FLD) (5) On Farm Testing (OFT).

What is Krishi Vigyan Kendra?

- Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) are agricultural extension centres created by ICAR (Indian Council for Agricultural Research) and its affiliated institutions at district level to provide various types of farm support to the agricultural sector.
- The first KVK was established during 1974 (Pondichery) and has grown as a largest network in the country.

E-CIGARETTES

Context: WHO has released a report on E-Cigarettes and its effects on health.

Highlights of the report:

- As per the report, Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS) (also known as e-cigarettes) emits nicotine, the addictive component of tobacco products. In addition to dependence, nicotine can have adverse effects on the development of the foetus during pregnancy and may contribute to cardiovascular disease.
- The WHO report further says that although nicotine itself is not a carcinogen, it may function as a “tumour promoter” and seems to be involved in the biology of malignant disease, as well as of neurodegeneration.
- Foetal and adolescent nicotine exposure may have long-term consequences for brain development, potentially leading to learning and anxiety disorders.
- The evidence is sufficient to warn children and adolescents, pregnant women, and women of reproductive age against ENDS use and nicotine.

What are e-cigarettes?

- An electronic cigarette (or e-cig) is a battery-powered vaporizer that mimics tobacco smoking. It works by heating up a nicotine liquid, called “juice.”
 - Nicotine juice (or e-juice) comes in various flavors and nicotine levels. e-liquid is composed of five ingredients: vegetable glycerin (a material used in all types of food and personal care products, like toothpaste) and propylene glycol (a solvent most commonly used in fog machines.) propylene glycol is the ingredient that produces thicker clouds of vapor.

- Proponents of e-cigs argue that the practice is healthier than traditional cigarettes because users are only inhaling water vapor and nicotine.

Why its hard to regulate them?

- As e-cigarettes contain nicotine and not tobacco, they do not fall within the ambit of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 2003 (COTPA), which mandates stringent health warnings on the packaging and advertisements of tobacco products.

Need for regulation:

- The current unregulated sale of e-cigarettes is dangerous for a country like India where the number of smokers is on the decline (WHO Global Report, 2015) as it increases the possibility of e-cigarettes becoming a gateway for smoking by inducing nicotine addiction and perpetuating smoking by making it more attractive, thereby encouraging persons to become users of tobacco as well as e-cigarettes.

Way ahead:

- The government should also impose appropriate restrictions on the sale and advertisement, online and otherwise, of e-cigarettes, including proper health warnings, in order to plug the existing regulatory vacuum.
- This should be done with immediate effect, and simultaneously the government should also commission independent scientific research on the benefits and risks posed by these products in the Indian context.

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LETTERS OF UNDERTAKING (LoUs)

Context:

- Rattled by a spate of banking frauds, RBI has initiated special audit of State-owned lenders with focus on trade financing activities, especially relating to issuance of letters of undertaking (LoUs) by them.
- In addition, the RBI has asked all banks for details of the LoUs they had issued, including the amounts outstanding, and whether the banks had pre-approved credit limits or kept enough cash on margin before issuing the guarantees.

What is LoU?

- Technically, Letter of Undertaking is a bank guarantee under which a bank allows its customer to raise money from another Indian bank's foreign branch in the form of short-term credit.
- The loan is used to make payment to the customer's offshore suppliers in foreign currency.
- The overseas bank usually lends to the importer based on the LoU issued by the importer's bank.

Why is it important?

- LoUs are important instruments that allow those in the import trade to transact their business.
- As an importer in India cannot simply buy dollars and send it abroad to make payments to his supplier, various instruments such as LoUs and Letters of Credit are required to carry out the transaction.
- LoUs, which are essentially a form of guarantee, have come to be a far cheaper and convenient way for importer to raise credit.

E-WAY BILL

Context:

- As the country prepares for the nationwide mandatory rollout of the e-way bill system for inter-state movement of goods from April 1 under the goods and services tax (GST) regime, ***Karnataka will be an exception having notified the e-way bill for both inter-state as well as intra-state movement of goods.***

Background:

- Karnataka was the first state to operationalise the e-way bill system in September 2017, using the information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure available with the state.

Are there concerns from industry?

- Trade and industry have raised concerns about the system being a possible route for the re-emergence of supply chain bottlenecks, and discretionary power to tax officials.
- The industry views the e-way bill as a system that will check tax evasion to some extent, but may not be able to stop it completely. Also, it adds another layer of compliances for GST payers and, in case of technical glitches, may result in supply chain bottlenecks.

DRAFT AGRICULTURE EXPORT POLICY

Why in News?

- Recently, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, released Draft Agriculture Export Policy.

Background

- India's agri export basket accounts for little over 2% of world agri-trade (estimated at US\$ 1.37 Trillion).
- India is currently **ranked ninth amongst** the major exporters globally (WTO 2015).
- Indian agricultural exports grew at 9% compared to China (8%), Brazil (5.4%) and US (5.1%) between 2007 and 2016.
- The draft Policy seeks to double farmers' income and increase the share of agricultural exports from around

30 billion USD currently to more than 60 billion USD by 2022.

Need of the Policy

- **Low export:** India's value added agri-produce in its agri-export basket is less than 15% compared to 25% in US and 49% in China.
- **Export rejections:** Indian agriculture produce **face more rejections** in key export markets compared to products from other developing countries (**ICRIER 2017**).
- **Lack of Uniformity:** India is unable to export **its vast horticultural produce** due to lack of uniformity in quality, standardization and its inability to curtail losses across the value chain.
- **Downward trend:** Cotton, oilseeds, bovine meat and cereals which **were country's highest forex earner** are showing a declining global trend in consumption and trade.

Draft Agri-Export Policy Framework

- **Strategic measures**
 - o **Policy measures-** It includes **Stable Trade Policy regime** free of ban or imposition of Minimum Export Price; **reforms in APMC Act** to remove perishables from its purview and streamlining of Mandi fee; **Liberalising Land Leasing norms** without

compromising the rights of the land owner as provided in Model Contract Farming Act.

- o **Infrastructure and logistic boost-** includes port development having dedicated agri infrastructure at ports with 24x7 customs clearance for perishables, enhancing hinterland connectivity, better cargo handling etc.
- o **Whole Government approach-** The policy advocates a quality control at farm level and coordination across different ministries involving agri chain. This would address the issues of R & D for improved varieties, establishing standards regime, response to SPS & TBT barriers, identification of winning sectors etc.
- o **Greater Involvement of state government in agri-export:** by identification of a nodal State Department/Agency for promotion of agriculture export and including agricultural exports in State Export Policy along with development of product specific clusters in different agro climatic zones
- **Operational Measures**
 - **Focus on Clusters:** The policy favours the establishment of **Farmer Producer Organisation**, digitization and geo-mapping of land records, identification of suitable production clusters coupled with a transition agri export zones (AEZs).
 - **Promoting Value Added Exports-** This includes establishment of organic export zone/organic food park, branding of organic products, developing a uniform packaging and quality protocols standard for organic and ethnic products. Moreover, there should be financial support for the non-forest produce under **SHEFEXIL**.
 - **Marketing and promotion of “Produce of India”-** There should be a **product specific market campaign**

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and a separate fund for marketing of organic products, ethnic products, and GI products.

- **Post-harvest Infrastructure to ensure smooth logistical movement of produce** – This include undertaking ease of doing business measures, developing sea protocol for perishables etc.
- **Establishment of a Strong Quality Regime-** It includes establishment and maintenance of single supply chain and standards for domestic and export market, striving towards recognition of our conformity assessment procedures.
- **Other measures-** include ensuring self-sufficiency and export-oriented production, creation of an agri- startup fund, formulating action plan on R&D, testing labs with strong infra in NE region to support export of organic produce, involving private sector in export promotion etc.

FARM MSP MODELS BY NITI AAYOG

Why in news?

In the recent Budget, the government has announced to ensure the minimum support price (MSP) to farmers for all agricultural crops. In light of this, the NITI Aayog has come out with three models.

Details

□ The three models are:

- o The market assurance scheme: It proposes procurement by States and compensation of losses up to certain extent of MSP after the procurement and price realisation out of sale of the procured produce.
- o The price deficiency procurement scheme: Under this, if the sale price is below a modal price then the farmers may be compensated to the difference between

MSP and actual price subject to a ceiling which would not exceed 25 per cent of the MSP. No compensation would be due if modal price in neighbouring states is above the MSP.

- Madhya Pradesh is implementing this scheme as Bhawaawantar Bhugtaan Yojana (BBY) (*refer January 2018 current affairs*).

o Private procurement and stockist scheme: Under this, procurement would be done by private entrepreneurs at MSP. The government would provide some policy and tax incentives to these entrepreneurs. The private player is nominated through a transparent bidding process by the state government.

- States can adopt one or more options depending on their

requirements. However, all the three options may not be implemented for the same crop.

Before finalizing any model, the government must also consider report of National Commission for Farmers (NCF) which had recommended that MSP should be at least 50% more than the weighted average cost of production.

Positive Impact of private procurement

- It would reduce fiscal implications for the government
- It will involve private entities as partners in agriculture marketing and improve the competition in the market.
- It would also limit the government's liabilities for storage and post procurement management & disposal are also avoided.

However, there are concerns that it may fail like earlier attempts because back-end facilities of storage and warehousing are handed over to them and they don't have the wherewithal to purchase farm goods in bulk.

MSP and procurement in India

- Minimum Support Price is the price at which government purchases crops from the farmers, whatever may be the price for the crops.
- In our country, **MSP for certain agricultural commodities** of Kharif and Rabi season are announced by the **Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA)**, Government of India **at the beginning of the sowing season** based on the recommendations of the **Commission for Agriculture Cost and Prices (CACP)**.
- However, procurement by Central and State Agencies is limited to rice and wheat and some amount of coarse cereals. The Government also procures limited quantity of oil seeds and pulses through NAFED, SFAC and some other agencies.

Some crops covered under MSP includes

- seven cereals (paddy, wheat, barley, jowar, bajra, maize and ragi);
- five pulses (gram, arhar/tur, moong, urad and lentil);
- eight oilseeds (groundnut, rapeseed/mustard, toria, soyabean, sunflower seed, sesamum, safflower seed and nigerseed);
- cash crops: copra, raw cotton, raw jute and

virginia flue cured (VFC) tobacco.

Present method of calculation of MSP:

For MSP, the CACP takes into account a comprehensive view of the entire structure of the economy of a particular commodity including factors like cost of production, changes in input prices, input-output price parity, trends in market prices, demand and supply, inter-crop price parity, effect on industrial cost structure, effect on cost of living, effect on general price level, international price situation, yield and production, imports, exports and domestic availability and stocks with the Government/public agencies or industry, cost of processing of agricultural products, cost of marketing - storage, transportation, marketing services, taxes/fees and margins retained by market functionaries, effect on issue prices and implications for subsidy etc.

NUTRIENT BASED SUBSIDY SCHEME

Why in News?

- Recently, government has approved the continuation of Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) till 2019-20.

About Nutrient Based Subsidy Scheme (NBS)

- Under this scheme a fixed amount of subsidy decided on annual basis, is provided to fertilizer companies (**other than Urea**) depending on its nutrient content to fertilizer manufacturer.
- Under this scheme Minimum Retail Price (MRP) of Phosphatic & Potassic (P&K) fertilizers has been left open and the manufacturers/importers/marketers are allowed to fix MRP of P&K fertilizers at reasonable level.
- **MRP** will be decided taking into account the **international and domestic prices** of P&K fertilizers, exchange rate, and inventory level in the country.
- **The scheme aims:**
 - o to ensure that adequate quantity of P&K is made available to the farmers at statutory controlled price.
 - o to ensure balanced use of fertilizers, improve agriculture productivity, promote growth of indigenous fertilizer industry and to reduce the burden of subsidy.

Issues involved and solutions

- **Roadmap:** There was no clear roadmap in front of government to achieve the NBS objectives which resulted in failure of the policy in checking the imbalanced use of fertilizers. Specific well-coordinated measures with quantifiable deliverables and specific timelines need to be formulated.
- **Monitoring mechanism:** There is no monitoring mechanism in the department of fertilizers (DoF) to ensure prices fixed by fertilizer companies are based on their reasonable cost of production.
- There is **absence of price fixation benchmark** at a reasonable level for import

of DAP (di-ammonium phosphate) fertilizer, which delays finalization of contracts between international suppliers and domestic fertilizer companies.

- High **canalisation** of urea import (fertiliser companies have to import it through only three agencies such as: State Trading Corporation, MMTC and Indian Potash Ltd.) often leads to mismatch in demand and supply of urea for the industry. Thus, de-canalisation needs to be done to allow fertiliser supply to respond flexibly and quickly to changes in demand.
- **Distorted consumption pattern:** underpricing of urea relative to other fertilisers, especially P&K, encourages distorted consumption pattern and unscientific use of it, resulting in significant environmental degradation, including depleted soil quality.
 - o Thus, subsidies should be rationalized along with dedicated awareness generation in farmers regarding the benefits of balanced usage of fertilizers. Also, modelling the fertilizer proportion according to different agro-climatic regions, is needed for the better growth and health of crops and soil.
- **Fiscal state:** Fertiliser accounts for large fiscal subsidies (about 0.73 lakh crore or 0.5 percent of GDP), the **second highest after food** and only 35% of total subsidy reaches the intended beneficiaries.

PMEGP

Context:

- The government has approved the continuation of Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) beyond the 12th Plan period for three years to 2019-20 with a total outlay of Rs 5,500 crore.
- The scheme will create sustainable estimated employment opportunities for 15 lakh persons in three financial years.

About PMEGP:

- **What is it?** PMEGP is a major credit-linked subsidy programme being implemented by the Ministry of MSME since 2008-09. The Scheme is aimed at generating self-employment opportunities through establishment of micro-enterprises in the non-farm sector by helping traditional artisans and unemployed youth in rural as well as urban areas.
- **Implementation:** The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) is the nodal implementation agency for the PMEGP at the national level. At the state/district level, state offices of KVIC, Khadi and Village Industries Boards (KVIBs) and District Industry Centres (DIC) are the implementing agencies.
- **Targets:** The scheme's targets are fixed taking into account the extent of backwardness of state; extent of unemployment; extent of fulfilment of previous year targets; population of state/union territory; and availability of traditional skills and raw material.

ACTION PLAN FOR CHAMPION SECTORS IN SERVICES

Context:

- The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal of the Department of Commerce to give focused attention to 12 identified Champion Services Sectors for promoting their development, and realizing their potential.
- The Cabinet has also directed the Ministries/Departments concerned with these sectors to utilize the available draft sectoral plans to finalize and implement the Action Plans for the identified Champion Services Sectors.
- A dedicated fund of Rs. 5000 crores has been proposed to be established to support initiatives for sectoral Action Plans of the Champion Sectors.

Impact:

- This initiative will enhance the competitiveness of India's service sectors through the implementation of focused and monitored Action Plans, thereby promoting GDP growth, creating more jobs and promoting exports to global markets.

Employment Generation Potential:

- Services sector in India has immense employment potential.
- The proposal will enhance the competitiveness of India's service sectors through the implementation of focused and monitored Action Plans, thereby creating more jobs in India, contributing to a higher GDP and exports of services to global markets.

Benefits:

- As the Services sector contributes significantly to India's GDP, exports and job creation, increased productivity and competitiveness of the Champion Services Sectors will further boost exports of various services from India.
- Embedded services are substantial part

of 'Goods' as well.

- Thus, competitive services sector will add to the competitiveness of the manufacturing sector as well.

PRIVATISATION OF PSBs

Context:

- Former NITI Aayog vice chairman Arvind Panagariya has made a strong case for privatisation of public sector banks with the exception of SBI.

Need for Privatisation:

- Mainly, predominance of scandals and NPAs in PSBs highlight the need for privatisation of PSBs. Efficiency and productivity too demand that the government relinquish its control of the large number of banks whose market valuation has dwindled despite the fact that they hold the bulk of the deposits.
- Also, there is a continuous pressure on the government finances on account of the weak performance of the banks. Privatisation would reduce the drain on the exchequer and the money saved could be used for developmental schemes and programmes of the government.

Benefits of private banks:

- Private banks will bring innovations in products, technology and customer servicing and a market-based discipline to lending. Private banks, knowing that they cannot count on government's protection, are unlikely to engage in the sort of risky lending that characterised public bank lending.
- Also, they will not be subject to the same pressure from politicians and others in government that has destroyed the public sector banks.

Way ahead:

- The public-sector banks, which constitute almost 70% of the Indian banking system, are saddled with burgeoning stressed assets. The government has already injected over ₹2.6 lakh crore in the public-sector banks through recapitalisation in the last

eleven years, which has had limited impact in improving the health of public sector banks thus far.

- Therefore, recapitalisation of PSBs alone is not a permanent solution and will not be effective unless the inherent issues related to governance, productivity, risk management, talent, customer service, etc. are resolved. The government should shrink unproductive public sector banks and move forward with increasing private sector participation in the banking sector.

FERTILISER SUBSIDY

Why in news?

- **DBT scheme** has been approved by cabinet for fertiliser subsidy payment across India
- The **Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs** (chaired by PM) has approved continuation of **Urea Subsidy Scheme upto 2019-20** and there will be no increase in price of urea, till 2020.

Details of the DBT scheme in Fertiliser

- DBT would entail **100% payment to fertilizer companies** on sale of fertilizers to farmers at subsidized rates.

a. Hence, the DBT model for fertilizers is slightly different from other schemes such as LPG, in which the ultimate consumer gets the entitlement in their bank account. **PAHAL** was the

first actual roll-out of a scheme using the DBT approach for providing subsidies.

- At the time of the sale, details of the buyer, the quantity purchased, Aadhaar number, land records (wherever available) and soil health will be captured using a point-of-sale machine.

Urea Subsidy Scheme

- Urea Subsidy is a part of **Central Sector Scheme** (wholly financed by the GoI).
- The continuation of Urea Subsidy Scheme till 2020 will ensure the timely payment of subsidy to the urea manufacturers resulting in **timely availability of urea to farmers**.
- Urea subsidy also includes **Imported Urea subsidy** which is directed towards import to bridge the gap between assessed demand and indigenous production of urea in the country.
- It also includes **freight subsidy** for movement of urea across the country.
- This is in continuation to **farmer-friendly policies** of the Central Government such as:
 - o 100% **Neem Coated Urea** was made mandatory in 2015 to plug the diversion of the subsidized Urea towards non-

agricultural purposes.

- o Decision to bag Urea in **45kg bags** to help reduce the cost of fertilizers to the farmers.
- o Notification of **New Urea Policy, 2015**:
 - ✓ maximise indigenous urea production through setting up of new units and revival of old ones.
 - ✓ promoting energy efficiency in urea production
 - ✓ rationalizing subsidy burden on the government

CITY COMPOST SCHEME

Why in news?

- Recently, government has approved the continuation of City Compost Scheme till 2019-20.

About City Compost Scheme

- Market Development Assistance-** under the scheme a market development assistance of Rs. 1500 per tonne of city compost for scaling up production and consumption of the product, is being provided.
- Marketing:** Fertilizer companies and marketing entities will also co-market City Compost with chemical fertilizers through their dealers' network.
- Under the provision of adoption, companies also adopt villages for promoting the use of compost.
- An appropriate BIS standard/ Eco-Mark ensures that environment friendly quality product reaches the farmers.

About Compost

- Composting is nature's way of recycling. Composting biodegrades organic waste. i.e. food waste, manure, leaves, grass trimmings, paper, wood, feathers, crop residue etc., and turns it into a valuable **organic fertilizer**.
- Finished compost can be classified as a 100% organic fertilizer containing primary nutrients as well as trace minerals, humus and humic acids, in a slow release form.

EDIBLE OIL EXPORT

Why in News?

- Recently, Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) removed the **decades-old ban** on export of bulk edible oils, except mustard oil.

More on News

- Moreover, mustard oil will continue to be exported only in consumer packs up-to 5 kgs and with a **minimum export price** of \$900 per tonne.
- At present, only certain edible oils were allowed to be exported in bulk and other oils only in 5 kg packs.

Background

- India's vegetable oil economy is world's fourth largest after USA, China and Brazil.
- The oilseed accounts for 13% of the gross cropped area, 3% of the Gross National Product and 10% value of all agricultural commodities
- Major oils produced in the country include mustard oil, cottonseed oil, soya-bean oil and groundnut oil.

Arguments in favor

- It will support growing production of oilseeds and would explore additional avenues for marketing of edible oils.
- It may also result in utilization of idle capacity in India's edible oils industry and is a step towards **Ease of Doing Business**.
- As much as liberal imports are necessary to support consumers, exports are critical to support domestic growers.
- It would be step toward progressive foreign trade policy in which both export and import windows are kept open.

Counter Arguments

- Domestic **production is already low** because acreage under oilseeds also remained lower this kharif season due to falling prices in the spot market throughout

last year.

- Country's annual edible oil demand stands at nearly 22 million tonnes and is growing by 3% to 4% per year. India meets only about 40% of its total edible oil demand.
- Mills prefer to import refined oil for blending directly with the oil of their choice for repacking and distribution for local consumption.

Conclusion

To ensure that local market is not affected much and lowering the need of imports in wake of increased exports, the focus should be on improving oilseeds production. It can be done through

- ensuring the availability of quality seeds by increasing investment in oilseeds R&D and developing new location-specific high yielding varieties.
- bridging the awareness gap in farmers regarding better techniques and effective agricultural extension system.
- developing supportive infrastructure facilities.
- ensuring an efficiently managed market for better price recovery.

MEGA FOOD PARK

Context:

- **Greentech Mega Food Park Private Ltd, first mega food park in Rajasthan**, was recently inaugurated at Roopangarh Village in Ajmer.
- The Park has been set up at a cost of Rs 113.57 crore and will benefit around 25,000 farmers in this as well as neighbouring districts.

About Mega Food Parks:

Ministry of Food Processing Industries is implementing Mega Food Park Scheme in the country.

- The Scheme of Mega Food Park aims at providing a mechanism to link agricultural production to the market by bringing together farmers, processors and retailers so as to ensure maximizing value addition, minimizing wastages, increasing farmers' income and creating employment opportunities particularly in rural sector.
- These food parks give a major boost to the food processing sector by adding value and reducing food wastage at each stage of the supply chain with particular focus on perishables.
- A maximum grant of R50 crore is given for setting up a MFP, in minimum 50 acres of contiguous land with only 50% contribution to the total project cost.

processors for supply of raw material to the Central Processing Centres.

- CPC has need based core processing facilities and basic enabling infrastructure to be used by the food processing units setup at the CPC. The minimum area required for a CPC is 50 acres.

The scheme is demand-driven and would facilitate food processing units to meet environmental, safety and social standards.

Mode of operation:

- The Scheme has a **cluster based approach based on a hub and spokes model**. It includes creation of infrastructure for primary processing and storage near the farm in the form of Primary Processing Centres (PPCs) and Collection Centres (CCs) and common facilities and enabling infrastructure at Central Processing Centre (CPC).
- The PPCs are meant for functioning as a link between the producers and

NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE FEDERATION OF INDIA LTD. (NAFED)

Context:

- National Agricultural Cooperative Federation of India Ltd. (NAFED) has signed the Debt Settlement Agreement with its eight lender banks.
- The One Time Settlement with the lender banks has been made at Rs. 478 Crore. In addition, the lenders are entitled to the assignment of auction right of the property of one of the defaulters of its tie-up business conducted in the years 2003-05.

About NAFED:

- National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd. (NAFED), established in 1958, is registered under the Multi State Co-operative Societies Act.
 - Nafed was setup with the object to promote Co-operative marketing of Agricultural Produce to benefit the farmers.
 - **Agricultural farmers are the main members of Nafed**, who have the authority to say in the form of members of the General Body in the working of Nafed.
 - **The objectives of the NAFED** shall be to organize, promote and develop marketing, processing and storage of agricultural, horticultural and forest produce, distribution of agricultural machinery, implements and other inputs, undertake inter-state, import and export trade etc

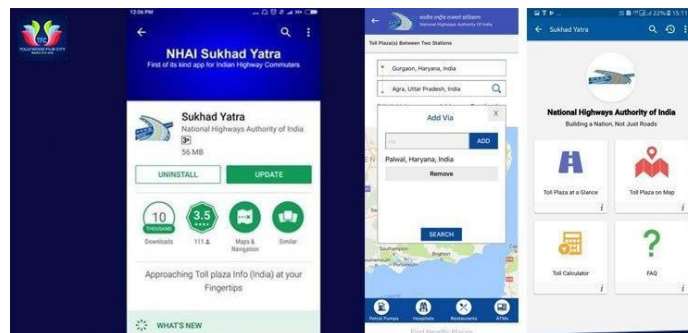
SUKHAD YATRA APP

Context: The government has launched Sukhad Yatra App.

About Sukhad Yatra App:

- Sukhad Yatra mobile application has been prepared by National Highways Authority of India, NHAI, to empower the Highway user.
- The key feature of the app includes provision for the user to enter road quality- related information or to report any accident or pothole on the highway.
- It also provides users with real-time data

related to waiting time expected at Plazas and various facilities like points of interest, highway nest/nest mini, etc., available across the highway. The app can also be used by the users to purchase the FASTag tag and further facilitate the highway user experience.



Sukhad Yatra App for Highway Commuters

NATIONAL E-MOBILITY PROGRAMME

Context: The government has launched the National E-Mobility Programme.

Significance of this move:

- India has embarked on an ambitious e-mobility plan and the government has taken the leadership in enabling e-mobility in India. The National E-Mobility Programme is a step towards ushering in an era of clean, green and future-oriented technologies in the country.

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 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.

National E- Mobility Programme:

- The Programme aims to provide an impetus to the entire e-mobility ecosystem including vehicle manufacturers, charging infrastructure companies, fleet operators, service providers, etc.
- The Programme will be implemented by Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) which will aggregate demand by procuring electric vehicles in bulk to get economies of scale.
- Energy Efficiency Services Ltd (EESL) will issue a fresh tender for additional 10,000 e-vehicles. These electric vehicles will replace the existing fleet of petrol and diesel vehicles.

About EESL:

- Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) is a joint venture of NTPC Limited, Power Finance Corporation, Rural Electrification Corporation and POWERGRID, Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) was set up under Ministry of Power (India) to facilitate

MAJOR PORT AUTHORITIES BILL

Context:

- With a view to providing more autonomy and flexibility to Major Ports and to professionalize their governance, the Government has introduced the Major Port Authorities Bill in Parliament to replace the existing Major Port Trusts Act, 1963.

Salient features of the Bill:

- **Application:** The Bill will apply to the major ports of Chennai, Cochin, Jawaharlal Nehru Port, Kandla, Kolkata, Mumbai, New Mangalore, Mormugao, Paradip, V.O. Chidambaranar, and Vishakhapatnam. The central government may notify more major ports.
- **Major Port Authorities Board:** Under the 1963 Act, all major ports are managed by the respective Board of Port Trusts that have members appointed by the central government. The Bill provides for the creation of a Board of Major Port Authority for each major port. The Boards will succeed the existing Port Trusts.
- **Composition of Board:** The Board will comprise of a Chairperson and a deputy Chairperson, both of whom will be appointed by the central government on the recommendation of a select committee. Number of Board Members will be 11-13.
- **Powers of the Board:** The Bill allows the Board to use its property, assets and funds as deemed fit for the development of the major port. The Board can also make rules on: (i) declaring availability of port assets for port related activities and services, (ii) developing and providing infrastructure facilities such as setting up new ports, jetties, and (iii) providing exemption or remission from payment of any charges on any goods or vessels.
- **Financial powers of the Board:** Under

the 1963 Act, the Board has to seek prior sanction of the central government to raise any loan. Under the Bill, to meet its capital and working expenditure requirements, the Board may raise loans from any (i) Indian scheduled bank or financial institution, or (ii) any financial institution outside India that is compliant with all the laws. However, for loans above 50% of its capital reserves, the Board will require prior sanction of the central government.

- **Adjudicatory Board:** The Bill provides for the central government to create an Adjudicatory Board. The Board will consist of a Presiding Officer and two members, as appointed by the central government on the recommendation of selection committee. Central Government shall have the power to remove the Presiding Officer or any member of the Adjudicatory Board from the office following the prescribed manner.
- **Functions of the Adjudicatory Board will include:** (i) certain functions being carried out by the Tariff Authority for Major Ports, (ii) adjudicating on disputes or claims related to rights and obligations of major ports and PPP concessionaires, (iii) reviewing stressed PPP projects, and (iv) looking into complaints received from port users regarding port services.

Significance of the Bill:

- Reforms have been under way since 1996, when ports were opened to private investment.
- With India's major and non-major ports (over 200 of them) accounting for over 70 per cent of India's international trade by value, it was necessary to address inefficiencies such as high turnaround time of ships by stepping up modernisation and grappling with shoddy management.

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

The new Bill marks an effort to promote ease of doing business.

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FINANCE BILL 2018

Why in news?

The Lok Sabha passed the Finance Bill 2018 and it became law by April 1 on receiving assent of the President.

Taxing the digital income: An amendment to the Bill also widened the scope of India taxing the “digital income” that some multinationals earn in the country without a permanent establishment here.

Highlights of the finance bill 2018

- **Long-term capital gains:** Currently, long term capital gains from transfer of equity instruments or a unit of business trust is exempt from payment of income tax. These transfers will now be taxed at 10% under Section 112A of Income Tax Act, if the profit from the transaction exceeds one lakh rupees.
- **Deductions for farm producer companies (FPCs):** Tax deduction of 100% for 5 years starting from 2018-19, has been introduced for farm producer companies with a total turnover up to Rs 100 crores.
- **Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2003 (FRBM Act):** The FRBM Act is being amended based on the recommendations of the Fiscal Reform and Budget Management Committee under chairmanship of N. K. Singh.
- **Income tax:** For salaried individuals, a standard tax deduction of Rs40,000 has been introduced. The deduction for transport allowance and medical expenses has been removed.
- **Education cess:** The 3% Education Cess has been replaced by a 4% Health and Education Cess for non-resident persons, including foreign companies.
- **Corporate tax:** Currently, companies with turnover less than Rs.50 crore pay corporate tax at the rate of 25%. This threshold has been increased to Rs.250 crore.
- **Salaries and pensions:** The Bill amends five laws to increase emoluments of the President of India, the Vice President, Governors of states, and Members of Parliament (MPs). Moreover, emoluments of MPs will be indexed to inflation, and will be revised every five years.

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CHANGES IN PRIORITY SECTOR LENDING

Why in news?

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has revised certain priority sector lending targets & classification
- thereby promoting growth.
- The removal of loan limits under the MSME could help PSU banks meet their target better as higher-value loans to MSMEs could qualify as priority sector and earn them better returns.

Changes made

- From FY 2018-19 the **foreign banks with 20 branches and above** will have to ensure that:
 - minimum 8% of Adjusted Net Bank Credit (ANBC) or Credit Equivalent Amount of Off-Balance Sheet Exposure (CEOBE), whichever is higher, is earmarked for lending to the **small and marginal farmers**.
 - minimum 7.5 per cent of ANBC or CEOBE, whichever is higher, is earmarked for lending to **micro-enterprises**.
- The **loan limits per borrower for Micro/Small and Medium Enterprises (Services) has been removed** for classification under priority sector. Now all bank loans to MSMEs, engaged in providing or rendering of services as defined in terms of investment in equipment under MSMED Act, 2006, shall qualify under priority sector without any credit cap.

Impact

- This will create a level playing field within banks.

Categories	Domestic scheduled commercial banks and Foreign banks with 20 branches and above	Foreign banks with less than 20 branches
Total Priority Sector	40 percent of ANBC or CEOBE, whichever is higher. Foreign banks to achieve the Total Priority Sector Target by March 31, 2018.	Same target but to be achieved by 2020.
Agriculture	18 percent of ANBC or CEOBE, whichever is higher. Within this, 8% of ANBC is prescribed for Small and Marginal Farmers.	Not applicable
MSME	7.5 percent of ANBC or CEOBE, whichever is higher.	Not Applicable
Weaker Sections	10 percent of ANBC or CEOBE, whichever is higher.	Not Applicable

- It will increase credit flow to these sections

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Priority Sector Lending: A brief

What is Priority Sector Lending (PSL)?

Lending by a commercial bank for certain sectors which are identified as “priority sector” by the central bank (Reserve Bank of India) is called as priority sector lending.

- Banks having any shortfall in lending to priority sector have to contribute to the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) established with Nabard and other specified funds.

Categories under priority sector include

- Agriculture (include three sub-categories viz. Farm credit, Agriculture infrastructure and Ancillary activities.)
- Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises;
- Export Credit;
- Education;
- Housing;
- Social Infrastructure (include activities namely schools, health care facilities, drinking water facilities and sanitation facilities);
- Renewable Energy (include like solar based power generators, biomass based power generators, wind mills, micro- hydel plants and for non-conventional energy based public utilities viz. street lighting systems, and remote village electrification); and
- Others

What is included under Weaker Sections under priority sector?

This include Small and Marginal Farmers, Distressed farmers indebted to non-institutional lenders, Artisans, village and cottage industries, SCs and STs, SHGs, Persons with disabilities, women, Minority communities as notified by Government of India etc.

Priority Sector Lending Certificates (PSLCs)

- Priority Sector Lending Certificates (PSLCs) are a mechanism to enable banks to achieve the priority sector lending target and sub-targets by purchase of these instruments in the event of shortfall.
- This also incentivizes surplus banks as it allows them to sell their excess achievement over targets thereby enhancing lending to the categories under priority sector.

- Under the PSLC mechanism, the seller sells fulfilment of priority sector obligation and the buyer buys the obligation with no transfer of risk or loan assets.

NATIONAL FINANCIAL REPORTING AUTHORITY

Why in news?

- Recently, Union Cabinet approved establishment of National Financial Reporting Authority, a key recommendation under the Companies Act 2013.

Members of NFRA

- According to the **NFRA (Manner of Appointment and other Terms and Conditions of Service of Chairperson and Members) Rules, 2018**, NFRA shall consist of a Chairperson, three full time members, nine part-time members.
- Chairperson and full-time members would be selected through a **search-cum-selection committee** headed by Cabinet Secretary
- **Terms of Office** – The chairperson and full-time members shall have **tenure of 3 years or until they attain the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier. They shall be eligible for re-appointment for only one more term.**
- In case of a part-time member, the tenure would be not more than three years but would be eligible for re- appointment.
- **Removal** – The Chairperson or members could be removed by the central government if adjudged insolvent, convicted of moral turpitude, mentally or physically incapable of performing duties, acquired financial interest, abuse his position to render continuance.
- Chairpersons and full-time members of NFRA should not be associated with any audit firm during their tenure as well as two years after demitting office.

profession and accounting standards with jurisdiction extending to all listed companies and large unlisted companies.

- ICAI under the Chartered Accountants Act, 1949 shall continue to audit smaller unlisted companies.
- Quality Review Board will also continue quality audit in respect of private limited companies, public unlisted companies and also with respect to audit of those companies delegated by NFRA.
- It will have the power to investigate Chartered Accountants and their companies either suo motu or on a reference for any misconduct.
- If professional or other misconduct is proved,
 - it can impose a penalty of not less than one lakh rupees, but which may extend to five times of the fees received, in case of individuals and not less than ten lakh rupees, but which may extend to ten times of the fees received, in case of firms
 - It can also debar an auditor for 6 months to maximum 10 years.
- NFRA will have the same powers as of a Civil Court while trying a suit.
- It would enhance investor and public confidence in financial disclosure of companies and assist in further development of audit profession.

National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA)

- It will be established as an independent regulator to oversee the auditing

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WEF ENERGY TRANSITION INDEX

Context:

- World Economic Forum (WEF) has released the energy transition index as part of the report titled Fostering Effective Energy Transition.
- The index ranks 114 countries on how well they are able to balance energy security and access with environmental sustainability and affordability.

Global performance:

- The overall list was topped by Sweden, followed by Norway at the 2nd position and Switzerland at the 3rd rank.
- Other countries on the top 10 include Finland (4th), Denmark (5th), the Netherlands (6th), the UK (7th), Austria (8th), France (9th) and Iceland (10th).
- Among its emerging market peers Brazil stood at the 38th place, Russia at 70th and China at 76th place.

Performance of India:

- India has been ranked at 78th, lower than its emerging market peers like Brazil and China.
- In the Index, India ranks in the third performance quartile and third readiness quartile, making it an emerging country that is approaching the leapfrog category.
- Concerns: Energy needs in the country are primarily met by fossil fuels with implications for environmental sustainability and increasing energy import costs. Furthermore, a considerable share of India's population still lacks access to electricity and clean cooking fuel.
- Challenges: The Indian renewable energy landscape shows promise, with subsequent renewable energy auctions clearing at prices lower than those in long-term thermal power purchase contracts. However, this has also cast

uncertainty on the economic viability of thermal power plants, which account for 58% of India's primary energy supply.

Way ahead:

- Worldwide progress towards environmental sustainability has stalled, while energy prices have risen in real terms in more than half of the countries surveyed despite an overall fall in fuel prices.
- India has taken “bold measures” to improve energy access, energy efficiency, and to improve the deployment of renewable sources of energy. However, energy transition in the country will require “large investments, and an enabling environment and robust regulatory frameworks to support the transition”.

“India is at the crossroads in its energy transition journey.”

SILVER COPPER TELLURIDE (AGCUTE)

Context:

- Researchers have developed silver copper telluride (AgCuTe), a novel compound that exhibits poor thermal conductivity in the 25-425 degree C range but shows good electrical conductivity.

About AgCuTe:

- The new material made from silver, copper, and tellurium shows high levels of thermoelectric performance that the scientists are hoping could some day be harnessed to extract electricity from waste heat of chemical, thermal, or steel power plants.
- Due to the low thermal conductivity of AgCuTe, one end of the 8 mm-long rod that is contact with waste heat remains hot while the other end maintains cold temperature. The temperature difference is essential for the generation of electrical voltage. At the same time, the material exhibits good electrical conductivity like metal.

Potential applications:

- The compound, silver copper telluride (AgCuTe), shows promise as a **thermoelectric material** for converting waste heat into electricity.
- Potential applications of the thermoelectric technology are in automobile industry, chemical, thermal and steel power plants where large quantities of heat are wasted.

GBI SUBMARINE CABLE

Context:

- Telecom major Bharti Airtel has acquired India leg of Gulf Bridge International submarine cable which will boost its data carrying capacity.
- Under the agreement, Airtel will acquire the ownership of the India leg of GBI's India-Middle East-Europe submarine cable. Airtel will also pick up a significant capacity on Middle East-Europe leg of GBI's cable system.

- The GBI Cable System is privately owned by Gulf Bridge International, established in December 2008 with an initial investment of \$445 million.

About GBI:

- The GBI (Gulf Bridge International) is a private submarine cable system connecting the Gulf countries together and provide onward connectivity to the rest of the world. The GBI Cable System was launched in Feb. 2012, connecting the world to the Gulf.
- The GBI Cable System is designed with a self-healing core ring in the Gulf, with double cable landings at the major terminals of Qatar and Fujairah (UAE) and branched landings in Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, Oman, and onward connectivity to landing in India and Europe as well.



RARE MINERAL DISCOVERED IN PLANTS FOR FIRST TIME

Context:

- Scientists have found that the mineral vaterite, a form (polymorph) of calcium carbonate, is a dominant component of the protective silvery- white crust that forms on the leaves of a number of alpine plants.

Significance of this discovery:

- Naturally occurring vaterite is rarely found on Earth. Small amounts of vaterite crystals have been found in some sea and freshwater crustaceans, bird eggs, the inner ears of salmon, meteorites and rocks.
- This is the first time that the rare and unstable mineral has been found in such a large quantity and the first time it has been found to be associated with plants.

Potential uses of vaterite:

- Vaterite has special properties that make it a potentially superior carrier for medications due to its high loading capacity, high uptake by cells and its solubility properties that enable it to deliver a sustained and targeted release of therapeutic medicines to patients.
- Other potential uses of vaterite include improving the cements used in orthopaedic surgery and as an industrial application improving the quality of papers for inkjet printing by reducing the lateral spread of ink.



About Vaterite:

- Vaterite is a mineral, a polymorph of calcium carbonate (CaCO_3). It was named after the German mineralogist Heinrich Vater. It is also known as **mu- calcium carbonate**.
- Vaterite was often associated with outer space and had been detected in planetary objects in the Solar System and meteorites: Vaterite is not very stable in the Earth's humid atmosphere as it often reverts to more common forms of calcium carbonate, such as calcite.

RYDBERG POLARONS

Context:

- An international team of physicists have successfully created a “**giant atom**” and filled it with ordinary atoms, creating a new state of matter termed “**Rydberg polarons**”.
- These atoms are held together by a **weak bond** and is **created at very cold temperatures**.

How was the new polaron created?

- It uses ideas from two different fields: Bose Einstein Condensation and Rydberg atoms.
- A BEC (Bose Einstein Condensate) is a liquid-like state of matter that occurs at very low temperatures. A BEC can be perturbed to create excitations which are akin to ripples on a lake. Here, researchers have used a BEC of strontium atoms.
- Electrons in an atom move in orbits around the nucleus. A ‘Rydberg atom’ is an atom in which an electron has been kicked out to a very large orbit. These have interesting properties and have been studied for a long time.
- In this work, researchers used laser light on a BEC of strontium atoms so that it impinges on one strontium atom at a time. This excites an electron into a large orbit, forming a Rydberg atom. This orbit is large enough to encircle many other strontium atoms inside it.
- As the electron moves around many strontium atoms, it generates ripples of the BEC. The Rydberg atom becomes inextricably mixed with these ripples and forms a new super-atom called a ‘Rydberg polaron’.

matter’ which exerts a gravitational force on other matter.

- Some theories of dark matter postulate that it is a cosmic **Bose Einstein Condensate**, perhaps composed of an as-yet-unknown type of particle. If we are indeed living in an invisible all pervading Bose Einstein Condensate, this experiment can suggest ways to detect it.

What will be the use of these Rydberg polarons?

- A particularly interesting implication is for **cosmology**. Our universe is believed to be filled with a mysterious ‘dark

HT COTTON

Context:

- Department of Biotechnology in the Ministry of Science and Technology has constituted a Field Inspection and Scientific Evaluation Committee (FISEC) to investigate the matter of illegal cultivation of HT cotton.

What's the issue?

- The cultivation of BG-III or HT cotton has not been approved by Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) of Ministry of Environment.*
- However, there are several media reports and complaints regarding the illegal or unauthorized cultivation of HT cotton in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Gujarat and Maharashtra.



cultivation costs and lead to health hazards.

Punishment:

As the herbicide tolerant cotton is not approved by the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) for commercial cultivation in India, its sale, cultivation and seed production is also punishable offence under Seeds Act 1966, Seed Rule 1968, Seeds (Control) Order 1983 with regard to Environmental Protection Act 1986 and Environmental Protection Rules, 1989.

Why HT Cotton is gaining popularity?

- ☐ In normal cotton, spraying of herbicide is not possible once the plant has emerged out of the soil, as the chemical cannot distinguish between weeds and the crop itself.
- ☐ But with cotton that is genetically engineered to 'tolerate' herbicide application – through introduction of another alien gene, this time coding for a protein inhibiting the action of that chemical – only the weeds, not the crop, get killed.

Concerns associated:

- ☐ As the unapproved cotton variety is claimed to be herbicide tolerant, farmers resort to indiscriminate use of glyphosate, a herbicide, causing health hazards to humans and cattle, apart from affecting the yield of cotton.
- ☐ The herbicide-resistant gene could spread through pollen into

the biodiversity system leading to transformation of weeds into super weeds on a large-scale. It would not only threaten the growth and yields of all crops in future, but also could increase

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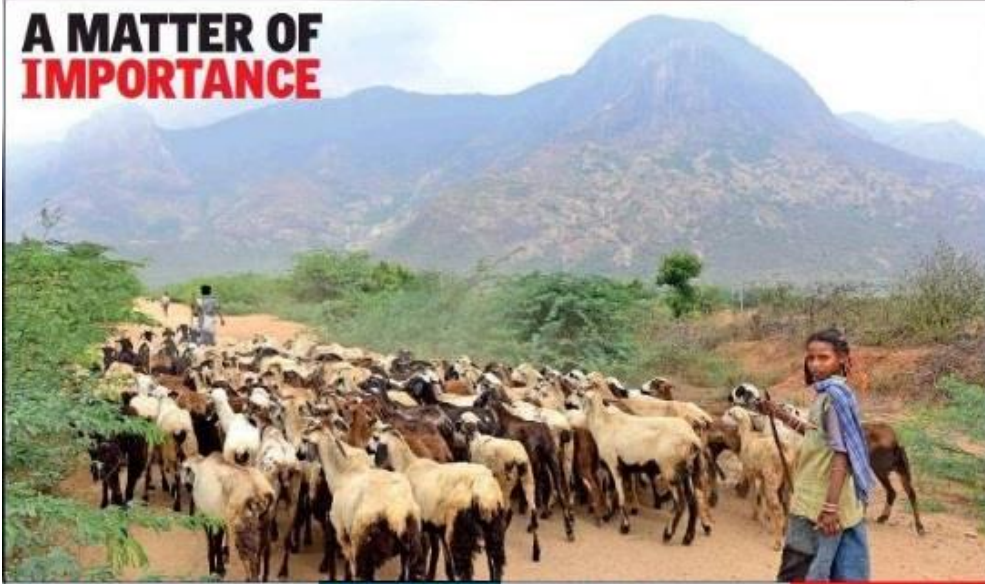
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NEUTRINO PROJECT

A MATTER OF IMPORTANCE



WHAT IS INDIA-BASED NEUTRINO OBSERVATORY (INO) PROJECT ABOUT?

- > A project that aims to build a world-class underground laboratory with a rock cover of approx. 1200m for non-accelerator based high energy and nuclear physics research in India.
- Will consist of:**
 - An underground lab at Pottipuram in Bodi West Hills, a 50,000 ton Iron Calorimeter (ICAL) detector for studying neutrinos and a National Centre for High Energy Physics at Madurai

OBJECTIVES

- > First phase will study natural neutrinos; second phase will study factory-made neutrinos from USA, Europe, Japan and Antarctica
- > The ICAL detector will help determine neutrino masses and mixing parameters


LAB FACTS

- > As laboratory cavern needs to be more than **1000m** underground (to reduce natural cosmic radiation and filter neutrinos), Bodi Hills was chosen for the project as it is made of Charnockite rocks, the hardest rock known
- > The lab at Pottipuram will be set up by blasting **10L tons** of rocks using explosives

Project will need 3,50,000 litres water per day

WHAT IS A NEUTRINO?

- > A sub-atomic particle, like an electron, which has a very small mass
- > One of the abundant particles in the universe, neutrinos have little interaction with matter and are thus difficult to detect



- > Trillions of neutrinos pass through the earth every second, not affected by its magnetic field

NO HOPE: Villagers who eke out a livelihood from livestock rearing fear they may lose their pastures once the project kick-starts

RIISING APPREHENSIONS

Locals and activists fear that:

- > The project will deteriorate the condition of ecologically fragile Western Ghats
- > Blasts during setting up the project will affect dams like Mullaperiyar, Vaigai, Idukki and Megamalai situated in the watershed area of river Vaigai
- > Dust generated during tunnelling will settle on the agriculture land, making it barren

Officials answer:

- > Idukki and Mullaperiyar dams are too far away to be affected
- > Tunnelling is a routine activity common in TN and not akin to blasting in quarries; the controlled blasting (two or three times per day) will last only a few seconds
- > Waste generated from tunnelling would be dealt with within the site; no radioactive material will be used at INO lab

Context:

- The India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO) project has got a fresh lease of life with the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) taking it up as a special case and granting it environmental clearance to set up the lab in **Bodi West hills**.

Two conditions:

While granting EC, the committee stipulated specific conditions, of which two are key for the project to take off.

- One is the consent to establish and operate to be obtained from the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB).
- Also, the INO team has to obtain the

necessary forest and National Board for Wild Life clearances as per law. *The Mathikettan Shola National Park in Idukki district, Kerala, is situated within five km from the project site.*

The project includes:

- Construction of an underground laboratory and associated surface facilities at Pottipuram in Bodi West hills of Theni District of Tamil Nadu.
- Construction of an Iron Calorimeter (ICAL) detector for studying neutrinos.
- Setting up of National Centre for High Energy Physics at Madurai, for the operation and maintenance of the underground laboratory, human resource development and detector R&D along with its applications.

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

Why detect them?

- Neutrinos are by far the most numerous of all the particles in the universe (other than photons of light) and so even a tiny mass for the neutrinos can enable them to have an effect on the evolution of the Universe through their gravitational effects.
- There are other recent astrophysical measurements that provide information on the evolution of the Universe and it is crucial to seek complementary information by direct determinations of the masses of neutrinos and their other properties. In a sense, neutrinos hold the key to several important and fundamental questions on the origin of the Universe and the energy production in stars. We have some partial answers but many details are still awaited from future experiments.
- Yet another important possible application of neutrinos is in the area of neutrino tomograph of the earth, that is detailed investigation of the structure of the Earth from core on wards. This is possible with neutrinos since they are the only particles which can probe the deep interiors of the Earth.

Why should the laboratory be situated underground?

- Neutrinos are notoriously difficult to detect in a laboratory because of their extremely weak interaction with matter.
- The background from cosmic rays (which interact much more readily than neutrinos) and natural radioactivity will make it almost impossible to detect them on the surface of the Earth. This is the reason most neutrino observatories are located deep inside the Earth's surface.
- The overburden provided by the Earth matter is transparent to neutrinos whereas most background from cosmic

rays is substantially reduced depending on the depth at which the detector is located.

What are the benefits to local people from this project?

- The construction contract will specify that local labour should be used, based on the skill levels, to the maximum extent possible.
- Furthermore, gainful employment will be there for a small number of people by way of sourcing of services and daily needs for the INO facility and for the upkeep of buildings and landscapes.

A major benefit will be for schools and colleges in the region as the students interested in science can benefit from the outreach activities as well as doing projects at the lab.

About the project:

- The India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO) Project is a multi-institutional effort aimed at building a world-class underground laboratory with a rock cover of approx. 1200 m for non-accelerator based high energy and nuclear physics research in India. The initial goal of INO is to study neutrinos.
- It is a mega-science project under the XII five-year plan of Government of India with an investment of about 1350 crores, **jointly funded by the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and the Department of Science and Technology (DST).**

What are neutrinos?

- Neutrinos, first proposed by Swiss scientist **Wolfgang Pauli** in 1930, are the second most widely occurring particle in the universe, only second to photons, the particle which makes up light. In fact, neutrinos are so abundant among us that every second, there are more than 100 trillion of them passing right through each of us — we never even notice them.
- Neutrinos occur in three different types, or flavours. These are separated in terms of

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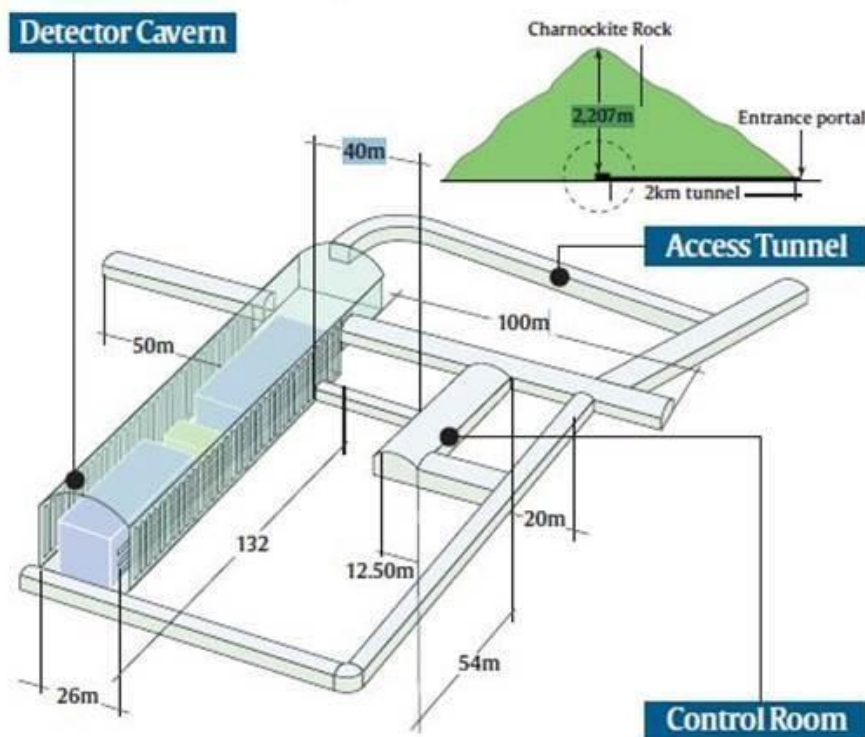
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different masses. From experiments so far, we know that neutrinos have a tiny mass, but the ordering of the neutrino mass states is not known and is one of the key questions that remain unanswered till today. This is a major challenge INO will set to resolve, thus completing our picture of the neutrino.

NEUTRINOS

ARE THE second most abundant subatomic particles after photons, and one of the several fundamental particles of the universe is built of. They have no charge, but are thought to have a small, as-yet-undetermined, mass. They are everywhere, but are extremely difficult to detect because they interact poorly with other objects, passing through the human body without a trace.



INO PROJECT

WILL PLACE a specially built iron calorimeter (ICAL) detector about 1.5 km under the ground, where the chances of detecting neutrinos are higher. The project will aim to determine the mass of neutrinos, and to establish a “mass order” among the three known types of neutrinos – electron, muon and tau.

KEY FACTS

NEUTRINOS ARE thought to have been produced just after the Big Bang that created the universe. The neutrino density of the universe is 330 per cubic centimetre.

100 TRILLION neutrinos are believed to pass through the human body every second.

RS 1,500 CR is the estimated cost of the project. Building the lab is likely to cost Rs 470 cr.

50,000 TONNES of magnets will make up the iron calorimeter detector.

22 INSTITUTIONS are part of the project. Involving over 100 engineers and physicists.

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NITI AAYOG PANEL ON GOLD MARKET

Why in News?

- Recently, NITI Aayog panel, headed by Ratan P Watal, proposed a more liberalised approach toward the gold market.

Proposed recommendations

- Target** - To increase its contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) to 3 per cent by 2022.
- On Tax** - a sharp cut in all taxes on the gold business, including import duty and goods and services tax (GST) is needed.
- On Institution** - setting up a **Gold Board** with statutory powers as a single-window agency to resolve all issues and for export promotion there should be **gold domestic council** in line with export promotion council.
- On Gold Monetisation Scheme (GMS)** -
 - Reducing minimum quantity of gold to be offered by customers under the GMS.
 - Link gold metal loans with international lease rates.
 - Temples should hold gold in prescribed limit and deposit rest under GMS.
- Replace sovereign gold bonds (SGB) with gold saving accounts** and the gold investment in rupee terms in proposed savings accounts should be **backed by physical gold** lying with Indian households.
- It proposed a **liberal PAN (permanent account number) limit** and a new limit for providing data to respective organisation under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act.

Others - promoting gold mining, responsible sourcing and good delivery of unrefined gold, making Indian standards for gold refined by Indian refineries etc.

Gold related schemes

- Gold Monetisation Scheme**
- A revamped version of an older **Gold Deposit Scheme**—to make idle gold productive, by getting consumers to either sell their gold or store it with banks.

- Its aim is to merge the gold into the formal economy and reduce the country's gold imports.
- Only Resident Indians** (Individuals, HUF, Trusts including Mutual Funds/Exchange Traded Funds registered under SEBI (Mutual Fund) Regulations and Companies) can make deposits under the scheme, either individually or jointly.

Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme:

- SGBs are government **securities denominated** in grams of gold issued by RBI.
- They are substitutes for holding physical gold. Investors have to pay the issue price in cash and the bonds will be redeemed in cash on maturity.
- The Bond is issued by Reserve Bank on behalf of Government of India.
- SGBs carry a fixed interest rate and only resident Indian can invest in minimum 1g and maximum of 500g per year. Later, this limit of 500g was modified and raised to 4 kg for individuals, 4 Kg for Hindu Undivided Family (HUF) and 20 Kg for Trusts and similar entities notified by the Centre.

Gold Coin/ Bullion Scheme

- It is a part of Gold Monetisation Programme.
- Initially the coins will be available in denominations of 5 grams and 10 gm. A 20 gm gold bar will also be available through 125 MMTC outlets across the country.
- Coins have anti-counterfeit features and tamper proof packaging.

Measures announced in Budget 2018-19

- The Government will formulate a comprehensive Gold Policy to develop gold as an asset class.
- The Government will also establish a consumer friendly and trade efficient system of regulated gold exchanges in the country.
- Gold Monetization Scheme will be revamped to enable people to open a hassle-free Gold Deposit Account

INTEGRATED SCHEME FOR DEVELOPMENT OF SILK INDUSTRY

Why in news?

Recently, Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its approval for **Integrated Scheme for Development of Silk Industry** for three years from 2017-18 to 2019-20.

About the Scheme

- It is a central sector scheme implemented by Central Silk Board (under Ministry of Textiles).
- It consists of following four components:
 - o Research & Development, Training, Transfer of Technology and I.T. Initiatives,
 - o Seed Organizations,
 - o Coordination & Market Development,
 - o Quality Certification Systems (QCS)/Export Brand Promotion & Technology Up-gradation.
- The scheme aims to achieve self-sufficiency in silk production by 2022 by focussing on improving productivity and increasing production of highest grade quality silk & import substitute bivoltine silk.
- It also seeks to provide livelihood opportunities for women, SC, ST and other weaker sections of the society including Left Wing Extremism affected areas and North Eastern Region.
- **Cost bearing –**
 - o **100% for government owned facilities** by Central Government,
 - o For SC and ST individuals beneficiaries **65% by Central Government, 25% by state government and 10% by the individuals,**
 - o For beneficiaries from Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and NE States **80% by Central Government, state government and individuals will bear 10%**

world only after China.

India currently produces all four variety of silk - mulberry, eri, muga and tassar. The silk production is mostly prevalent in Karnataka, Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir.

Major Export destination of Indian Silk exports are USA and UAE followed by UK, France, Italy and Germany. Mostly natural silk yarns, fabrics, made-ups, readymade garments, silk carpets and silk waste are exported.

For growth and development of the silk industry Indian **Silk Export Promotion Council** has also been set up. It organises trade shows and fairs across the world to promote trade with different countries. The council also facilitates meetings between exporters and potential customers.

Bivoltine Silk

It is a hybrid silk which is cultivated in temperate region such as China, Japan and Thailand.

This breed can withstand the high temperature stress and high humidity as prevalent in India due to tropical climate. Therefore, Central Silk Board is stepping up production of variety of bivoltine hybrid through crossbreeding.

Silk Industry in India

India is the second largest producer of Silk in the

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR)

Why in News?

- Recently, Ministry of Corporate Affairs has decided to put in place a centralized system to keep a tab on entities' compliance with CSR obligations in the backdrop of non-compliance to CSR by one-third of firms on the S&P BSE 100 list.

More on news

- Activities that witnessed **rise in CSR expenditure** included promotion of education, vocational skill development, environmental sustainability, gender equality, national heritage, slum development, community development, infrastructure, social welfare, welfare of armed forces veterans, war widows and their dependents.
- Activities that witnessed a **dip in CSR expenditure** included eradication of hunger and poverty, promotion of healthcare and sanitation, the contribution towards the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund.
- Industrialized states with large corporate presence such as Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu top the list of highest recipients of CSR expenditure by India Inc. However, Maharashtra followed by Daman & Diu and Odisha witnessed the biggest increase

About Corporate Social Responsibility

- Corporate social responsibility is a management concept whereby companies **integrate social and environmental concerns** in their **business operations** and **interactions with their stakeholders**.
- The corporate firms **utilize valuable resources from the society** in the form of **raw materials** etc. for their operations, so the firms must give **back something for the**

welfare of the society.

- Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013 which contains **CSR provisions is applicable** to companies
 - o With an annual turnover of INR 1,000 crore and more,
 - o Or a net worth of INR 500 crore and more,
 - o Or a net profit of five crore INR and more.
- The Act mandates companies to **spend at least 2% of their average net profit in the previous three years** on CSR activities.
- Schedule VII of the Act contains the list of activities which a firm can take up.

Benefits of a Robust CSR Programme for a Company

- Gaining of trust of communities
- Attracting and retaining employees
- Enhancing corporate reputation and brand building
- Attract investors as they include ethics as part of their assessment while investing
- Increased profitability as ethical conduct exerts a growing influence on purchasing decisions of customers.

Few Challenges in CSR

- **Lack of robust policy:** Lack of capability in many firms to formulate a long term robust CSR policy leads to failure in giving definitive directions to CSR spending
- **Disconnect with local requirements:** A disconnect can be seen in what the requirements on the ground are and what the companies are allocating money towards. There is non-availability of well-organized NGOs in remote and rural areas that can assess and identify real needs of the community.
- **Ease of implementation as basis:** Many CSR efforts are driven purely by the company's operational perspectives and ease of implementation of their CSR projects.

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- **Duplication of activities by different corporate houses** which results in competitive approach rather than collaborative approach.
- **Lack of awareness in local communities about CSR:** There is a lack of trust and interest of the local community in participating and contributing to CSR activities of companies. In fact, all stakeholders need to be involved including government, NGO, local agencies, community as well as private sector
- **Lack of focus on rural areas:** Many CSR initiatives and programs are taken up in urban areas and localities leaving the needy and the poor in the rural areas out from benefits of CSR.
- **Inadequate monitoring:** There is lack of an independent agency which can monitor and accreditate CSR efforts.

MUNICIPAL BONDS

Why in news?

Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has decided to provide incentive to ULBs covered under AMRUT for Issuance of Municipal Bonds.

More on news

- The ministry will incentivise up to 10 Urban Local bodies (ULBs) for up to a maximum of 26 crores.
- The amount will be paid in one lump sum in the escrow account opened by ULB for the concerned purpose.
- The bonds issued will be taxable municipal bonds and not green bonds.

Need for Municipal Bonds

- **Improving urban infrastructure:** A High Powered Expert Committee (HPEC) on Urban Infrastructure estimated a requirement of Rs 3.92 million crores to provide urban services conforming to national benchmarks for urban infrastructure over a period 2012-31.
- **Alternative source of finance:** It may help corporations in raising funds without looking to State grants or agencies such as World Bank. Also, rating agency CARE estimates that large municipalities in India could raise Rs. 1,000 to Rs. 1,500 crore every year considering municipal bond markets in US and China touch around \$3.7 trillion and in China \$187 billion.
- **Attracting institutional investors:** They may ensure participation of large institutional investors such as pension funds and insurance companies by providing less risky avenues of investments to them.
- **Challenges for Municipal Bond Market in India**
- **Issues with municipal bond:** They are relatively **illiquid instruments** due to absence of secondary market for them which results in investors having to hold municipal bonds until maturity.
- Also, PFRDA classify municipal bonds as **Class C instruments** instead of Class G (Government securities) making them compete with other Class C instruments which have higher yields thus making municipal bonds unattractive.
- **Credit worthiness:** Earlier 94 cities which are part of Smart City Mission and Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), were rated by agencies such as CRISIL. Out of 94, 55 cities got investment grade rating (BBB- and above), while other 39 were rated below BBB-. Reasons affecting credit worthiness include:
 - Thirteenth finance Commission data reflected that the **municipal tax to GDP ratio** is a meagre 0.5 per cent as compared to central tax to GDP ratio at 12 per cent.
 - Dependence of Municipal bodies for funds and **unpredictability of transfers** from State governments to ULBs impact the outlook of financial position of ULBs.
 - Except in a few big ULBs the **budgeting and accounting systems** of ULBs still lack transparency which leaves scope for misappropriation of assets and misleading picture of income and expenditure of ULBs.
 - The **absence of buoyant sources of revenues** for ULBs in the past has increased their reluctance to borrow in future.
 - There may be increased **cases of default** when the debts on Municipalities increase too much as is happening in china currently.
 - Further there are no **insolvency and bankruptcy laws and security enforcement laws** applicable against municipalities unlike corporate sector.
- **Other Suggestions**
- **Increasing the marketability** of the bonds by bringing them under EEE category (Where the initial investment, the interest earned and the maturity amount are all exempted from taxation) so that retail investors can be brought into the market.

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- **Corporate Bonds and Securitisation Advisory Committee** of SEBI had recommended for providing tax free status to municipal bonds charging an interest higher than 8% as well. At present, only bonds carrying interest rate upto maximum 8% per annum are eligible for this
- **Need to encourage establishment of bond markets:**
- Structuring of bonds by **securitizing revenues** such as property tax collections through an escrow mechanism to help ‘A’-rated ULBs (urban local bodies) get a credit enhancement and access to the capital market.
- SEBI has also suggested a **Pooled mechanism** to float bonds which can help lower rated urban local bodies to come together and issue bonds.
- Creating a **secondary market for bond trading** to tap long-term savings and allowing households or institutions to sell their long-term bonds before maturity.
- **Municipal bonds could be given the status of ‘public securities’** so that they become admissible for statutory liquidity ratio (SLR) investment by commercial banks.
- Further urban infrastructure can be made part of **priority sector lending** to increase the demand for municipal bonds from institutional investors.
- **Introduction of a debt recovery and bankruptcy law** applicable to urban entities
- **Improving transparency and disclosure norms** to increase investor confidence by disclosing information regarding the management, administration, projects, revenue generation, risk factors etc. to the public along with the future revenue generating capacity of the ULB.
- **Structural reforms** at the governance level must also be undertaken to equip municipalities with the technical and financial expertise to generate adequate credit worthy municipal finance opportunities.

executives in charge in municipalities and ideas such as directly elected mayors needs to be seriously considered.

Other reforms such as realistic user charges and fees for municipal service, increase in property taxes must also be implemented to complement fiscal devolution and boost their capacity for issuance of bonds.

- There is also a need to **empower political**

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DEFENCE INDUSTRIAL CORRIDOR

Why in News?

The Government initiated work for preparing a Detailed Project Report (DPR) to set up a defence production corridor in Tamil Nadu.

About Defence Industrial Corridors

- The government, in Budget 2018, announced establishment of two defence corridors-
 - o One in **Uttar Pradesh** which will run from Agra to Chitrakoot.
 - o Another in **Tamil Nadu** called **Tamil Nadu Defence Production Quad** connecting Chennai, Hosur, Salem, Coimbatore and Tiruchirappalli to Bengaluru.
- The draft defence production policy, 2018 provides that these defence industry Corridors will be set up in collaboration with States. Govt of India will contribute 50% of assistance subject to a ceiling of Rs 3000 Crores to the SPV set up for development of each defence corridor.
- Government has also announced the creation of a dedicated defence and aerospace small and medium enterprises (SME) fund, registered with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), where a minority stake could be taken by investors. This fund would help channelise investments into the two defence corridors.
- Benefits of the corridors:
 - o They will give **thrust to the manufacturing sector** and will help in making India **self-reliant** in the defence sector.
 - o They are expected to **bolster interaction between all industry players** in order to **create long-term synergy** and **eventual development of the area into a Defence Production powerhouse**.

These corridors will **attract investment and create lakhs of jobs**.

FIRST 'CRIME FREE ZONE' ON INDIA-BANGLADESH BORDER

Why in news?

A crime-free stretch of **8.3 kms** has been established between the BSF border posts at Gunarmath and Kalyani and the BGB (Border Guards Bangladesh) border posts at Putkhali and Daulatpur.

More on news

- The objective of creating a crime-free zone is **to have select border locations that are clear of illegal, anti-social and criminal activities** (such as Human trafficking/Drugs and Fire arm smuggling/terrorist activities) by integrating the efforts of the BSF and the BGB, with assistance from the district administration, NGOs and border population of both the countries.
- Border **surveillance devices** such as closed-circuit cameras, search-lights and thermal imaging devices have been installed to ensure that the area remains crime-free. Drones will also be used to keep a tight vigil on the border.
- The BSF and BGB have also been raising **awareness among the locals** regarding crime prevention in the border area.

- India and Bangladesh share a **4,096 km land boundary**, largest among the international boundaries that India shares with its neighbours.
- The border **runs along five states**, West Bengal (2,216.7 km), Assam (263 km), Meghalaya (443 km), Tripura (856 km) and Mizoram (318 km).
- Half of the Indo-Bangladesh boorder has been **fenced**. The remaining half will be fenced by 2019 deadline.

MALWARES

Why in News?

- ‘**Saposhi**’, a new malware which can create **botnet** and launch **Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS)** attack, was detected by the security agencies.

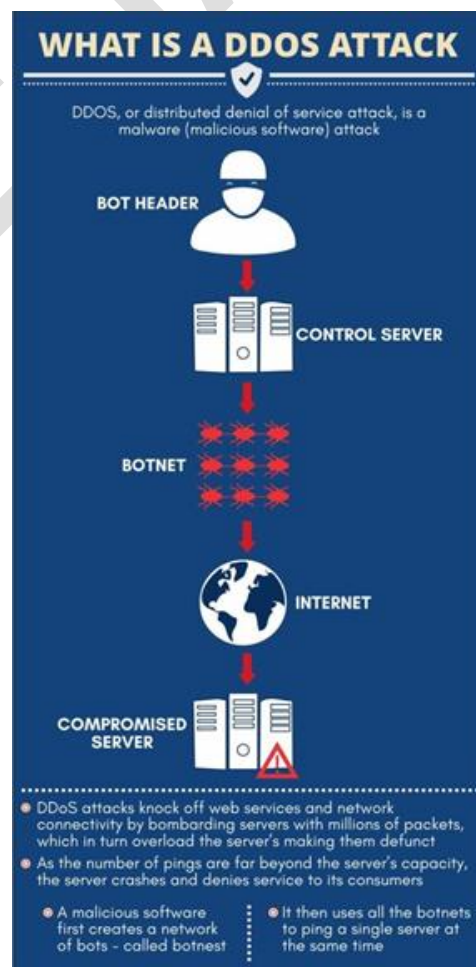
What is a Malware?

- The term is contraction of “**Malicious Software**” and is any piece of software that was written with the intent of doing harm to data, devices or to people.

□ Different kinds of Malware include

- o **Virus**: They attach themselves to clean files and spread uncontrollably, damaging a system’s core functionality and deleting or corrupting files. They usually appear as an executable file.
- o **Trojans**: They disguise themselves as legitimate software and tend to act discretely and create backdoors in your security to let other malwares in.
- o **Spyware**: It hides in the background and takes notes of what one does online, including passwords, credit card numbers, surfing habits and more.
- o **Worms**: Worms infect entire networks of devices, either local or across the internet, by using network interfaces. It uses each consecutive infected machine to infect more.
- o **Ransomware**: Also called scareware, this kind of malware can lock down computer and threaten to erase everything — unless a ransom is paid to its owner.
- o **Adware**: These can undermine security which can give a lot of other malware a way in. Botnets:
- o Botnets are networks of infected computers that are made to work together under the control of an attacker.
- o **Cyber Swachhta Kendra to Tackle Malware**
- o Government has established the “**Cyber Swachhta Kendra**” which is a **Botnet Cleaning and Malware Analysis Centre**.

- o It is part of **Digital India initiative** to **create a secure cyber space** by **detecting botnet infections** and
- o **providing information** and **enabling citizens** for **removal of BOTs/malware**.
- o It is being **operated by CERT-In**
- o Also, the Kendra will **strive to create awareness** among **citizens to secure their data, computers, mobile phones and devices** such as **home routers**.
- o It also **collaborates** with Department of Telecommunications, Internet Service Providers, Antivirus companies and academia to carry out its work.



BRAZZAVILLE DECLARATION

Why in news?

Recently, Brazzaville Declaration was signed to promote better management and conservation of Cuvette Centrale Region in Congo Basin.

About the Brazzaville Declaration

- The declaration has been signed by Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo and Indonesia in the backdrop of the **3rd Conference of Partners of the Global Peatlands Initiatives (GPI)**, taking place in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo.
- GPI is an initiative by leading experts and institutions to save peatlands as world's largest terrestrial organic carbon stock and to prevent it being emitted.

What are Peats?

- Peats are a **heterogeneous mixture of plant material** (vascular plants, mosses and humus) that had accumulated in a water-saturated area and are only partially decomposed due to absence of oxygen.
- The natural areas covered by peat are called peatlands. Various types of peat are – swamp forests, fens, bogs or mires.
- They form where climate, bedrock and relief create an area with permanent water saturation i.e. either in shallow water over layers of lake sediments (called terrestrialisation) or directly on mineral soil (called paludification).
- They are **mostly found in permafrost regions** towards the poles and at high altitudes, in coastal areas, beneath tropical rainforest and in boreal forests. Countries with largest peatland areas are – Russia, Canada, Indonesia, USA, Finland etc.
- Several multilateral conventions take peatland into consideration such as UNFCCC, Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, Convention on Biodiversity and United Nation Convention to Combat Desertification.

Importance of Peatland

- **Carbon Storage** – Although they cover less than 3% of the global surface, estimates

suggest that peatlands contain twice as much carbon as in the world's forest.

- **Supporting unique and critically threatened biodiversity** – They are home to some of the most unique and even endangered species which are adapted to live there. e.g. 37% of all the vascular plants in the peatlands of Yamal Peninsula and 10% fish species within Malay Peninsula are only found in peatland ecosystem.
- **Supporting water cycle** – They regulate water flow, exert a cooling effect during hot periods through evaporation and cloud formation, play an important role in retention of pollutants and nutrients and water purification, counteract eutrophication of water bodies and also prevent intrusion of salt water.
- **Supporting livelihood** – They are source of berries, mushrooms and medicinal plants in boreal and temperate regions and of non-timber forest products in tropical regions. Even the peat itself is used as fuel.
- **As a cultural landscape and archive** – They hold some of the most evocative archeological discoveries of last decades such as 4th millennium BCE footpath 'sweet tracks'. They also record environmental changes.

Threats to Peatlands

- **Dra inage for agriculture** – Agriculture expansion has been main driver of changes in peatlands. Peat soil needs to be regularly saturated otherwise they lose nutrients very fast.
- **Commercial Forestry** – It is the second greatest cause of land- use changes in peatland mostly prevalent in Scandinavian countries, UK, Russia, South-east Asia etc.
- **Peat extraction and usage** – Peat as a source of energy is being used on a large scale by households. It is also used as raw material for producing growing media for

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professional horticulture and for home gardening.

- **Infrastructure Development** – Conversion of peatlands in coastal areas to meet the urban development, waste disposal needs, development of roads and other infrastructure.

Solutions

- **Rewetting** - It is an essential step in the restoration of Peatlands as they rely on waterlogged conditions for their survival.
- **Plaudiculture and sustainable management techniques** – It is a practice of crop production on wet soils, predominantly in peatlands. Other sustainable techniques could be cultivation of fish or pursuit of eco-tourism.
- **Legal and Fiscal environment and Policies** – Various policies that have been put in place both at global as well domestic levels should be implemented properly.
- **Creating a market to finance peatland management** – Using Funding mechanism such as Green Bonds, private capital (equity and debt), funding from government sources etc.
- **Institutional framework for coordinated action** – Integrated global partnerships should be established.
- **Restricting new agriculture & industrial activities** that threaten their long-term viability and developing long-term land use policies which favour conservation and protection of peatlands.

Capacity building – Focused action is required with support from developed countries for capacity building, outreach and awareness raising.

CONSERVATION ASSURED | TIGER STANDARDS (CA|TS)

Why in news?

- Recently a survey has found that only 13 per cent of the tiger conservation areas meets the global standards of an accreditation system- the Conservation Assured | Tiger Standards.

More on news

- The survey is the first and largest rapid assessment of site-based tiger conservation across Asia and has been driven by 11 conservation organisations and tiger-range governments that are part of the CA|TS coalition.
- It found out that tiger monitoring is being implemented in 87 per cent of the sites and all sites surveyed in South Asian and East Asian countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Nepal and Russia have management plans.

Conservation Assured (CA|TS)

- It is a management tool which sets basic criteria for effective management of tiger conservation reserves or other conservation reserves and protected areas which have tiger populations.
- It is based on a set of seven pillars with 17 minimum standards and associated criteria for effective management.
- It addresses multiple factors which impact conservation management, including support for resident human populations (including their social, cultural, spiritual and economic needs), enhancing overall biodiversity richness, prey-base and habitat cover, and also considers the legal context of an area in terms of content, application and capacity of those on the ground to enforce those laws.
- It is **driven by the CA|TS Partnership**, which comprises of tiger range governments, intergovernmental agencies, conservation organisations and other institutions, such as Global Tiger Forum, IUCN, United Nations Development Program (UNDP), WWF etc.

- The secretariat for CA|TS is hosted by WWF.
- It is a key element in realizing the ambitious goal of doubling the global tiger population by 2022, a commitment made by all 13 Tiger Range Countries (TRC).
- **Nepal is the first TRC** to implement the process.
- To date, three sites- **Lansdowne Forest Division in Uttarakhand, India**, Chitwan National Park in Nepal and Sikhote-Alin Nature Reserve in Russia have been awarded CA|TS Approved status.

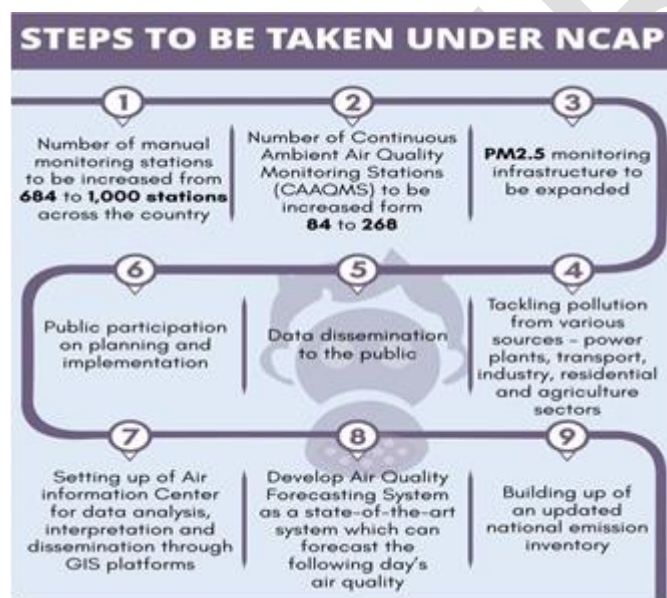
NATIONAL CLEAN AIR PROGRAMME

Why in news?

- Recently, the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has released draft of National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) proposing multiple strategies to reduce air pollution

About the programme

- The programme involves various steps to be taken by the government (**see figure**)
- Earlier the environment ministry had announced its targets of 35% reduction of air pollution in the next three years and 50% reduction in the next five years for at least the 100 identified non-attainment cities across India.
- A non-attainment city is considered to have air quality worse than the **National Ambient Air Quality Standards**.
- However, no reference of these targets is there in latest released document by the Ministry.



UN WORLD WATER DEVELOPMENT REPORT

Why in news?

- Recently UN World Water Development Report 2018 was released titled **Nature-based solutions (NBS) for water**.

More on news

- The report aims to address contemporary water management challenges across all sectors, and particularly regarding water for agriculture, sustainable cities, disaster risk reduction and water quality.
- The world is facing immense water-related challenges such as
 - o Tremendous **increase in water demand** due to increasing population
 - o **Water scarcity** due to impact of climate change on global water cycle with wet regions generally becoming wetter and dry regions drier
 - o **Decreasing water quality** due to water pollution by discharge of industrial and municipal wastewater.

What are Nature-based Solutions?

- These are solutions that are inspired and supported by nature and use, or mimic, natural processes to address societal challenges effectively and simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits.
- NBS are designed to address major societal challenges, such as food security, climate change, water security, human health, disaster risk, social and economic development.

Role of NBS in addressing water problems:

- **Managing water availability** through ecosystem-friendly forms of water storage (natural wetlands, soil moisture, efficient recharge of groundwater) and environmental-friendly agricultural practices like conservation tillage rather than traditional grey infrastructure such as dams.

- **Managing water quality through proper management of forests**, wetlands, grasslands, soils and crops for reducing sediment loadings, capturing and retaining pollutants, and recycling nutrients and reduction of non-point (diffuse) source pollution from agriculture by rehabilitating ecosystem services that enable soils to improve nutrient management.
- **Managing water-related risks and disasters, such as floods and droughts:** NBS for flood management can involve water retention by managing infiltration and overland flow, and thereby making space for water storage through floodplains.
- **Enhancing water security:** by improving water availability and water quality while simultaneously reducing water-related risks and generating additional social, economic and environmental co-benefits.

Challenges and limitations

- There remains a historical inertia against NBS due to the continuing overwhelming dominance of grey infrastructure solutions.
- NBS often require cooperation among multiple institutions and stakeholders, something that can be difficult to achieve.
- There is a lack of awareness, communication and knowledge at all levels, from communities to regional planners and national policy makers, of what NBS can really offer. Lack of understanding of how to integrate green and grey infrastructure at scale, and an overall lack of capacity to implement NBS in the context of water.
- There are limits to how NBS can perform. For example, NBS options for industrial wastewater treatment depend on the pollutant type and its loading.
- While some small-scale NBS applications can be low- or no-cost,

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some applications, particularly at large scale, can require large investments.

Way forward

- **Leveraging financing:** there is a need of redirecting and making more effective use of existing financing. The emerging ‘green bond’ market can be tapped.
- **Creating an enabling regulatory and legal environment:** Rather than making drastic changes in regulatory regimes, NBS can be promoted effectively through existing frameworks. Identifying where and how NBS can support existing planning approaches at different levels can be a useful first step in this process.
- **Improving cross-sectoral collaboration** through better harmonization of policies across economic, environmental and social agenda.
- **Improving the knowledge base** on NBS, through more rigorous research.

STATE OF GLOBAL CLIMATE REPORT, 2017

Why in News?

- **World Meteorological Organization (WMO)** recently released its **State of the Global Climate in 2017**.

World Meteorological Organization

- It is a **specialized agency** of the **United Nations (UN)**.
- It is the **UN system's authoritative voice** on the state and behaviour of the Earth's atmosphere, its interaction with the land and oceans, the weather and climate it produces and the resulting distribution of water resources.

Major Points of the Report

- **2017** was **2nd warmest year** on record after 2016, and the **warmest non-EL Nino year**.
- The 2013-17 was the **warmest five-year average** on record.
- **Global sea surface temperatures** were ranked as the third warmest, as they were somewhat below the levels of 2015 & 2016.
- Total global disaster losses from climate-related events in 2017 stood at US\$ 320 billion making 2017 the most expensive year on record.
- **Cryosphere** continued to shrink, with Arctic and Antarctic sea ice well below average. Cryosphere is the frozen water part of the Earth which includes the continental ice sheets found in Greenland and Antarctica, as well as ice caps, glaciers, and areas of snow and permafrost. It also includes frozen parts of the ocean, such as waters surrounding Antarctica and the Arctic and frozen rivers and lakes, which mainly occur in polar areas.
- **Ocean acidification** continued with seawater pH progressively falling from values above 8.10 in the early 1980s to between 8.04 and 8.09 in the last five years.

INTERSTITIUM: THE LATEST ORGAN DISCOVERED IN HUMAN BODY

Context: Scientists have discovered a new organ in the human body which they have dubbed the ‘interstitium’.

About Interstitium:

- The new organ is known as the Interstitium and it is found everywhere in our bodies, acting as a shock absorber in all places where tissues are moved or subjected to force.
- It lies beneath the top layer of skin, but is also in tissue layers lining the gut, lungs, blood vessels, and muscles. The organ is a network of interconnected, fluid-filled spaces all over the body.
- Scientists say, it may even be one of the largest organs in the body. The organ acts like a shock absorber in all places where tissues are moved or subjected to force.

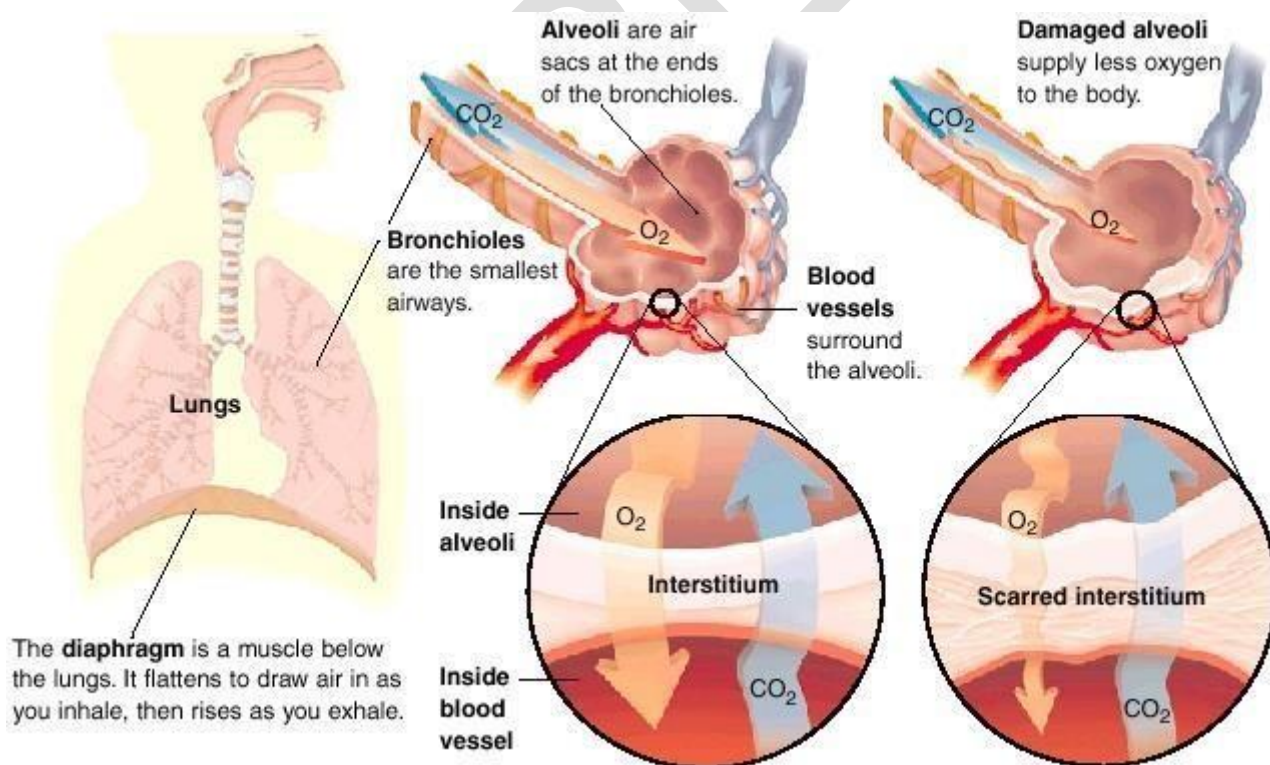
over the body and is made up of both strong (collagen) and flexible (elastin) connective tissue proteins, with interstitial fluid moving throughout.

Functions of the organ:

- Interstitial spaces are organized by a collagen “mesh”, can shrink, expand, and “may thus serve as shock absorbers.”
- These “dynamically compressible and distensible sinuses” act as thoroughfares to transport critical fluids within organs and around the body.
- The Interstitium plays an important role in carrying lymph, the clear fluid that also travels through lymphatic vessels and supports immunity.

Significance of the discovery:

The discovery of the fluid ‘highway’ could help to explain how cancer spreads in the body, and pave



the way for new ways to detect and treat the disease.

WHAT IS THE ORGAN MADE OF?

- The organ is a network of interconnected, fluid-filled spaces all

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CIMON (CREW INTERACTIVE MOBILE COMPANION)

What is it?

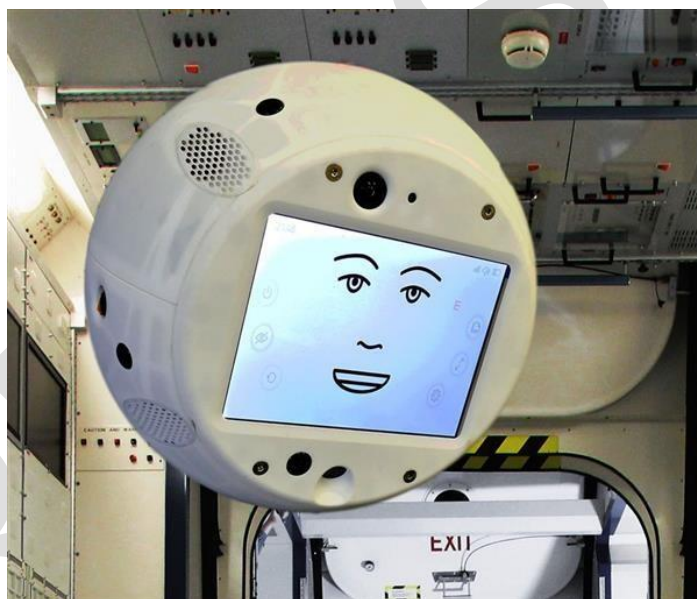
- Airbus, an aeronautics company based in Netherlands, is developing CIMON (Crew Interactive Mobile Companion), an AI-based space assistant for Germany's DLR Space Administration.

Context:

- Described by its creators as a “flying brain”, this 3D-printed artificial intelligence system will soon join the crew aboard the International Space Station (ISS) to assist astronauts. It will be tested during the European Space Agency's Horizons mission between June and October this year.

About CIMON:

- CIMON will be the first AI-based mission and flight assistance system. The entire structure of CIMON is made up of plastic and metal, created using 3D printing.
- CIMON has a brain-like AI network and is designed to support astronauts in performing routine work, for example by displaying procedures or offering solutions to problems. With its face, voice and artificial intelligence, becomes a genuine ‘colleague’ on board.
- Applications: With CIMON, crew members can do more than just work through a schematic view of prescribed checklists and procedures; they can also engage with their assistant. CIMON makes work easier for the astronauts when carrying out every day routine tasks, helps to increase efficiency, facilitates mission success and improves security, as it can also serve as an early warning system for technical problems.



PARKER SOLAR PROBE

Context:

- NASA is inviting people around the world to submit their names online to be placed on a microchip aboard NASA's historic Parker Solar Probe mission launching in summer 2018.
- Parker Solar Probe is part of NASA's Living with a Star Program, or LWS, to explore aspects of the Sun-Earth system that directly affect life and society.

The mission:

- Parker Solar Probe will swoop to within 4 million miles of the sun's surface, facing heat and radiation like no spacecraft before it. Launching in 2018, Parker Solar Probe will provide new data on solar activity and make critical contributions to our ability to forecast major space-weather events that impact life on Earth.
- The primary science goals for the mission are to trace the flow of energy and understand the heating of the solar corona and to explore what accelerates the solar wind. Parker Solar Probe provides a statistical survey of the outer corona.

Parker Solar Probe has three detailed science objectives:

- Trace the flow of energy that heats and accelerates the solar corona and solar wind.
- Determine the structure and dynamics of the plasma and magnetic fields at the sources of the solar wind.
- Explore mechanisms that accelerate and transport energetic particles.

Background:

- Understanding the Sun has always been a top priority for space scientists. Studying how the Sun affects space and the space environment of planets is the field known as heliophysics. The field is not only vital to understanding Earth's most important and life-sustaining star, it supports exploration in the solar system and beyond.

1 LAUNCH DATE
Between July 31 and August 19, 2018 from Kennedy Space Centre in Florida

2 ARRIVING AT SUN 2024
The spacecraft will fly through the sun's atmosphere to within 3.7 million miles – seven times closer than any spacecraft has come before
At its closest approach, it will hit 430,000 mph – travelling close to the distance from Nottingham to London (118 miles) every second

THE PROBE
Weight: 1,350lb
Length: 9ft 10in

Magnetometers will measure electric and magnetic fields, radio emissions and shock waves

SUN FACTS
The probe will experience temperatures of 1,400C. At its core the sun reaches 15million C
Average diameter: 864,000 miles, about 109 times the size of the Earth
Composition: Hydrogen, helium
Sunlight takes 8 minutes to reach Earth

Solar panels power the probe and retract when close to sun

High-gain antenna to transmit data via a radio signal

Electromagnetic wave antenna measures radio emissions of the sun and solar winds

Thermal shield to protect instruments is 8ft in diameter and made of 4.5in thick carbon-composite

A detector will gather solar wind particles

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NEWTON-BHABHA FUND FOR ARSENIC RESEARCH IN GANGA BASIN

Context:

- An India-UK Joint Team has won the Newton-Bhabha Fund for a project on Groundwater Arsenic Research in Ganga River Basin.

Key facts:

- The Newton Bhabha Fund, provided by the British Council, aims to bring together the UK and Indian scientific research and innovation sectors to find joint solutions to the challenges facing India in economic development and social welfare.
- The team members involved with the project will try to assess how the problem of arsenic poisoning can get aggravated in the next 25 to 30 years and influence groundwater management practices and suggest water remedial technologies accordingly.

Arsenic in groundwater:

Arsenic in ground water is a geogenic contaminant i.e. caused by natural geologic processes.

- Arsenic-containing groundwater in Ganga River basin is hosted by the sediments deposited by the rivers during the late Quaternary or Holocene age (<12 thousand years). Incidence of high arsenic in groundwater reported from various parts of the country, particularly in the Ganga- plains is a serious threat to the health of human being.
- Over the last three decades numerous measures have been initiated which includes alternate arrangement for supply of arsenic free water to the affected populace and providing arsenic removal plants.
- Arsenic occurrences in ground water in these areas is highly sporadic in nature and all the sources in these areas are not necessarily contaminated.

Way ahead:

Technological options to combat arsenic menace,

in groundwater, to ensure supply of arsenic free water, in the affected areas can be in-situ remediation of arsenic from aquifer system, ex-situ remediation of arsenic from tapped groundwater by arsenic removal technologies, use of surface water source as an alternative to the contaminated groundwater source, tapping alternate safe aquifers for supply of arsenic free groundwater or combination of above techniques.

What is Newton Bhabha?

- The Newton Bhabha Fund aims to bring together the UK and Indian scientific research and innovation sectors to find joint solutions to the challenges facing India in economic development and social welfare.
- How it works:
 - People: building skills and capacity through training and people exchanges;
 - Programmes: research collaboration on development topics;
 - Translation: taking innovation from universities to industry.
- What it does:
 - Sustainable Cities and Rapid Urbanisation
 - Public Health and Well being
 - Energy Water Food Nexus



**Newton-Bhabha
Fund**

400 Crore Rupees over
5 years

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INDIA'S FIRST COASTAL POLICING ACADEMY

Context:

- The Union home ministry has sanctioned the launch of the National Academy of Coastal Policing (NACP) from a campus of Gujarat's Fisheries Research Centre located in coastal Okha in the newly created Devbhoomi Dwarka district.

Key facts:

- ***It will be the country's first national academy to train police forces in effectively safeguarding the Indian shoreline.*** It will sharpen the response and skills of the marine forces of multiple states which have sea lines.
- The first-of-its-kind institution of the country will be ***created and run by a multi-agency team of paramilitary and defence forces.***
- The Union home ministry's policing think tank — the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPRD) — will pilot the establishment and running of the academy.
- The Border Security Force (BSF), that guards the Indian frontier in Gujarat with Pakistan, the navy and the Coast Guard will form the core to run the academy. The BSF will also provide security to the campus which on the Arabian Sea coast and is at a flying distance from the Pakistan coast.
- The navy and the Coast Guard will help design “the training curriculum, providing skilled trainers and ensuring access to jetties and boats” for the trainees of the academy.
- The academy, that will have faculty from the Navy, Coast Guard and the BSF, will train police personnel and other security agencies staff in maritime laws, seamanship, boat work, navigation, weapons handling, usage of sea guidance and surveillance gadgets and survival skills for long haul

operations on the sea or during distress times when they may get stranded in these waters running up to 12 nautical miles from the shore.

Significance of the academy:

- India has a vast coastline of 7,516 kms touching 13 states and union territories (UTs). It also has around 1,197 islands. There is no institute in the country that trains marine or coastal police forces in these subjects in a professional manner.
- That is why the academy will be first-ever and the best practises of various agencies like the navy, the BSF and the Coast Guard will be borrowed by it for teaching purposes. Also, the academy was specially required since India faced its major sea-borne terror attack in November 2008 in Mumbai.

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ARMED FORCES (SPECIAL POWERS) ACT (AFSPA), 1958

Context:

- The government has informed the Lok Sabha that it was considering a proposal to make the AFSPA Act more “operationally effective and humane.” The AFSPA is in force in several northeastern States.
- The decision came after the Home Ministry decided to reduce the number of Central Armed Police Force personnel deployed in the northeastern States.

What is AFSPA?

- AFSPA, enacted in 1958, gives powers to the army and state and central police forces to shoot to kill, search houses and destroy any property that is “likely” to be used by insurgents in areas declared as “disturbed” by the home ministry.
- The Act provides army personnel with safeguards against malicious, vindictive and frivolous prosecution. Security forces can “arrest without warrant” a person, who has committed or even “about to commit a cognizable offence” even on “reasonable suspicion”.

What are ‘disturbed’ areas?

- The state or central government considers those areas as ‘disturbed’ “by reason of differences or disputes between members of different religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities.”

How is a region declared ‘disturbed’?

- Section (3) of the Afspa empowers the governor of the state or Union territory to issue an official notification in The Gazette of India, following which the Centre has the authority to send in armed forces for civilian aid.

- Once declared ‘disturbed’, the region has to maintain status quo for a minimum of three months, according to The Disturbed Areas (Special Courts) Act, 1976.”

What is state government’s role?

- The state governments can suggest whether the act is required to be enforced or not.
- But under Section (3) of the act, their opinion can be overruled by the governor or the Centre.

What are the arguments for Afspa?

- The army is opposed to the withdrawal of Afspa. Many argue that removal of the act will lead to demoralising the armed forces and see militants motivating locals to file lawsuits against the army.

What do detractors say?

- Critics say the undemocratic act has failed to contain terrorism and restore normalcy in disturbed areas, as the number of armed groups has gone up after the act was established. Many even hold it responsible for the spiralling violence in areas it is in force.
- The justice **Jeevan Reddy Committee** was set up in **2005** to review Afspa and make recommendations. It recommended that Afspa should be repealed and the Unlawful Activities Protection Act strengthened to fight militancy. However, no steps were taken to repeal or reform the act.

CHIPKO MOVEMENT

Context: Google on March

26th commemorated the 45th year of the Chipko movement.

What is Chipko movement?

- Chipko, signifying 'embrace or hug', was the strategy of hundreds of villagers –*mostly women- in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand*, to save the forest cover on the Garhwal Himalyas.
- Reckless felling of trees on the hill slopes was having a devastating effect on the livelihood of the villagers. The floods in 1970, when the Alakananda River broke its banks, led to massive landslides that blocked the river and washed away hundreds of hamlets downstream.
- Widespread protests followed in the early 70s, when villagers led by **Chandi Prasad Bhatt**, a Gandhian, literally embraced the trees to save them from the woodcutters' axe.

Background:

- The original Chipko andolan dates back to the 18th century and was started by Rajasthan's **Bishnoi** community. The incident has been etched in the annals of history for the sacrifice of a group of villagers, who led by a lady named Amrita Devi, laid down their lives while protecting trees from being felled on the orders of then King of Jodhpur. After this incident, the king, in a royal decree, banned cutting of trees in all Bishnoi villages.

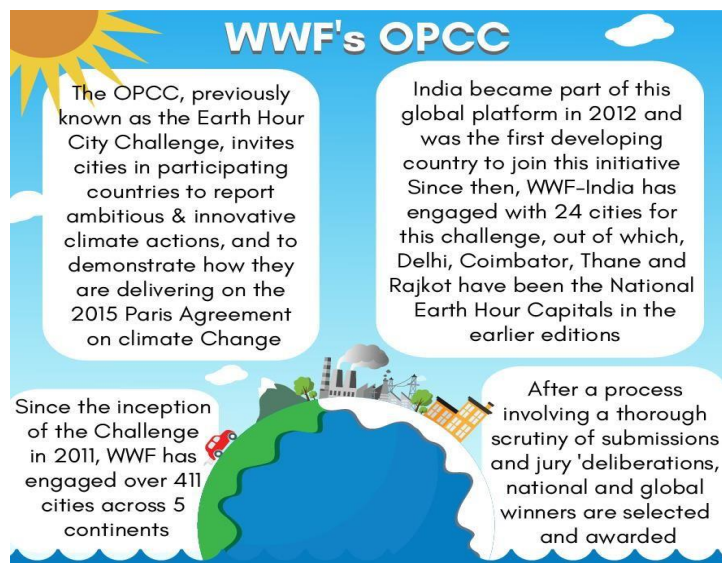
ONE PLANET ONE CITY CHALLENGE OF WWF

Why in news?

Recently 3 Indian cities have been selected as national finalists in the 2017-18 edition of WWF's One Planet City Challenge (OPCC).

More about the news

- World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) works in collaboration with **ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability** (a global network of more than 1,500 cities, towns and regions committed to building a sustainable future) to mobilize cities to participate in the One Planet City Challenge.
- The three cities Panaji, Pune and Rajkot that are among cities in India's Smart City Mission, will now compete for the title of National and Global Winner.
- Given the increasing urbanization in India, cities have a significant role in providing solutions for mitigating carbon emissions as well as preparing for climate resilient development.



World Wildlife Fund for Nature

- It is an **international non-governmental organization** founded in 1961, working in the field of the wilderness preservation, and the reduction of human impact on the environment.
- The **Living Planet Report** is published every two years by WWF.
- Earth Hour is organized by the WWF. The event is held worldwide annually encouraging individuals, communities, households and businesses to turn off their non-essential lights for one hour, from 8:30 to 9:30 p.m. towards the end of March, as a symbol for their commitment to the planet.

E-WASTE (MANAGEMENT) AMENDMENT RULES, 2018

Why in News?

- Recently, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) amended the earlier E-Waste Management Rules, 2016.

Highlights of new rules

- It aims to **formalise the e- waste recycling sector** by channelizing the E-waste generated towards authorized dismantlers and recyclers.
- Phase wise Collection:** It introduced the phase-wise collection targets for e- waste, which shall be 10% of the quantity of waste generation as indicated in the EPR Plan during 2017-18, with a 10% increase every year until 2023. After 2023 onwards, the target has been made 70% of the quantity of waste generation as indicated in the EPR Plan.
- Separate **e-waste collection targets** have been drafted for new producers, i.e., those producers whose number of years of sales operation is less than the average lives of their products.
- Reduction of Hazardous Substances (RoHS):** Under this, cost for sampling and testing shall be borne by the government for conducting the RoHS test and if the product does not comply with RoHS provisions the cost will be borne by the Producers.
- Producer Responsibility Organizations (PROs)** shall apply to the Central Pollution Control board (CPCB) for registration to undertake activities prescribed in the Rules.
- It covered even components and spare parts of electric & electronic equipments. Mercury containing lamps like CFLs were also included.
- It has the **interest-bearing Deposit Refund Scheme** charged by the producer to the consumer at the time of purchase.
- It introduced Pan India EPR Authorization by CPCB replacing the state wise EPR authorization.

About E-waste (Management) Rules, 2016

- It is applicable to all the stakeholders such as Producer Responsibility Organisations, Consumers, Dismantlers, Recyclers, Dealers, Manufacturers etc.
- It adopted **collection mechanism-based approach** which includes collection centre, collection point, and take back system etc. for collection by Producers under EPR.

BIO-MEDICAL WASTE MANAGEMENT RULES, 2018

Why in news?

Recently, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change released the amendments to Bio-medical Waste Management Rules.

Context

- Government had notified Bio-medical Waste Management Rules in 1998 under the **Environment Protection Act 1986** which were later amended twice in 2000 and 2003.
- In 2016 government notified revamped **Bio-medical Waste (BMW) Management Rules 2016** to enhance, widen and bring a comprehensive regime for **bio- waste management**.
- The latest amendments have been further introduced to improve compliance and strengthen the implementation of environmentally sound management of biomedical waste.

What is Bio-medical Waste?

- Bio-medical waste consists of any waste which is generated during diagnosis, treatment or immunisation of human beings or animals or in research activities.
- It includes syringes, needles, cotton swabs, vials that may contain bodily liquids and spread infections.
- It has been found that only 15% of the bio-medical waste that is generated is hazardous. However, all the waste needs to be treated.

Features of Bio-medical Waste Management (Amendment) Rules 2018

- Bio-medical waste generators i.e. hospitals, clinics, vaccination camps etc. will now be required to phase out the use of **chlorinated plastic bags** and gloves by **March 2019**.
- Common biomedical waste treatment facility (CBMWTF) shall **establish GPS and Bar coding facility** in accordance with

guidelines issued by the **CPCB**.

- **Pre-treatment of Bio-medical waste** – Every occupier of health care facility needs to pre-treat the laboratory waste, microbiological waste, blood samples etc. on-site in accordance with **guidelines on safe management of wastes from health care activities by WHO and WHO Blue Book 2014** and then send it to CBMWTF for final disposal. This will ensure that the toxic discharge such as infectious liquid waste is not discharged into the sewerage network.
- All healthcare facilities shall provide **annual report on its website** within two years of the publication of the amended rules.

Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)

- It is a statutory organisation which was constituted in 1974 and was entrusted with the powers and functions under the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981.
- Main functions of CPCB is to -
 - Promote cleanliness of streams and wells in different areas of the States by prevention, control and abatement of water pollution
 - to improve the quality of air and to prevent, control or abate air pollution in the country.

Features of Bio-medical Waste Management Rules 2016

- **Widened jurisdiction** – The ambit of the rules was widened to include vaccination camps, blood donation camps, surgical camps etc.
- **Pre-treatment of waste** – Waste generated in laboratories, microbiological waste, blood samples and blood bags to be

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pre- treated through disinfection or sterilisation on-site in the manner as prescribed by WHO or NACO.

- **Better segregation** – Bio-medical waste has been classified into 4 categories instead of 10 namely – Untreated human anatomical waste, Animal anatomical waste, Soiled waste and Biotechnology waste.
- **Bar-code system** for bags or containers to be established containing bio-medical waste for disposal.
- **Training and Immunisation** – Regular training to all its health care workers and immunising all health workers.
- **Stringent pollution norms** for incinerator to reduce the emission of pollutants in environment including the emission limits for Dioxins and furans.
- Phasing out of use of chlorinated plastic bags, gloves and blood bags **within 2 years**.
- **Procedure of Disposal** –The biomedical waste must be segregated in **coloured bags according to the category of the waste**. It can be **stored up till 48hrs** after which it is either needed to be **treated at in- situ site** or collected by the worker from CBMWTF.

STEPHEN HAWKING

Why in news

- Recently, a known theoretical physicist of his time, Stephen Hawking passed away at the age of 76.
- He suffered from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS (also known as Lou Gehrig's disease).

Contribution of Stephen Hawking

Hawking-Penrose theorem / Big Bang Theory

- Sir Roger Penrose and Stephen Hawking in 1970** proved in a theorem that Einstein's General Relativity must break down at a certain point in Space-time under certain generic physical conditions. This point is called 'Singularity' which inside a Black Hole indicate towards the beginning of the Universe. Big Bang is now the most widely accepted theory of the origin of the universe.

Information Paradox, or Hawking Paradox,

- By using Quantum Mechanics in the General Relativistic realm, he showed that Black Holes can radiate and has temperature. Emission is similar to something escaping from Black Holes. He also showed that because of the emission of this thermal radiation or **Hawking Radiation**, the black hole would lose energy and eventually disappear or “evaporate”.
 - If the paradox is true, it would require some radical revision of physics as it left two pillars of modern physics quantum mechanics and Einstein's general theory of relativity irreconcilable.
 - This could also open a path towards the final unified theory of Physics called 'Quantum Gravity' or more popularly 'The Theory of Everything'.

Hawking-Hurtle state

- Hawking with colleague James Hurtle developed a Quantum Mechanical model of the Universe that says the Universe is self-contained (like Earth surface which has no starting point) but has No Boundary (We

can't fall from the edge of Earth). So Universe is finite but boundary-less (Like Earth surface having finite area but no edge).

Breakthrough Initiative

- It was launched by Russian tech investor **Yuri Milner** and cosmologist **Stephen Hawking**, to explore the Universe, seek scientific evidence of life beyond Earth. Various component of initiative are:
 - Breakthrough Listen Project:** It's a \$100 million program of astronomical observations to survey one million stars, the galactic plane and 100 neighbouring galaxies in the search for intelligent life.
 - Breakthrough Message:** It's a \$1 million competition to design a message representing Earth, life and humanity that could potentially be understood by another civilization.
 - Breakthrough Watch:** It's multi-million dollar astronomical program to develop Earth- and space-based technologies that can find Earth-like planets in our cosmic neighborhood – and try to establish whether they host life.
 - Breakthrough Starshot:** It's a \$100 million research and engineering program aiming to demonstrate proof of concept for a new technology, enabling ultra-light unmanned space flight at 20% of the speed of light and to lay the foundations for a flyby mission to Alpha Centauri within a generation

GSAT-6A

Why in news

Recently, GSAT-6A was launched on board the GSLV F08, from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre at Sriharikota.

Highlight

- Launch marked the **12th flight of Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle GSLV- F08** and sixth flight with the **indigenous Cryogenic upper stage**.
- GSAT-6A, similar to GSAT-6, is a high-powered **S- band communication** satellite which would help improve mobile communications to handheld devices, as well as network management techniques useful in satellite- based mobile communication applications.
- However, **ISRO lost contact with its communication satellite GSAT-6A**.



The GSAT-6A is scheduled to be launched from Sriharikota in Andhra Pradesh on march 29. (ISRO)

AIMING HIGH

- ▶ GSAT-6A, similar to GSAT-6, is a high power S-band communication satellite
- ▶ It is designated for the use of the Armed Forces
- ▶ Mission Life: 10 years
- ▶ Handheld ground terminals

The satellite will help demonstrate to and develop technologies like:

- ▶ Unfurling of a 6 metre S-Band antenna
- ▶ Network management techniques useful in satellite based mobile communication application

MICRO-LED: THE NEXT-GEN DISPLAY TECHNOLOGY

Why in news?

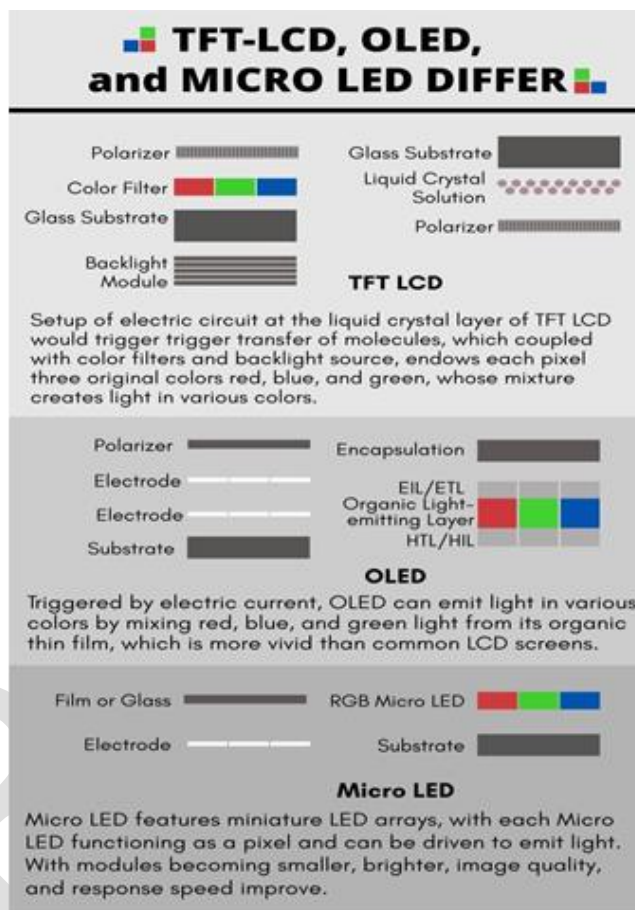
Samsung recently demonstrated a prototype MicroLED based TV of 146 inches display.

About MicroLED

- It is an emerging flat panel display technology in which displays consist of arrays of microscopic LEDs forming the individual pixel elements.
- These are simply traditional LEDs shrunk down and placed into an array. The LED technology is not new but manufacturing a panel array using such tiny components is very difficult and currently not commercially viable over OLED.

OLEDs and MicroLEDs

- OLEDs are self-emissive, which means they require no backlight; instead, it lights each individual pixel as needed. Like OLED, Micro LED too don't need backlight.
- OLEDs are made of organic materials that age, resulting in a decrease in luminance over time, with the potential for uneven ageing. MicroLEDs being inorganic (gallium nitride) are not as susceptible to ageing.
- This switch from organic to inorganic also reduces the need for a polarizing and encapsulation layer, making panels thinner.
- The OLED manufacturing process also limits the possible screen shapes and sizes. The MicroLED technology are “modular” in nature which are flexible to configure any size.
- MicroLEDs are more power-efficient than OLEDs



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ORGAN DONATION

Organ donation is when a person allows an organ of theirs to be removed legally either by consent while the donor is alive or after death with the assent of the next of kin. This donation may be for research, or, for transplantation into another person. Some organs and tissues can be donated by living donors, such as a kidney or part of the liver etc. while most donations occur after the donor has died.

Ethical Issues Involved in organ transplantation

- **Justice versus benefit in allocation:** Due to shortage of donors, the question of who should get the organs - the one who is the sickest or the one who is waiting for long, or the one who can get benefited the most or to the richest person in queue – becomes an ethical dilemma
- **Individual beliefs system:** The treatment of body and its parts after death has great significance for an individual not only for religious and spiritual reasons, but also in terms of cultural and social perspectives.
- **Monetizing body parts:** Selling an organ for the need of money raises question of ethics and exploitation of poor sections. There are countries like Iran where buying a Kidney is legal.
- **Coercion:** In India, opt-in system is followed and only the willing donors can donate their organs but several times it is found that women have been forced to donate their organs to the male family members.
- **Non-informed donation:** Scandals of trafficking of organs raise issues regarding informed consent of the donor.
- **Potential risks of donation:** At times, donors are unaware of the potential risks and aftereffects they may undergo. The well-being of donor needs to be placed above than the recipient.
- **Non-universality:** The development and use of technology related to organ and tissue

transplants is quite expensive and beyond the means of many people.

Regardless of these issues, there are various positive values attached to organ donation as well:

- **Altruism:** the act of donation is a selfless act of giving a valuable thing to other
- **Saving of life:** Organ donation of a dead or dying part gives the gift of a new life to the receiver.

However, due to complex ethical issues involved in organ donation, the Government must try to regulate it. People should be encouraged to donate in case the benefits to patient and society is more than the harms to the donor. The step towards altruistic donation is good because it can check organ trafficking, as well as those who have to sell their organs out of poverty. The living donor should be tested psychologically as well to find out whether the consent is coerced or genuine. There should also be an opt-out system where people who are not willing to donate their organs might make a will about it.

VANDALISM

Vandalism is an offence that occurs when a person or group of people **willingly destroy or deface public or private property without the permission of the owner**. The acts of vandalism may include burning shops, destroying vehicles, breaking windows, defacing billboards, or destructing public buildings, railway lines, etc. The cases of Vandalism have increased a lot in recent days such as destroying the statue of Lenin and Periyar, railway line destruction during Jat agitation, burning of buses during Padmavati movie protests etc. In India, Vandalism is a criminal offence which comes within the ambit of **Prevention of damage to Public Property Act, 1984 and Section 425 of IPC** which terms it as 'creating Mischief'.

Ethical issues involved in vandalism

- **Reduced social cohesion:** It may lead to **social tensions** in the society. Destruction of statues of leaders like Ambedkar, Periyar, or incidents like Babri Masjid demolition divides the society on caste and religious lines. The effects of such acts are long term.
- **Destroying common good:** Generally public property faces more destruction due to act of vandalism. This indirectly involves wastage of hard-earned taxpayers' money.
- **Mindless and permanent damage:** The purpose behind such acts may or may not be successful, but the loss is permanent e.g. the Jat reservation Agitation paralysed the whole machinery for several days and led to mindless destruction of public property but the outcome is not according to the will of the protestors.
- **Psychological effects** over minorities, women, children and other affected people. The recent vandalism over release of Padmavati movie led to bad impression over innocent minds of school going children. Several women got molested and passerby got abused during such acts of

vandalism.

- **Impacts sanctity of a place:** Vandalism may lead to destruction of precious art and art forms. It destroys the aesthetic beauty of ancient inscriptions, and permanent damage to the monuments. The act of writing over walls of monuments, defacing the idol, spitting of chewed tobacco etc. are examples of such vandalism.
- **Legitimizes aggression:** because such acts generally go unpunished and are usually done in groups.
- **Reduces trust in the system:** When system is not able to stabilize such acts immediately and muscle power is able to silence critics the trust of people gets affected.
- **Represent degrading values:** Such acts represent the failure of society and education system as a whole, because they were unable to impart the basic virtues of respect, compassion, peace, and resolution of issues through dialogue mechanism.
- **Lack of patience and tolerance:** It shows lack of patience in getting justice or meeting their demands through proper channels.

Vandalism even for the sake of valid reasons cannot be justified because it represents lack of faith in judicial systems and constitutional provisions, unscientific temperament, creation of panic and chaos in the society, disrespect for heritage, and violation of fundamental rights of privacy, choice and movement of other people.