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1. GS PAPER 1

Indian Culture And Heritage

Sant Ravidas Jayanti

In News

- Sant Ravidas Jayanti was recently celebrated on 19th February. This year is said to be the 642nd birth anniversary of Guru Ravidas.
- Guru Ravidas is a North Indian mystic poet of the bhakti movement. While the exact year of his birth is not known, it is believed that the saint was born in 1377 C.E.
- Guru Ravidas Jayanti is celebrated on Magh Purnima, which is the full moon day in the Hindu calendar month of Magha.
- The saint was said to have been born in the village of Seer Goverdhanpur which is located near Uttar Pradesh's Varanasi. His birthplace has now been named Shri Guru Ravidas Janam Asthan and has become a major place of pilgrimage for the followers of Guru Ravidas.
- Notably, he belonged to an untouchable caste and suffered a lot of atrocities as a result. However, the saint chose to focus on spiritual pursuits and also penned several devotional songs which made a huge impact in the Bhakti movement during the 14th to 16th century CE.
- Guru Ravidas spoke against the caste divisions and spoke of removing them to promote unity. The Adi Granth of Sikhs, in addition to the Panchvani are the two of the oldest documented sources of the literary works of Guru Ravidas.
- His teachings resonated with the people, leading to a religion being born called the Ravidassia Dharam. He taught about the omnipresence of God and said that a human soul is a particle of God and hence Ravidas rejected the idea that people considered lower caste cannot meet God. He said in his teachings that the only way to meet God was to free the mind from the duality.

Bharat Rang Mahotsav

In News

- The Ministry of Culture recently inaugurated Bharat Rang Mahotsav, the 21 day long nationwide theatre speactacle in New Delhi.
- Bharat Rang Mahotsav (BRM), the annual international theatre festival of India organized by the National School of Drama (NSD), was established two decades ago to stimulate the growth and development of theatre across India.
- Originally a national festival showcasing the work of the most creative theatre workers in India, BRM has evolved to international scope, hosting theatre groups from around the world, and is now the largest theatre festival of Asia.
- The National School of Drama (NSD) is an ***autonomous institution under the Ministry of Culture***. The 20th BRM comes with 111 national and international acts in its basket that includes folk and other traditional theatre forms, invitee plays, and productions by the students of the National School of Drama.
- Apart from New Delhi, NSD has arranged parallel festivals of the 20th BRM in Dibrugarh, Varanasi, Ranchi, Mysore and Rajkot.

Ghumot – Goa's Heritage Instrument

In News

- Art and Culture Ministry of Goa informed that the government will soon notify Ghumot as state's heritage instrument.
- Traditionally, ghumot, **a percussion instrument** played during Ganesh Chaturthi 'aarties' (prayers), is fashioned as **a designed clay pot, with the skin of the monitor lizard** (locally known as 'gaar') stretched taut across the pot's mouth, forming a drumhead.
- Monitor lizards are classified as an **endangered wildlife species** listed in **Schedule I of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972** because of which ghumot was banned by the state forest department.
- However, recently there has been a rise in interest in the musical instrument after its makers started replacing monitor lizard skin with the skin of a she-goat.

International Conference on Guru Padmasambhava

In News

- Celebrating 50-years of formalization of diplomatic ties between India and Bhutan, a two-day international conference on 8th century Himalayan sage Guru Padmasambhava was held in New Delhi that saw the participation of distinguished scholars from both countries.
- The conference was organised by the **Centre for Escalation of Peace (CEP)** and was titled **'Life and Legacy of Guru Padmasambhava**'. Scholars from both countries discussed the Guru who was born in India and **moved towards Bhutan in the 8th century to spread Buddhism** and Buddhist teachings all across the Himalayan region.
- The seminar has been organized as a part of a series of events that are being organised to celebrate India-Bhutan friendship
- Guru Padmasambhava, also referred to as **Guru Rinpoche,** was born in India and is highly respected in Bhutan. His imprint is seen everywhere in Bhutan as there is an image or painting of the guru in every Bhutanese home or temple
- Parallel to the conference, an art exhibition, showcasing rare artefacts associated with Guru Padmasambhava, was also held.
- **Thangka paintings**, sculptures and photographs portrayed the life and teachings of the Guru, who is also known as **the second Buddha** as he played a very crucial role in spreading Buddhism in North-East India, Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet.

Protection of Maithili Language

In News

- A committee constituted in 2018 for preparing a report for **Promotion and Protection of Maithili Language And Its Scripts** has submitted its report to Ministry of Human Resource Development.
- A major recommendation by the committee is to **establish a Script and Manuscript Centre at Darbhanga** in either Kameshwar Singh Sanskrit University or at the Lalit Narayan Mithila University.
- It also suggested early completion of the work affecting Unicode Scripts of Mithilakshar by Technology Development of Indian Languages (TDIL) and **creating audio-visual teaching materials for teaching the mithilakshar scripts**.

History of Maithili

- Maithili is a **Bihari language of the eastern sub-group of the Indo-Aryan branch**. Bhojpuri and Magadhi are closely related to the language.
- The language is claimed to have **developed from the Magadhan Prakrit**. It was the **literary language of all of eastern India during the medieval period**.
- This language was **popularised in fourteenth century by poet Vidyapati** and solidified the importance of the languag**e in literature.**

Mithilakshar

- Mithilakshar or Tirhuta is the script of broader cultural Mithila. Mithilakshar, Bangla, Assamese, Nebari, Odia and Tibetan are a part of the same family of scripts.
- It is an ancient script and is one of the scripts of the broader North Eastern India. Mithilakshar emerged as a language in 10 Century AD. The oldest form of the language was found in Sahodara stone inscriptions of 950 AD. Afterwards, the scripts has been used throughout Mithila from Champaran to Deoghar.
- Use of this script has been on decline since last 100 years and therefore the culture is getting decimated. Because its own script is not being used, the Maithili language is getting developed in a composite manner despite having been accorded a constitutional status in the constitution.

Tagore Award for Cultural Harmony

In News

- The President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind, recently **presented the Tagore Award for Cultural Harmony** for the years 2014, 2015 and 2016.
- The awardees were selected by a jury headed by the Prime Minister and includes Chief Justice of India Justice Ranjan Gogoi, former Chief Election Commissioner Shri N Gopalaswami and the President of Indian Council for Cultural Relations Shri Vinay Sahasrabuddhe.
- Exponent of Manipuri dance **Shri Rajkumar Singhajit Singh** was given the award for the year 2014. He is **one of the greatest exponents of Manipuri dance** and has bridged this age-old art form of Manipur with not only modern sensibilities but with other parts of the country.
- **Chhayanaut,** a cultural organization of Bangladesh was given the award for 2015 for its role in the promotion of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore's works and Bangla arts.
- Renowned sculptor and scholar **Shri Ram Vanji Sutar** was given the award for 2016. He is a sculptor and scholar who represents an art tradition that goes back thousands of years to our ancient past. These days he is most well-known for the Statue of Unity.
- Tagore Award for Cultural Harmony was **instituted by the Government from 2012 during the commemoration of the 150th birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore**. It is **awarded annually** and carries an amount of one crore rupees, a citation, a plaque and an exquisite traditional handicraft or handloom item.
- **The award is a celebration of Indian traditions of culture and its civilisational wealth** – whether in literature or music, art or drama, sculpture or handicrafts, design or digital art. Each region in the country has a distinct cultural identity. Yet, in its essence, culture does not divide – it unites and harmonises all of India and all of humanity.

- India's multi-dimensional heritage was well reflected in the works of Gurudev. Rabindra Sangeet has all the colours of the country and it is not bound by a language. Tagore's teachings are timeless and the world stands to learn a great deal from his works.

Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards

In News

- In a ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhavan, the President awarded the Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards to a total of 42 artistes in five categories for the year 2017 for their contribution in various art forms.
- The Sangeet Natak Akademi was established by the then **Ministry of Education**, Government of India by a resolution as the National Academy of Music, Dance and Drama, and was inaugurated by the first President of India, Dr Rajendra Prasad in January, 1953.
- It was created as the apex body in the country for carrying out the task of preservation and promotion of the performing arts of India.
- One of the important activities of the Akademi has been to give recognition and honours to artists as it would help in setting standards in these arts and restore the art and artists to their rightful place in Independent India.
- The institution of Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards is now more than fifty years old and the large body of practitioners, gurus and scholars in the performing arts honoured by the Akademi represent the nation's highest achievement in music, dance and drama.
- The Awards in Hindustani and Carnatic music were instituted as early as 1951, even before the Akademi was set up and these were known as Presidential Awards. With the formation of the Akademi, the Awards came to be known as Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards, and the investiture became the responsibility of the Akademi.
- The Awards are recognized as the highest national honour conferred on practicing artistes, gurus and scholars, and have come to stay as the most coveted honours to which the artistes aspire.

Society

National Rural Economic Transformation Project (NRETP)

Syllabus: Poverty and Developmental Issues

In News

- The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister has approved the implementation of an externally pided Project namely National Rural Economic Transformation Project (NRETP) under the *Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM)* through loan assistance from World Bank (IBRD Credit).
- Innovative projects will be undertaken under NRETP to pilot alternate channels of financial inclusion, creating value chains around rural products, introduce innovative models in livelihoods promotion and access to finance and scale-up initiatives on digital finance and livelihoods interventions.

DAY - NRLM

- Aajeevika -National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) was **launched by the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), in June 2011**. In November 2015, the program was renamed Deendayal Antayodaya Yojana (DAY-NRLM).

- The scheme lays special emphasis on **targeting the poorest of the poor and the most vulnerable communities** and their financial inclusion.
- The poor are facilitated to achieve **increased access to rights, entitlements and public services, diversified risk and better social indicators of empowerment**.
- It believes in **harnessing the innate capabilities of the poor and complements them with capacities** (information, knowledge, skills, tools, finance and collectivization) to participate in the growing economy of the country.
- It provides for mutually beneficial working relationship and formal platforms for consultations between Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Community Based Organizations(CBOs).

2. GS PAPER 2

Constitution, Polity, And Governance

New Rules Under Section 79, IT Act

Syllabus: Indian Constitution: Historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

In News

- Recently, the Rules notified under *Section 79 of the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000* by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) ask for greater due diligence from intermediaries on the regulation of the content they host.
- The Rules make intermediaries such as Facebook, Google, WhatsApp, and others responsible for actively monitoring the content they host.

Provisions Of The Intermediaries Guidelines (Amendment) Rules, 2018

- ***Tracing of Information:*** The Rules ask the intermediaries to allow the tracing of information on their platforms by government agencies, a requirement that could create difficulties in the India operations of global end-to-end encrypted products like WhatsApp or Signal.
- ***Use of Tech:*** All intermediary companies will have to deploy technology based automated tools or appropriate mechanisms, with appropriate controls, for proactively identifying and removing or disabling public access to unlawful information or content.
- ***Type of Content Monitoring:*** In addition to the earlier stipulation about content that is grossly harmful, defamatory, obscene, *etc.*, they must now also filter content that threatens public health or safety; promotion of cigarettes or any other tobacco products or consumption of intoxicant including alcohol and Electronic Nicotine Delivery System (ENDS) & like products that enable nicotine delivery.
- ***Timeline:*** The new Rules say that if there is a lawful order, then intermediary shall, ***within 72 hours*** of communication, provide such information or assistance as asked for by any government agency or assistance. The lawful order could be in matters of state security, cyber security and investigation of any offence.
- ***Registration in India:*** All players with **more than 5 million users** in India have to be incorporated under **the Companies Act**. The companies will need to have a permanent registered office in India with a physical address. Also, these norms, although currently applicable to only the 5 million plus firms, can be extended to any intermediary, which is specifically notified by the Government of India.

Implications

- ***Costly affair:*** For many startups in India, monitoring and removing content might not always be viable or possible, given the resources that would be required.

- ***Unclear rules:*** The companies will have to inform their users at ***least once every month*** that in case of non-compliance, their accounts and content would be removed. Exactly how this will be achieved is unclear.
- ***Impact privacy and services:*** The requirement that companies have to help government agencies in locating the origin of content, will mean choosing between breaking their end to end encryption in India (essential for ensuring privacy) or stopping the service in the country altogether.
- ***Applicability unclear:*** Again, the Rules only say fifty lakh users in India but it is unclear whether they mean monthly active users or daily active users, which are the key metrics that Internet companies use to define their user base. A service that has 5 million monthly active users in India *i.e.*, users who log in once a month, might not see the sense in having an office in the country.

Dishonour Of SC Verdict On Section 66A IT Act

Syllabus: Indian Constitution: Historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

In News

Recently, the issue arose in context of **Section 66A** of the Information Technology Act 2000 (IT Act) as it continued to be used to prosecute persons despite being struck down by the Supreme Court (SC) as unconstitutional in **Shreya Singhal Case** (2015).

Issues

- ***Issue about awareness generation:*** There is no systems in place to ensure that the news of judicial decisions reached all corners of the state machinery.
- ***Misuse of the law:*** The news of a penal provision being struck down by the SC is not reaching the many police stations. And it also raise the issue of misuse of such law despite it being declared unconstitutional.
- ***Poor monitoring by court:*** The SC does not have any mechanism to continue monitoring the compliance of its decision/direction.
- ***Loss of faith in judiciary:*** The non-compliance of the Court's direction raises the issue about the capability of the Court to protect the rights of the ordinary citizen.
- ***Issue about separation of power and accountability:*** It is also a visible symptom of a deeper malaise, where one branch of the state (judiciary) is simply not being heard by the others (executive).

Suggestion To Overcome Such Issue

As the declarations of unconstitutionality do not wipe out a provision from the statute book, it meant something more had to be done to ensure people know the provision is no longer valid.

Govt. Grants Divisional Status To Ladakh

Syllabus: Functions & responsibilities of Union & State, Issues & challenges pertaining to federal relations, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.

In News

- Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) Governor granted Ladakh a divisional status, thus creating three administrative units of **Jammu**, **Kashmir** and **Ladakh** in the State.

- Further, the J&K government has also approved the creation of a separate administrative and revenue division for Ladakh. It will **comprise Leh and Kargil districts**, with **headquarters at Leh**.

Implication Of The New Administrative Arrangement

- ***Background:*** Earlier, Ladakh was a part of the Kashmir division. Moreover, a section in Leh had also been demanding Union Territory status. Ladakh's Kargil and Leh districts already have separate **hill development councils** for local administrative powers. Further, in December 2018, the **Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils (LAHDC) of Leh** and **Kargil** had passed resolutions for creation of a separate division.
- ***Biggest division:*** The move leaves the **Kashmir valley** geographically the **smallest division** at 15,948 sq. km, Jammu division at 26,293 sq. km and **Ladakh, the biggest division**, at 86,909 sq. km.
- ***Rationale for such a status:*** During the winter months, the entire Ladakh region remains cut off from the rest of the country for almost six months. The remoteness and inaccessibility of the area makes it eligible for establishing a separate division. Moreover, the region is riddled with insurmountable problems with respect to delivery of developmental schemes, redress of public grievances, conduct of administrative affairs and governance as such. Hence, the move goes a long way in fulfilling governance and development aspirations of people of Ladakh region.
- ***Administrative structure:*** Ladakh will now get its own **Divisional Commissioner** and **Inspector General of Police**.

Final Analysis

- ***Similar demands:*** The move is likely to give rise to similar demands in some districts of Jammu region, where people are demanding separate hill councils for **Pir Panjal (comprising Rajouri and Poonch districts)** and **Chenab Valley region (Doda, Ramban and Kishtwar districts)**.
- ***Opposition:*** Kargil (Shia Muslim dominated area) has opposed the current move and demanded six monthly rotation of headquarters between Leh and Kargil.
- ***Not required:*** The process of decentralization of administrative control is good but question have been raised that such status was not required as Ladakh already has hill development councils.

Puducherry Stand off

Syllabus: Functions & responsibilities of Union & State, Issues & challenges pertaining to federal relations, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.

In News

- A standoff has started in the Union Territory (UT) of Puducherry, as the Chief Minister led dharna outside Lieutenant Governor (LG) residence to protest her alleged negative stand towards the Congress government.
- The elected government has also accused Governor of blocking crucial files that affects the people and welfare schemes.
- The unseemly confrontation between LG Kiran Bedi and Chief Minister V Narayanasamy in Puducherry raises serious questions about the remit of the LG's office in this UT with an elected government.

Delhi vis-à-vis Puducherry

- ***Position of Lt. Governor:*** Though the issues in Delhi and Puducherry seem similar, the LG of Delhi has more executive functions that allow him to exercise his powers in matters connected to **public order, police and land** in consultation with the CM.
- ***Legislative powers:*** Under the constitutional scheme, the Delhi Assembly has the power to legislate on all subjects except law and order and land. However, the Puducherry Assembly can legislate on any issue under the Concurrent and State Lists. However, if the law is in conflict with a law passed by Parliament, the law passed by Parliament prevails.
- ***Legal rules:*** While the LG of Delhi is also guided by the **Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991** and the **Transaction of Business of the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Rules, 1993**, the LG of Puducherry is guided mostly by the **Government of Union Territories Act, 1963**.

Legal Status Of Puducherry

- ***1963 Statute:*** Under the Constitution, the territory belongs to the President, who runs it through the LG as Administrator. However, under **Section 44** of the **Union Territories Act, 1963**, the Administrator has to act on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers.
- ***In case of difference of opinion:*** At the same time, any difference of opinion between them can be referred to the President and in the meantime the Administrator's action prevails on any urgent matter. This scheme, which gives a clear edge to the Centre, can work only if there is harmony between the Council and the LG.

Way forward

- Last year, ruling on the limits of the LG's powers in Delhi, the Supreme Court stressed the need for the LG as well as people's representatives to function in harmony within constitutional parameters. The LG was cautioned against having a hostile attitude towards the Ministers. There is no reason why that principle cannot be extended to Puducherry, which has a longer record of elected governments.
- Similarly, the **Government of Union Territories Act, 1963** allows the LG's office discretionary powers, but these must be exercised judiciously and only in exceptional circumstances.
- Puducherry has an elected assembly and the task of law making should be entrusted with it. Similarly, public policy and administration must be left to the elected representatives.

SC Decision On Delhi V/S Centre

Syllabus: Functions & responsibilities of Union & State, Issues & challenges pertaining to federal relations, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.

In News

- A Supreme Court (SC) Bench of **Justices A.K. Sikri** and **Ashok Bhushan** gave a split opinion on whether the Delhi government has control over the administration's services and decided to refer the question to a larger Bench.
- Earlier, the constitution bench in 2018, held that the Lieutenant Governor (LG) was bound by the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers of the Delhi government. Further, it also held that decisions of the Delhi government will not require the concurrence of the LG, except in matters relating to **Land, Home and Public Order**. But, the judgment was silent on matters relating to 'services'.

The Split Decision

- ***Power lies with Union:*** While Justice Bhushan held that the Delhi government has no power over services, observing that ***Entry 41 of the State List*** in the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution dealing with **State Public Services,** was outside the purview of the Delhi Assembly.
- ***Middle path:*** While, Justice Sikri ruled that files on the transfers and postings of officers of the rank of Secretary, Head of Department and Joint Secretary could be directly submitted to the LG. But as far as the *Delhi, Andaman & Nicobar Islands Civil Service (DANICS)* cadre is concerned, the files could be processed through the Council of Ministers, led by the Chief Minister, before being sent to the LG. Moreover, Justice Sikri also held that in case of a difference of opinion, the LG prevails.
- ***Upheld MHA notification:*** On question other than that of 'services', the two judges agreed and upheld the MHA's notifications, authorizing the LG to exercise powers in relation to services and directing the Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) police not to take cognizance of offences against Central government officials.
- ***Other points of decision:*** The SC also confirmed the Delhi HC's finding that the appropriate government under the **Commission of Inquiry Act, 1952** is the Centre and not the Delhi government. Further, the court also held that the Delhi government should have taken the views of the LG before issuing the circular for revising minimum rates of agricultural land (circle rules) under the provisions of **Indian Stamp Act, 1899**.
- ***Proposal by SC:*** Justice Sikri also proposed setting up of **Civil Service Boards** to take care of the service matters of grade one, two, three and four officers. The Boards for grade four and three officers could be led by the **Services Secretary** and the others by the Chief Secretary.

Final Analysis

- It is only through a mature politics that the root cause of the over-politicization of governance, playing at least since 2015, must be addressed.
- What Delhi needs is a bold re-imagination of the skewed federal contract that currently determines its executive and legislative boundaries. Moreover, a mature discussion between stakeholders that looks beyond short-term political gains holds the potential to resolve the embedded contradiction.

125th Constitutional Amendment Bill

Syllabus: Functions & responsibilities of Union & State, Issues & challenges pertaining to federal relations, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.

In News

- The government has introduced the 125th Constitutional Amendment Bill in the Parliament to increase the financial and executive powers of the **10 Autonomous Councils** in the **Sixth Schedule** areas of the north-eastern region.
- The 125th Constitutional Amendment Bill will impact **one crore** tribal people in **Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram**.

Important Features Of The Bill

- ***Democracy:*** The amendments proposed provide for elected village municipal councils, ensuring democracy at the grass-root level.
- ***Power to village council:*** The amendment empowers the village councils to prepare plans for economic development and social justice including those related to agriculture, land improvement,

- implementation of land reforms, minor irrigation, water management, animal husbandry, rural electrification, small scale industries and social forestry.
- ***Finance Commission:*** The amendment bill mandates the Finance commission to recommend devolution of financial resources to these autonomous councils. The Autonomous Councils are dependent on grants from Central ministries and the State government for specific projects.
- ***Reserved seats:*** The amendment bill also **reserve one-third of the seats** for women in the village and municipal councils in the Sixth Schedule areas of Assam, Mizoram.

(For details also refer to January 2019 Current Affairs Issue with title 'Cabinet decides to strengthen North-East Autonomous Councils')

Difference Between 5th Schedule and 6th Schedule Areas

- While both the areas under 5th schedule and 6th schedule have dominance of the tribal people, constitution calls them with different names *viz.* Scheduled Area under 5th schedule while Tribal areas under 6th schedule.
- While executive powers of the union extend in Scheduled areas with respect to their administration in 5th schedule; the 6th schedule areas remain within executive authority of the state.
- While 5th schedule envisages creation of Tribal Advisory Council, 6th schedule provides for District Councils and Regional Councils with certain legislative and judicial powers.

Issue Of Summoning Of Social Media Heads By Parliament

Syllabus: Parliament and State Legislatures- structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.

In News

- Recently, the Parliamentary Committee on Information Technology issued notice to Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey for personal appearance, after he reportedly did not heed its invitation the first time.
- This followed after a complaint had been submitted to Anurag Thakur, Chairman of Parliament's Departmentally Related Standing Committee on Information Technology, alleging an anti-rightwing bias on the social media platform Twitter.

Rules, Questions of the Summons

- **Rule 269(1)** under **Chapter XXVI (Parliamentary Committees) of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha** states that a witness may be summoned by an order signed by the **Secretary General** and shall produce such documents as are required for the use of a Committee.
- **Rule 270** further states that a Committee shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, provided that if any question arises whether the evidence of a person or the production of a document is relevant for the purposes of the Committee, the question shall be referred to the **Speaker whose decision shall be final**. Provided further that Government may decline to produce a document on the ground that its disclosure would be prejudicial to the safety or interest of the State.

The Issue

- **Issue of insisting personal appearance unclear:** While a Committee of India's Parliament has the right to send for executives of a company that operates in India, but the insistence on a personal appearance of Dorsey remain unclear.
- ***Lame duck Parliament:*** The current Lok Sabha will survive only until the end of the elections. The Parliamentary Committee on Information Technology will be reconstituted after the constitution of

the next Lok Sabha. In these circumstances, what the current proceedings can realistically achieve is not immediately apparent.

- ***Pre-emptory step:*** While Parliamentary committees often call in experts, but this kind of posturing is ill-judged and pre-emptory.
- ***Issue of enforcement:*** There is also the obvious question of enforcement as the Twitter is headquartered in San Francisco and Dorsey can refuse to appear.
- ***Political reason:*** More worrying, however, is the perception that Twitter and its senior leadership is being singled out for political reasons for suspending account of government sympathizer.

Final Analysis

- It may well be the case that the Parliamentary committee wants to enforce some accountability from those who actually set policy at Twitter in its quest to safeguard citizen's rights on social/online news media platforms.
- But, the parliamentary committee would do better to take a leaf out of the government's book *vis-a-vis* WhatsApp, which was seen to be facilitating rumours that contributed to lynchings and mob violence. With consistent pressure leading to self-regulation, WhatsApp has taken steps, including curbs on bulk messages as well as a public education campaign to alert users to the dangers of rumour. That ongoing endeavour was made possible without making an issue of summoning Mark Zuckerberg.

Judiciary's Post Retirement Jobs

Syllabus: Structure, organization, and functioning of Judiciary and Related Issues

In News

Justice A.K. Sikri, judge of the Supreme Court (SC) of India, found himself in the eye of a storm arising from accepting a post offered by the government, while being a judge of the court. But later he turned down the offer after the controversy erupted. However, this is an issue that recurs frequently.

Background

- ***Research:*** In a study, the **Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy** pointed out that as many as **70 out of 100 Supreme Court retired judges** have taken up assignments in the National Human Rights Commission of India, National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, Armed Forces Tribunal, and the Law Commission of India *etc.*
- ***International practice:*** **In USA**, no SC judge retires lifelong. This is done to prevent conflict of interest. Similarly, **in UK** SC judges retire at the age of 70 and no law stop judges from taking post-retirement jobs but no judge has taken such a post.

Impact Of Post Retirement Jobs

- ***Retirement age issue:*** Unlike abroad, a judge of the higher judiciary in India retires at a comparatively young age and is capable of many more years of productive work. Thus, issue of post retirement job need to be seen in this light.
- ***Independence of judiciary:*** The government sponsored post retirement appointments will continue to raise a cloud of suspicion over the judgments the best judges delivered while in service.
- ***Issue of conflict of interest:*** In **Rojer Mathew v. South Indian Bank Ltd.**, which is currently going into the issue of tribalization of the judiciary and its challenges to the independence of the judiciary, the amicus curie has observed that the Tribunals should not be haven for retired persons and

appointment process should not result in decisions being influenced if the Government itself is a litigant and appointment authority at the same time.

- ***Public faith:*** It is true that in law justice must not only be done but also be seen to be done. But the post retirement job may impact the people's faith in judiciary.
- ***Structural problem:*** The other reason why retired apex court judges are appointed to these posts is the statutes of these bodies have laid down that only candidates with specific qualifications will be considered.

Solution

- There is a need for striking a balance between the valuable experience and insights that competent and honest judges acquire during their period of service that cannot be wasted after retirement.
- Therefore, the viable option is to expeditiously establish, through a properly enacted statute, a commission made up of a majority, if not exclusively, of retired judges to make appointments of competent retired judges to tribunals and judicial bodies. Such a process must sufficiently insulate the judiciary from the charge of being a recipient of government largesse.
- There is also a need for a **cooling off period** between retirement and appointment to such posts to prevent conflict of interest. An amendment to the Constitution can be done by incorporating a provision similar to **Articles 148 or 319**.
- Moreover, the government can also look into the issue of increasing the retirement age for High Court and Supreme Court judges.

EVM Controversy

Syllabus: Elections and Representation of People's Act

In News

Earlier, a self-proclaimed cyber expert claimed in London that the electronic voting machines (EVM) used in elections in India could be hacked. He alleged that the BJP had won the 2014 general election by manipulating the EVMs.

Arguments Against Use Of EVM

- ***Possibility of electoral fraud:*** The expert says there is a chance that EVM may be used for electoral fraud by manipulating the technology that drives the machine.
- ***Insider fraud:*** There is also a possibility of insider fraud by errant officials or manufacturers or vendors of different machine parts.
- ***Original purpose of EVM no longer an issue:*** With each polling booth video recorded by the EC and mobile phones ubiquitous enough to send out proof of booth capturing or rigging by anyone the original reason to shift to EVMs has certainly diminished if not disappeared.
- ***International experience:*** Many democracies like Britain, Germany, France, Ireland, the Netherlands and Italy use or have gone back to using ballot paper.

VVPAT

- VVPAT machines are use to verify that the vote polled by a voter goes to the correct candidate.
- VVPATs are a second line of verification particularly and are particularly useful in the time when allegations around Electronic Voting Machines tampering crop up.
- After a voter presses the button on the EVM against the chosen candidate the VVPAT prints a slip containing name of the candidate and the election symbol and drops it automatically into a sealed box. The machines give the chance for the voter to verify their vote.

Justification for use of EVM

- ***Lack of proof:*** Despite such controversy, no tangible evidence has so far been produced to warrant a serious examination of the EVMs or a rethink of the EVM aided poll process.
- ***Full proof technology:*** The architecture of the EVM (software written onto a one-time programmable chip; standalone machines that are not networked and advancements in newly deployed machines that allow for self-diagnostics to render the machines tamper-proof among other things) has helped in removing the misgivings experienced by EVMs used in other countries.
- ***Administrative checks and balances:*** Combining technical safeguards with administrative safeguards such as allowing for rigorous checks at various levels, such as randomization of deployment of machines, a listing of candidates in alphabetical order rather than on party basis on ballot units; sealing of machines by political party representatives after polling and storing in high security strong-rooms, has made tampering impossible.
- ***Political motivation:*** More often than not, these accusations are primarily made by political parties that have chosen to blame EVM manipulation as an easy excuse for their losses in various elections.

Solution

There is a need for universal implementation of the ***Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT)*** that allows for a layer of verification to the electoral process. Thus, the VVPAT's introduction and use is necessary to address doubts related to the possibility of EVM hacking.

NCST Foundation Day

Syllabus: Constitutional/Statutory/Regulatory/Quasi-Judicial Bodies

In News

- The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) **celebrated its 15th foundation day on 19th February**.
- On the occasion, the NCST has decided to institute a national award named as **NCST Leadership Award** which will be conferred for significant and exemplary services towards Scheduled Tribes in the country.
- The awards will be given in 3 categories i.e. ***Educational Institutions/ Universities, Public Sector Undertakings/Banks and Public Service*** rendered by an *Individual, NGO or Civil Society.*
- This year, the first award were conferred on
    - **Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences Bhubaneswar:** In recognition of their significant contribution towards education of tribal children in Odisha and neighbouring states from kindergarten to post graduate level.
    - **Central Coalfields Ltd. Ranchi:** In recognition of their significant contribution in the field of sport promotion among children from Scheduled Tribes in Jharkhand.
    - **Dr. Pronob Kumar Sircar**, Tribal Welfare Officer in Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samiti (AAJVS): In recognition of his significant contribution towards Particularly Vulnerable Tribes Groups i.e. Oonges, Shompens, Andamanese and Jarwas in Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- A book titled "Janjatiya Swadhinta Sangram" in Hindi was released by the Vice President of India, which brings out the little unknown facets of the freedom struggle of tribal people in the country. It highlights the contribution of tribal uprising against British regime during freedom struggle.

NCST

- NCST was **set up in 2004 through Constitution (89th Amendment) Act, 2003**. With this amendment, the erstwhile National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was replaced by two separate Commissions namely- the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST).
- The Commission comprises a Chairperson, a Vice-Chairperson and three full-time Members (including one lady Member). The term of all the Members of the Commission is ***three years*** from the date of assumption of charge.
- It has the power to investigate and monitor all matters relating to the safeguards provided for the Scheduled Tribes under the Constitution, under any other law or under any order of the Government and to evaluate the working of such safeguards.
- While investigating any matter, the Commission shall have the powers of a civil court.

National Commission for Safai Karmacharis

Syllabus: Constitutional/Statutory/Regulatory/Quasi-Judicial Bodies

In News

- The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal for **extension of tenure** of the National Commission for Safai Karmacharis (NCSK) beyond March 2019, **for three years**.
- The **major beneficiaries** of the proposal would be the **safai karamcharis** and persons engaged in **manual scavenging** in the country since the NCSK will work for their welfare and upliftment.
- The NCSK has been giving its recommendations to the government regarding specific programmes for welfare of safai karamcharis, study and evaluate the existing welfare programmes and investigate cases of specific grievances.
- Also as per the ***Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act***, the NCSK has been assigned the work to monitor the implementation of the Act, tender advice for its effective implementation to the Centre and State Governments, and enquire into complaints regarding contravention/non-implementation of the provisions of the Act.

Current Scenario

- Though the government has taken many steps for the upliftment of the safai karamcharis, the deprivation suffered by them in socio-economic and educational terms is still far from being eliminated.
- Further the practice of manual scavenging is still prevalent in the country and its eradication continues to be an area of the highest priority for the government.
- The number of Manual Scavengers identified under the MS Act Survey as of Jan 2019 is 14226 and under the National Survey undertaken by Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment at the behest of NITI Aayog is 31128.
- Hence, the Government feels that there is a continued need to monitor the various interventions and initiatives of the government for welfare of safai karamcharis and to achieve the goal of complete eradication of the practice of manual scavenging in the country.

NCSK

- The NCSK was **established in the year 1993** as per the provisions of the NCSK Act 1993 initially for the period upto 31.3.1997. Later the validity of the Act was initially extended upto March 2002 and thereafter upto Feb 2004.

- The **NCSK Act ceased to have effect from March 2004**. After that the tenure of the NCSK has been extended as a non-statutory body from time to time. The tenure of the present Commission is up to March 2019.

Delhi's Zero Fatality Corridor

Syllabus: Government Policies and Interventions For Development In Various Sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

In News

- The Delhi government has launched a pilot project of creating Delhi's first 'zero fatality corridor' while issuing actionable points to all agencies to ensure a 10% reduction in road accidents by the end of the year.
- As many as 1690 people were killed and 6086 people were injured in 6515 road crashes in 2018, according to Delhi traffic police.
- As per the government's plan, a 3 km stretch between Burari Chowk and Bhalswa chowk will be taken as a case study for scientific assessment of accidents, road engineering, road-user engagement and for checking police enforcement and rapid emergency care.
- The initiative will be **run in partnership with Save LIFE Foundation**, a leading road safety non-profit. The Save LIFE Foundation's ZFC model is well-known for reducing road crash deaths by 30 per cent on the Mumbai-Pune Expressway.
- The activity is in line with Delhi government's plan of action to reduce fatalities due to road crashes by 30 per cent by 2020. It binds all agencies — transport, public works department, health, education and Delhi traffic police — to a year-round set of actions to reduce road fatalities in Delhi.
- After evaluating the impact of the initiative, the plan is to replicate the model in other parts of the city.

Provisions Of The Plan

- The plan includes conducting a host of audits such as studying and identifying unsafe roads, transportation of school children, road signage, emergency care service and enforcement activities of agencies.
- The plan also calls for commissioning road safety audit of top 20 accident prone zones in the city. Such zones are placed around 500 metre diameter having three fatal or total 10 accidents.
- It will entail a scientific study to reduce the conflict involving pedestrians and cyclists on one hand and the cars and heavy vehicles on the other.
- Nodal officers have been appointed in various departments for smooth coordination to execute the action plan.
- The district magistrates will ensure footpaths are continuous and encroachment-free and an action taken report will have to be submitted by all DMs monthly, at the same time the road safety cell will also contribute in improving traffic engineering.
- It also provides for a ***Road Safety Fund*** to be maintained through 50 per cent of the fine money realised by the Transport department's enforcement wing and traffic police. Estimated to be around Rs 90 crore annually, the fund will be used to implement road safety measures including infrastructure development and improvements.

Bill To Amend Cinematograph Act

Syllabus: Government Policies and Interventions For Development In Various Sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

In News

- The government has introduced a bill in the Rajya Sabha to amend the Cinematograph Act and impose strict penalty to combat the menace of film piracy by including penal provisions for unauthorised camcording and duplication of films etc. The Act deals with provisions for the certification of cinematograph films for exhibition and for regulating exhibitions by means of cinematographs.
- The Indian film industry has long cited piracy as a major challenge to its growth and has been demanding for a long time that the government consider amendments to the law preventing camcording and piracy.
- According to a report by global solution provider in digital platform security and media and entertainment, Irdeto, **the Indian media and entertainment sector loses $2.8 billion of its annual revenue to piracy** and India is one of the top five countries for peer-to-peer downloads.
- The Bill **requires the insertion of a new Section 6AA in the Cinematograph Act** to ensure the prohibition of unauthorized recording.
- The bill proposes to **make film piracy offences punishable with imprisonment of up to three years and fines that may extend to ₹10 lakh or both**.
- The proposed amendment states that any person, who without the written authorisation of the copyright owner, uses any recording device to make or transmit a copy of a film, or attempts to do so, or abet the making or transmission of such a copy, will be liable for such a punishment.
- The proposed amendments would **increase industry revenues, boost job creation, fulfil important objectives of India's National Intellectual Property policy and will give relief against piracy and infringing content online**.
- This is a significant move to protect intellectual property in the country. It communicates to all stakeholders that the country respects and rewards innovation and creativity and will ensure that the rights of owners and creators of this intellectual property are safeguarded.

Democracy Index

Syllabus: Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability

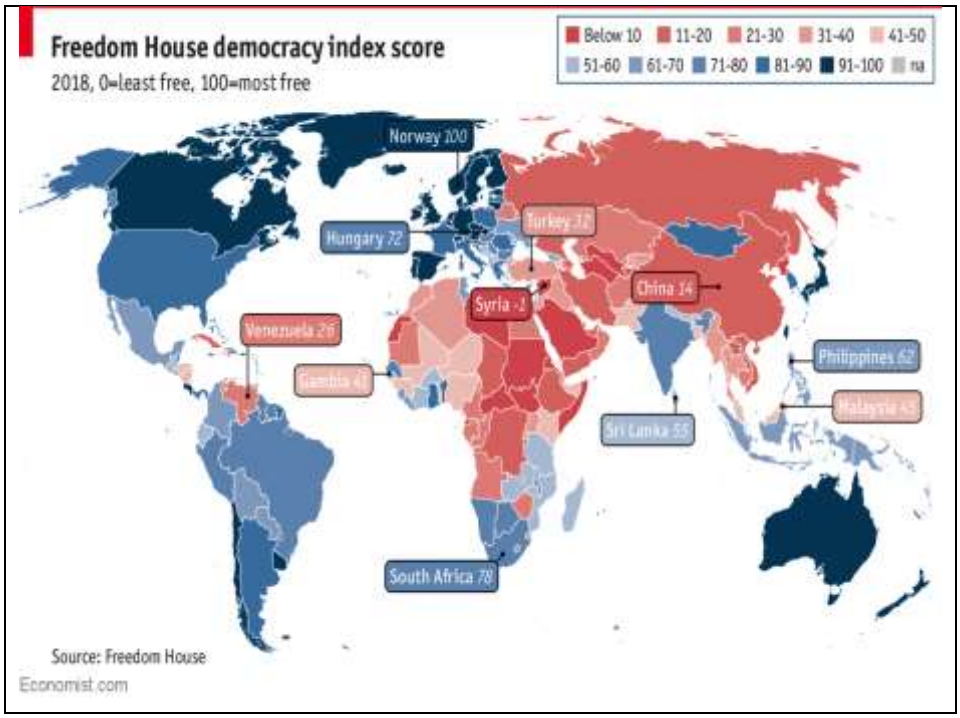
In News

The **Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)** recently published its **11th report** on the **State of Democracy in the World** in 2018 titled **"Me Too?' Political participation, protest and democracy"**.

The Recent Ranking

- ***Parameters of ranking:*** The survey ranks **165 independent countries** based on **five parameters** namely, electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, functioning of the government, political participation and political culture.
- ***Classification of democracies:*** Based on a comprehensive survey containing 60 questions under five categories, the index classifies countries into **four types *i.e.* Full Democracies, Flawed Democracies, Hybrid Democracies and Authoritarian Regimes**.

- ***Ranking:*** The **top five** are Norway, Iceland, Sweden, New Zealand and Denmark, while the **bottom five** are generally war-ravaged nations with highly authoritarian regimes, namely Chad, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria and North Korea.
- ***South Asia:*** Among the SAARC countries, India (41) and Sri Lanka (71) are classified as flawed democracies, followed by Bangladesh (88), Bhutan (94) and Nepal (97), which are hybrid regimes, with Pakistan (112) and Afghanistan (143) being authoritarian. The Maldives is not being ranked on the index. Sri Lanka registered the worst fall among all countries in South Asia, with deteriorating civil liberties and functioning of the government in the wake of a constitutional crisis in October 2018.



- ***Final analysis:*** Four out of five attributes of the Democracy Index either showed stagnation or improvement for the whole world, except for 'civil liberties', which continues its decline since 2008, coming down from 6.3 to 5.7. 'Functioning of the government' remains at the bottom of the score-card, with hardly any improvement from a high of 5.0 since 2008. Another concerning trend is that, as a whole, the score for perception of democracy as a sub-attribute suffered its biggest fall in the index since 2010, indicating that people are losing faith in the capability of democracy to deliver basic goods and utilities.
- ***Analysis of Indian position:*** India, which had reached its highest-ever position of 27 in 2014 (just two ranks away from becoming a full democracy), slipped to 42 last year, registering the second largest fall in ranking after Indonesia, which fell by 20 ranks to 68. This confirms the paradox of India as the world's largest electoral wonder, but a flawed democracy.

Rajasthan Social Accountability Bill

Syllabus: Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability

In News

After a protracted campaign of civil rights groups, the government in Rajasthan has started the process for bringing the Rajasthan Social Accountability Bill.

Provisions Of The Bill

- ***Incorporate the provisions of earlier law:*** The new accountability law would incorporate the provisions of the **Guaranteed Delivery of Public Services Act** and the **Right to Hearing Act**.

- ***Citizen friendly initiative:*** The bill includes provisions for citizen's charter, public hearing, social audit and information and facilitation centres.
- ***Grievance redressal:*** The Bill will also set up a grievance redressal mechanism starting from village panchayats.
- ***Accountability of officials:*** It will make officials accountable for timely delivery of public goods and services as citizen's entitlement. It also provides for the provision for penalty on erring officials and compensation to the public.

Social Justice

Regional Conference on Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme

Syllabus: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes

In News

- A regional conference on Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS) was recently organized by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in Kolkata.
- Programme Implementing Agencies who are mostly NGOs, State Government representatives from various states participated in the conference. It provides a unique opportunity for interactions amongst all stakeholders and would ensure exchange of cross-sectoral views on the aspects of the efficacy of the scheme as well as the scope of improvements in it.
- Under the scheme, every year more than 600 NGOs are provided with financial assistance for running their projects for the rehabilitation of persons with disability such as special school, pre-school and early intervention, halfway homes and community based rehabilitation. The NGOs being funded are catering rehabilitative services to more than 35000 to 40000 beneficiaries every year.
- The Scheme has been revised for making it more impactful for rehabilitation of PwDs. The provisions of the revised scheme are an increase in the cost norms by 2.5 times, streamlining the procedure of application, increase the funding of projects from 75% to 90% of their total cost, extending special benefits to special areas such as Left Wing Extremism Affected Districts and removal of limit in increase of number of beneficiaries.
- The conference was an effective step towards good governance and highlighted the need for **creation of inclusive society that accepts and respects persons with disabilities without discrimination**. It would lead to in-depth understanding of the scheme and would enable better outreach in terms of better facilities to end beneficiaries.

Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme

- DDRS is a **Central Sector Scheme** which is being **implemented since 1999** for providing financial assistance to NGOs working for education and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities.
- The objective of the scheme is to create an enabling environment to ensure equal opportunities, equity, social justice and empowerment of persons with disabilities.
- It also aims to encourage voluntary action for ensuring effective implementation of the People with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities and Protection of Rights) Act of 1995.

Pradhan Mantri Shram-Yogi Maandhan (PMSYM) Yojana

Syllabus: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes

In News

- The Pradhan Mantri Shram-Yogi Maandhan (PMSYM) Yojana announced in the interim budget has been launched for the workers in the unorganised sector. With more than **90 % of the workforce** engaged in it and **accounting for 50 % of the national product**, the unorganised or informal sector constitutes a pivotal part of the Indian economy.
- The scheme is a **voluntary and contributory pension scheme** where prescribed age-specific contribution shall be made by the beneficiary along with a **matching contribution by the Central Government**. The idea is to let workers save towards their retirement.
- It resembles the EPF scheme for the workers in the organised sector wherein 12 % of basic salary goes into employees' provident fund while an equal contribution is made by the employer.

Provisions Of The Scheme

- From age 60, a fixed monthly pension of Rs 3,000 irrespective of the age will be paid for the lifetime of the individual. If death occurs during the period of pension, the spouse will get family pension equal to half of what was being paid to the individual. After death of subscriber and his or her spouse, the corpus shall be credited back to the pension fund of the government.
- **Eligibility Criteria**
    - It is open only for those workers who are in the **unorganized sector** and are **between the age of 18 and 40 years**. The amount of monthly contribution is based on age and has to be paid till age 60.
    - The subscriber's **monthly income should not exceed Rs 15,000** and he/she will be **required to have a mobile phone, savings bank account and Aadhaar number**.
    - A worker will not be eligible if he/she is ***already a member of other pension schemes*** - National Pension Scheme (NPS) where contribution is also made by the Central Government or Employee State Insurance Corporation Scheme or Employee Provident Fund or he/she is an income tax assessee.
- In case of default on payment contributions, the eligible subscriber will be allowed to regularise his/her contributions by paying the outstanding dues along with interest. The interest will be determined by the Government of India.
- If the subscriber wishes to exit the scheme, within ten years of date of joining, then only his share of contribution will be returned to him along with savings bank interest rate.
- If the subscriber exits after the completion of ten years in the scheme but before the age of sixty years, then he shall get higher of his share of contribution along with the accumulated interest actually earned by the pension scheme or bank savings account interest rate .
- In case the subscriber becomes permanently disabled before the age of sixty and is unable to contribute to the scheme, then he has the option to exit the scheme by receiving his share of contribution. The spouse will also have the option to continue to contribute to the scheme subsequently by payment of regular contribution.

Criticism

- **Should not require contributions from the beneficiaries:** Critics say contributory pension schemes are set to fail since those targeted find the monthly payments too high. They

recommend no-strings-attached pension for the poor, like those by even least developed economies like Bolivia, Lesotho and Botswana.

- **Not adjusted for inflation:** If calculated, taking into account core inflation over the past 10 years, the real value of the monthly assured figure of Rs 3,000 comes down to around Rs 500, by the time a person entering the labour force retires decades from now. That would be too little.

Comparision with Atal Pension Yojana

- The PM-SYM scheme will run parallel to the existing Atal Pension Yojana (APY) that was launched in 2015.
- **Beneficiaries:** While APY was meant for workers in the unorganised sector, the new scheme includes marginal wage earners from organised sector as well.
- **Age limit:** Another difference is the upper age limit of 60 years in PM-SYM as against 40 years in APY.

ANOTHER SCHEME FOR THE POOR

	Existing Atal Pension Yojana (₹)	New Pradhan Mantri Shram-Yogi Maandhan Yojana (₹)
Monthly pension to be received*	5,000	3,000
Monthly contribution by an individual **at the age of 18**	210	55
Monthly contribution by an individual **at the age of 29**	529	100

Source : Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority, Budget speech; * at the age of 60

Conclusion

- Half of India's GDP comes from the hard work of 42 crore workers in the unorganised sector. They become extremely vulnerable after their working age and in this regard, it is a good move by the government to provide them comprehensive social security coverage for their old age.
- The new scheme is more inclusive than Atal Pension Yojana as it includes more beneficiaries and has higher age limit. However, the amount must be inflation indexed so that they can live an honourble life at the time of retirement. If possible, the government should make the full monthly contribution towards the pension.
- Government has also asked one and all to inform and guide the workers in one's own home and neighborhood to take advantage of this scheme. With IMPS and other digital mode of payments in vogue, one may even consider contributing on behalf of the individual working for them.
- All the branch offices of LIC, ESIC and EPFO and all Labour offices of Central and State Governments will guide the unorganised workers about the Scheme, its benefits and the procedure to be followed.

Minimum Support Price For Minor Forest Produce Scheme

Syllabus: Mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections

In News

- The Centre has informed that it is in the process to **frame new guidelines and extend the coverage of Minimum Support Price (MSP) for minor forest produce (MFP) scheme**, which is aimed at benefiting a majority of 10 crore tribals. The government is also considering **increasing the MSP for various MFPs by around 40 per cent**.
- Tribals depend on MFP for food, fodder, shelter, medicines and cash income. It provides them critical subsistence during lean seasons, particularly for primitive tribal groups such as hunter, gatherers, and the landless. According to Planning Commission data, tribals derive 20-40 per cent of their annual income from MFP. If the market prices fall below MSP, the state government agencies move in to procure the minor forest produce.

Critical Note On The Scheme

- The MSP for MFP scheme was **started in 2013** to ensure fair and remunerative prices to MFP gatherers. While it has been more than five years since the scheme was launched, **it has not been implemented properly**. **Improving the implementation of the scheme is the need of the hour** to benefit the forest-dwelling and forest-dependent communities.
- Moreover, despite the MFP rights being given to tribal communities under the Forest Rights Act, many states have nationalised MFPs like tendu, monopolising their trade which affects their livelihood adversely.
- The allocations made under the scheme have over the years been heavily under-utilised, **around 90 % of the funds** since the inception of the plan have remained unspent. The Centre had earmarked Rs 1,172 crore for five years till 2018-19. But Ministry of Tribal Affairs' statistics reveal that only 11 % of the total outlay – about Rs 128 crore – has been spent.
- About Rs 360 crore released to state governments are lying unspent in the state coffers and minor forest produce worth Rs 78 crore are lying unsold in state agencies' godowns.
- The new system would be **decentralised with district collectors** holding the responsibility of implementing the scheme.
- Moreover, self-help groups will be formed to sell MFP in village haats and value addition centres will be set up and the area of operation would be expanded to 307 districts across 27 states.

Registration of Marriage of NRI Bill 2019

Syllabus: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes

In News

- The External Affairs Ministry has introduced a path breaking Bill on Registration of Marriage of Non-Resident Indians in the Rajya Sabha .
- The Bill is an outcome of a joint initiative of the Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Home Affairs, and Ministry of Law and Justice.
- The introduction of the Bill was necessitated by the Ministry of External Affairs due to numerous complaints received from Indian nationals mostly women deserted or harassed by their Non-Resident Indian Spouses. This would provide a much-needed relief to all Indian women married to NRIs worldwide.

NRI vis-à-vis PIO/OCI

- An NRI (Non-Resident Indian) is an Indian citizen who is ordinarily residing outside India and holds an Indian Passport.
- While a PIO (Person of Indian Origin)/OCI (Overseas Citizen of India) card holders are people whose ancestors were of Indian Nationality and who is presently holding another countries' citizenship/nationality.

Provisions Of The Bill

- The Bill proposes to create more accountability, offer greater protection to Indian women married to NRIs, and serve as a deterrent to NRIs against harassment of their spouses.
- It envisages registration of marriages by Non-Resident Indians; Amendment of the Passports Act 1967 and Amendment to the Code of Criminal Procedure 1973.
- According to the provisions of the Bill, the **compulsory registration of marriage within thirty days** of marriage in India or abroad would provide better enforcement of rights of the deserted spouse under various family laws.

- Similarly, the **Amendment to the Passport Act** would empower the Passport Authority to impound or revoke the passport of NRI, if it is brought to his notice that the NRI has not registered his marriage within 30 days from the date of marriage.
- The **Amendments to CrPC 1973** would empower the courts for issuance of summons, warrants through the specially designated website of the Ministry of External Affairs. It also provides provisions for attachment of properties belonging to the NRI, if he does not appear before the court and will be declared as Proclaimed Offender by the court.

Initiatives On Women's Safety

Syllabus: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes

In News

The Ministry of Women and Child Development has conceptualized several initiatives to promote safety of women in their living spaces, working spaces and the public spaces.

Panic Button

- The idea of having a panic button on the mobile phone was conceived way back in 2015 and after a series of deliberations with the Ministry of Telecom, mobile phone manufacturers and mobile telephony service providers, the Ministry of Telecom mandated a physical panic button on all mobile phones in the country.
- This system was then conceptualized in collaboration with the Ministry of Home Affairs and state governments were asked to put in place a dedicated Emergency Response Centre through which the entire system will be operated.
- The emergency response system can be triggered in the following ways
    - On the smart phones, the power button (which is dedicated panic button) when pressed three times quickly.
    - Dialing 112 from any phone.
    - In case of feature phones, long press of the touch key 5 or 9.
    - Using 112 India Mobile App which is available for free downloading.
- The emergency message coming out of the above modes, will trigger a response from the emergency response centre through a team of trained personnel who can handle emergency requests of various kinds and get the necessary relief services launched.
- For Women and children, 112 India App provides a special SHOUT feature which alerts registered volunteers in the vicinity of victim for immediate assistance.

SCIM Portal Under Safe City Project

- In order to provide safety for women in public spaces, the Government has identified eight cities for implementation of Safe City project. The 8 major cities which have been chosen are Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Lucknow and Mumbai.
- Detailed projects for this have been prepared jointly by the municipal bodies and the local police authorities. The projects include creation of on ground assets & resources and mindset safety of women. Some of the key features of the safe city project include:
    - Identification of sensitive hot spots in each city,
    - Installation of CCTV surveillance covering the entire hot spot.

- Automated number plate reading machines to be deployed in extremely sensitive areas.
- Intensive patrolling in vulnerable areas beyond the identified hot spots.
- Improving street lighting and public toilet facilities for women.
- Setting up women help desks in police stations and augmentation of women support centres.

- All the above measures would be coordinated through an Integrated Smart Control Room in the city. In order to facilitate States to monitor and manage the Safe City projects and avoid duplication on ground, an online Safe City Implementation Monitoring (SCIM) portal has also been developed.
- SCIM will facilitate online tracking of deployment of assets and infrastructure created under the Safe City projects. It facilitates an evidence based online monitoring system.
- It also creates a digital repository of assets, infrastructure and social outreach programs, as well as best practices achieved in each city.

DNA Analysis Facilities in States

- In view of the complaints of delay in cases of sexual assault investigations, it is proposed that dedicated DNA analysis facilities should be created in the forensic science laboratories on a mission mode.
- Timely testing of DNA samples from the crime scene is the quickest process of obtaining forensic evidence in cases of sexual assault on women.
- In the initial phase, dedicated DNA analysis facilities have been sanctioned for the forensic science laboratories located at Chennai, Madurai, Agra, Lucknow, Mumbai and Kolkata.
- The equipments to be provided under this initiative include refrigerated facility for samples, automated DNA extractor & sequencer, centrifuges, genetic analyzers. A sum of Rs.78.86 crores has been sanctioned for this initiative through the Nirbhaya fund. Expert technicians are also being recruited and trained for forensic analysis.

Women's Livelihood Bond

Syllabus: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes

In News

- **World Bank, UN Women, and Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI)** have joined hands to launch a new *social impact bond* exclusively for women, called Women's Livelihood Bond (WLB), with an initial corpus of *Rs 300 crore.*
- SIDBI will act as the financial intermediary and channel funds raised to women entrepreneurs through participating financial intermediaries like banks, NBFCs or microfinance institutions.
- The proposed bond will enable individual women entrepreneurs in sectors like food processing, agriculture, services and small units to ***borrow around Rs 50,000 to Rs 3 lakh*** at an annual interest rate of around ***13-14 per cent or less*** and will have a tenure of ***five years***.
- The WLBs will be ***unsecured, unlisted bonds and offer fixed coupon rate of 3 per cent per annum*** to bond investors. Some of the top wealth management firms like Centrum, ASK, Ambit and Aditya Birla Capital, among others, have reached out to high net worth individuals and impact investors to raise the funds.
- A corpus fund catalysed with support from the UK Department for International Development plus future CSR and other grant money will be created to support implementation of the WLB, capacity

building of women entrepreneurs including links to markets and appropriate technologies, as well for credit default risk mitigation.

- The new bonds will not only enable women self help groups to graduate from 'group borrowing' to 'individual borrowing' but will also allow them to shift from development assistance towards more market-financed programmes.

National Deworming Day

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

In News

- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) recently conducted its eighth round of National Deworming Day (NDD).
- It is implemented with an objective to reduce the prevalence of ***Soil Transmitted Helminths*** (STH) or parasitic intestinal worms (which affect over 241 million children in India every year), so that they are no longer a public health problem.
- STH or parasitic worms are among the most common infections worldwide. It lives in human intestines and consume nutrients meant for the human body. They produce thousands of eggs each day, which are passed in faeces and spread to others in areas used for public toilet.

About NDD

- NDD is observed bi-annually on 10th February and 10th August in all states and UTs followed by mop-up activities.
- The campaign was launched in February 2015 as a part of National Health Mission with the aim to deworm all the children from 1 to 19 years of age. **It has emerged as world's largest public health campaign preventing children from intestinal parasitic worms.**
- The program is implemented with the ***Ministries of Women and Child Development and Human Resource Development***, where the anganwadi workers and teachers administer the deworming medicine to children and adolescents at the anganwadis and schools.
- **ASHA workers support the efforts through community mobilization and sensitization of communities** about the ill effects of worm infestations.
- There are a variety of parasitic worms that can reside in the human body. The five most common types of worms are tapeworms, hookworms, flukes, threadworms and trichinosis worms.
- **Worm infection interferes with the nutrient uptake of kids** and can make children anaemic, malnourished, weak, sick and tired with poor concentration.
- Using **Albendazole tablet** for deworming is an evidence-based, globally-accepted, and effective solution used to control worm infections in all children, regardless of socio-economic background.

Success Of Initiative

- Deworming has shown to reduce absenteeism in schools; improve health, nutritional, and learning outcomes for children; and increase the likelihood of higher-wage jobs later in life as per global evidence.
- The success of the NDD program has incrementally increased with each round as the coverage has increased from 8.9 crores in Feb 2015 to 22.69 crores in the last round in August 2018 and has a target of 24.44 crores in this round.

- The convergence of NDD with the Swachh Bharat Mission is another step that has helped towards ensuring cleanliness and hygiene in our surroundings and towards prevention and control of worm infestation.
- Awareness generation activities have also been undertaken under this program to sensitize the public about the harmful effects of worm infestation due to open defecation and to promote healthy habits to keep worm infections under control.

Kerala Sets Up Drug Price Monitor

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

In News

- Kerala has become the **first State** to set up a Price Monitoring And Research Unit (PMRU) to track violation of prices of essential drugs and medical devices under the Drugs Price Control Order (DPCO).
- The move comes more than five years after the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) proposed such a system for the States and the Union Territories.
- The suggestion to set up PMRUs was made against the backdrop of the lack of a field-level link between the NPPA and the State Drugs Controllers and State Drug Inspectors to monitor drug prices.
- Pharma companies have been accused of overcharging prices of drugs in the scheduled category fixed by the DPCO and those outside its ambit too.
- A society has been registered to get Central assistance for the functioning of the unit. The State Health Secretary would be the Chairman of the society and the Drugs Controller would be its member secretary. Its members include a State government representative, representatives of private pharmaceutical companies, and those from consumer rights protection fora. The society would also have an executive committee headed by the Drugs Controller.
- The new watchdog will offer technical help to the State Drug Controllers and the NPPA to monitor notified prices of medicines, detect violation of the provisions of the DPCO, look at price compliance, collect test samples of medicines, and collect and compile market-based data of scheduled as well as non-scheduled formulations. There is also a plan to collect data on the prices of surgical devices and stents in the market.

National Survey On Extent And Pattern Of Substance Use In India

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

In News

- The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has conducted a "National Survey on Extent and Pattern of Substance Use in India" through the NDDTC of AIIMS, New Delhi during 2018 which provides data at the National level as well as at the State level.

- India is vulnerable to narcotic drug trafficking as it is located between two largest Opium producing regions of the world i.e. ***Golden Crescent*** in the west and ***Golden Triangle*** in the east.
- Drug trafficking and abuse pose serious threat to societies and is a matter of serious concern. Drugs endanger peace, health and stability across regions and it places a heavy burden on public health systems.
- The State governments and all other stake holders including NGOs and Drug De-addiction centres will be consulted to formulate guidelines and an action plan to counter the menace of drug abuse.
- A combination of two data collection approaches was employed in this Survey
- A Household Survey (HHS) was conducted among the representative, general population (10-75 years old) of all the 36 states and UTs of the country. This was aimed primarily at studying the use of common, legal substances (like Alcohol and Cannabis). At the national level, a total of 200,111 households were visited in 186 districts and a total of 473,569 individuals were interviewed.
- A Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS) survey along with multiplier approach was conducted in 123 districts among 70,293 people suffering from dependence on illicit drugs. This was aimed primarily for estimating the prevalence of dependence on illicit drug (since the HHS tends to underestimate illicit drug use).

Major Findings

- **Alcohol Use**
  - At the national level, about 14.6% of people (among 10-75 year old) are current users of alcohol, i.e. about 16 Crore people.
  - Prevalence is 17 times higher among men than women.
  - About 5.2% of Indians (more than 5.7 crore people) are estimated to be affected by harmful or dependent alcohol use. In other words, every third alcohol user in India needs help for alcohol related problems.
  - States with the high prevalence of alcohol use are *Chhattisgarh, Tripura, Punjab, Arunachal Pradesh and Goa*.
- **Cannabis Use**
  - About 2.8% of Indians (3.1 Crore individuals) report having used any **cannabis product** within past 12 months (Bhang – 2% or 2.2 crore people; Ganja/Charas – 1.2% or 1.3 Crore people).
  - About 0.66% of Indians (or approximately 72 lakh individuals) need help for their cannabis use problems.
  - States with the higher than national prevalence of cannabis use are *Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Sikkim, Chhattisgarh and Delhi*.
- **Opioids**
  - At the national level, the most common opioid used is Heroin, (current use 1.14%) followed by Pharmaceutical opioids (current use 0.96%) and then Opium (current use 0.52%).
  - Prevalence of current use of opioids, overall is 2.06% and about 0.55% of Indians are estimated to need help for their opioid use problems (harmful use and dependence). More people are dependent upon Heroin than Opium and Pharmaceutical Opioids.
  - Of the total estimated approximately 60 lakh people with opioid use disorders (harmful or dependent pattern) in the country, more than half are contributed by just a few states viz.

Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat.

- **Sedatives**
    - About 1.08% of 10-75 year old Indians (approximately 1.18 crore people) are current users of sedatives (non-medical, non-prescription use).
    - Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat are the top five states which house the largest populations of people using sedatives.
    - Inhalants are the only category of substances for which the prevalence of current use among children and adolescents is higher (1.17%) than adults (0.58%).
- Cocaine (0.10%) Amphetamine Type Stimulants (0.18%) and Hallucinogens (0.12%) are the categories with lowest prevalence of current use in India.
- Nationally, it is estimated that there are about 8.5 Lakh People Who Inject Drugs (PWID). High numbers of PWID are estimated in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Haryana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Manipur and Nagaland.
- **Access to treatment Services**: In general, access to treatment services for people affected by substance use disorders is grossly inadequate. Just about one in 38 people with alcohol dependence report getting any treatment. Only about one in 180 people with alcohol dependence report getting inpatient treatment / hospitalization for help with alcohol problems. Among people suffering from dependence on illicit drugs, one among 20 people has ever received inpatient treatment/ hospitalization for help with drug problems.

Government's Steps To Combat The Menace

- The government has constituted ***Narco-Coordination Centre (NCORD)*** in November, 2016 and revived the scheme of Financial Assistance to States for Narcotics Control. Besides in 2017, the government approved new Reward Guidelines with increased quantum of reward for interdiction or seizure of different illicit drugs.
- For effective coordination with foreign countries including neighbouring countries, India has signed ***37 Bilateral Agreements/Memoranda of Understanding***.
- *Narcotics Control Bureau* has been provided funds for developing a new software i.e. ***Seizure Information Management System (SIMS)*** which will create a complete online database of drug offences and offenders.
- The government has constituted a fund called "***National Fund for Control of Drug Abuse***" to meet the expenditure incurred in connection with combating illicit traffic in Narcotic Drug, Psychotropic Substances; identifying, treating and rehabilitating addicts, and educating public against drug abuse.

Global Digital Health Partnership

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

In News

- The fourth Global Digital Health Partnership Summit was recently held in India. It was hosted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in collaboration with World Health Organization (WHO) and the Global Digital Health Partnership (GDHP).
- **Australia** was the host country for the inaugural summit in February 2018.

- The Ministerial conclave discussed the implication of digital health interventions to health services accessibility, quality and affordability and explored ways of leveraging digital health technologies to strengthen the healthcare delivery systems globally.

Some Random Facts

- India took the world stage at the **71st World Health Assembly** in Geneva, Switzerland by successfully introducing and unanimous **adoption of Resolution on Digital Health**.
- This resolution highlighted global attention to the **potential, challenges and opportunities of Digital Health intervention**s and the need for closer collaboration on the issue globally for countries achieving health-related SDG targets as well WHO's implementation of **13th General Program of Work**.

About Global Digital Health Partnership (GDHP)

- It is an international collaboration of governments and territories, government agencies and the World Health Organization (WHO) dedicated to improving the health and well-being of their citizens through the best use of evidence-based digital technologies.
- It was established in 2018 as a platform to facilitate global collaboration and co-operation in the implementation of digital health services.
- The GDHP is currently focused on the five work streams: Cyber Security, Interoperability, Evidence and Evaluation, Policy Environments, Clinical and Consumer Engagement.
- The Australian Digital Health Agency is providing the secretariat services for the first eighteen months of the GDHP.
- They can improve the safety, quality and effectiveness of healthcare, support earlier diagnosis of disease and the development of new medicines and treatments. They can empower patients, citizens and the care professionals who serve them.

What Is Digital Health?

- Digital health involves the use of information and communication technologies to track well-being and health indicators such as blood pressure and heart rate.
- Digital health is also referred to as telehealth or mhealth.
- Mhealth, or mobile health, is a branch of digital health specific to mobile phone technologies.

What are the benefits of digital health?

- Allows both the public and patients to self-manage their health
- Care for patients with long-term conditions
- Enables remote monitoring of patients

Indian Initiatives

- **Ayushman Bharat** is primarily dependent on maximising the use of digital tools for effective implementation and monitoring. The scheme is completely digital wherein all the processes from beneficiary identification to hospital empanelment and settlement of claims are done electronically. Hence all the benefits of the scheme are delivered in a mode that is cashless, paperless & completely transparent for all stakeholders
- The Health Ministry is in the process of establishing an ***Integrated Health Information Platform*** for interoperability amongst various health IT systems and a pan-India exchange of Electronic Health Records of citizens ensuring privacy, security, and confidentiality of data. The same is to be

supplemented by a pan-Indian network of disease surveillance, tele-medicine and tele-radiology and tele-education.

Global Health Expenditure Report (GHED)

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

In News

- WHO recently released a new report on global health expenditure. The GHED provides internationally comparable data on health spending for close to 194 countries, since 2000.
- Health spending consists of government expenditure, out-of-pocket payments (people paying for their own care), and sources such as voluntary health insurance, employer-provided health programmes, as well as activities by non-profits.
- The report analyses for the first time, data for a subset of countries not only on the basis of sources of spending but also on how the money was used — on primary health care and by specific disease priority and intervention category.
- According to the report, public spending on health is essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets for health through sustainably funding common goods and subsidising services to the poorest segments of society.
- A health system that relies mainly on high levels of government funding, as well as a high share of public sources in overall health spending, generally provides better and more equitable access to services and better financial protection.

Report Findings

- In low- and middle-income countries, health spending is undergoing a transformation. The reliance of people on public funding has increased. In most regions, reliance on out-of-pocket spending is gradually going down and has also been associated with a reduction in the share of domestic government revenues allocated to health.
- Global spending on health increased in low- and middle-income countries by 6 per cent and in high income countries by 4 per cent.
- While the total amount of aid that middle-income countries receive has increased, aid per capita has fallen. In 2016, lower- and upper middle-income countries still received close to 57 % of global aid, and certain middle-income countries still received large amounts of aid in absolute terms.
- Therefore, there is an ***inverse relationship between a country's income levels and the share of external aid*** as a health funding source.
- According to the report, the roles of external and domestic funding are evolving; however, external funding is declining in middle-income countries.
- Governments account for less than 40 per cent of primary health care spending. There are huge variations across countries in public spending on primary health care, which is intended to give people access to quality care, including access to medicines, as needed.
- The data indicates that nearly half of donor funds for health and about 20 per cent of public spending on health went to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. About one-third of domestic public spending went towards injuries and non-communicable diseases, which received comparatively little external funds.

- Health is a human right and all countries need to prioritise efficient, cost-effective primary health care as the path to achieving universal health coverage and the Sustainable Development Goals

HOPE Portal

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

In News

- In order to extend benefits associated with Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) and Ayushman Bharat scheme to small scale hospitals across India, the government has digitalized and simplified the **National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Organizations (NABH)** accreditation process.
- The revised process is driven through a new portal called HOPE - **Healthcare Organizations' Platform for Entry-level-certification** with a focus to promote quality at nascent stages by enrolling a wide range of hospitals across the country including healthcare organizations (HCOs) and small healthcare organizations (SHCOs).
- The **aim is to create a momentum for HCOs and SHCOs** that want to avail benefits associated with IRDAI and Ayushman Bharat by getting themselves NABH certified along with the primary aim of creating a quality healthcare ecosystem in India.
- Universal and affordable health services in Ayushman Bharat are possible through hospitals that have quality health care facilities, hence more and more hospitals now want to be a part of scheme.
- HOPE is not just confined to certification of HCOs/SHCOs, but also enables them to comply with ***quality protocols, improve patient safety and the overall healthcare facility*** of the organization.
- A mobile application has also been developed to support HCO/SHCOs for directly uploading geo-tagged and time stamped evidences required for compliance to the standards.
- It has also changed the assessment process which is now carried out on a technology based application where the data is captured and validated on a real-time basis

NABH

- The NABH is a constituent body of **Quality Council of India (QCI)** which handles global accreditation in Indian healthcare sector under Ministry Of Commerce And Industry.
- It has been working to ensure reliability, efficiency and global accreditation in Indian healthcare sector using contemporary methodologies and tools, standards of patient safety & infection control.
- The accreditation provides assurance of quality and care in hospitals at par with international benchmarks.

Medical Devices To Be Treated As Drugs

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

In News

- The Centre has issued a notification according to which medical devices viz. all implantable devices, CT Scan, PET and MRI equipment, defibrillators, dialysis machines and bone marrow separators, will be treated as drugs for human beings with effect from April 1, 2020. The decision was taken in consultation with the Drugs Technical Advisory Board.

- Majority of medical devices are completely unregulated in India. According to public health experts, the medical device industry is ridden with loopholes and thus regulation is extremely important. The recent controversy over Johnson & Johnson's alleged faulty acetabular surface replacement (ASR) has brought to light the loopholes of the medical devices industry.
- With this move, all implantable devices and some diagnostic equipment will be brought into the regulatory framework under Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) which is important from a patient safety perspective. The agency will be responsible for approving the import, manufacture and sale of the devices.
- Through this move the government also intends to regulate pricing of medical equipments that would not allow an increase of price hike of more than 10 per cent a year.

Swachh Shakti

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

In News

- Swachh Shakti 2019, a convention of women Sarpanches where the Swachh Shakti-2019 awards were distributed, was recently **held in Haryana**.
- The movement is a part of activities under the aegis of the **Swachh Bharat Mission**. It is a national event which aims to bring in to focus the leadership role played by rural women in Swachh Bharat Mission. Women Sarpanches and Panches from all over the country attended the event and around 15,000 women participated in the event aimed at empowering women.
- The **Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation** in association with the **Govt. of Haryana** had organized the event. Best practices from grass root level in the rural areas for Swachh Bharat were shared at the event. The event also showcased the achievements of Swachh Bharat and the recently conducted *Swachh Sunder Shauchalay*, (neat and clean toilet) - a unique and first of its kind in the world campaign.
- The first **Swachh Shakti program** was held at **Gandhinagar,** Gujarat in 2017 on International Women's Day.
- Swachh Shakti is an example of how at the grass root level, rural women champions are acting as a change agent to mobilize the community and lead from the front for a Swachh Bharat.

National Testing Agency Launches A Mobile App

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

In News

- The National Testing Agency (NTA) has launched a mobile app through which students can practice or take mock tests on their own computers or smart phones.
- In order to ensure that no student is disadvantaged due to lack of resources, NTA has established a network of more than 4000 Test Practice Centres (TPCs) to acquaint the aspirants, especially those from rural areas with Computer Based Tests (CBTs).
- Computer-based tests aren't a cakewalk for all kinds of students in India as even though the spread of digital awareness is growing, it hasn't reached every underprivileged corner of India yet.

- Students across the country can register themselves online at NTA Website or NTA Students App for visiting the TPCs. All these services are provided to the students free of cost.
- So far, more than one lakh students have registered at these TPCs and more than one crore students have benefited from these App & Web services.

National Testing Agency

- National Testing Agency (NTA) has been established as a premier, specialist, autonomous and self-sustained testing organization to conduct entrance examinations for admission/fellowship in higher educational institutions.
- Among others, it conducts Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) main for undergraduate engineering admissions and National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) for medical admissions.
- Its mission is to **improve equity and quality in education** by administering research based valid, reliable, efficient, transparent, fair and international level assessments.
- It intends to create a system which will promote teaching (by teachers), learning (by students) and assessment (by parents and institutions).

Operation Digital Board (ODB)

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

In News

- The Union HRD Ministry has launched Operation Digital Board to leverage technology in order to boost quality education in the country.
- Although the country has a good number of premier institutions, which compete with the best in the world, a large number of higher education institutions and schools need improvements in quality teaching-learning, as the students coming out of these institutions find themselves unsuitable for the requirements of the society and market.
- ODB aims to set up **one digital and interactive board per classroom in government and government-aided schools**, **for students from class 9 to 12 in schools, in addition, to classes in higher education institutions by 2022**.
- Additionally, e-resources will be made available to students for anytime, anywhere access. The scheme aims at converting a conventional classroom into a digital classroom.
- It is a revolutionary step which **will make the learning as well as the teaching process interactive and popularise flipped learning as a pedagogical approach**. It will also help in provisioning of personalised adaptive learning as well as Intelligent Tutoring by exploiting emerging technologies like Machine Learning, Artificial Intelligence & Data Analytics.
- **UGC will be the implementing agency for ODB in HEIs**. For the 2 lakh class rooms, the cost is estimated at Rs. 2000 crores. This can be implemented as a Central scheme, as a loan from HEFA.
- Besides ODB, the launching of ***e-Pathshala, DIKSHA, NROER, NPTEL, e-pgpathshala SWAYAM and SWAYAM-Prabha DTH Channels*** etc. by MHRD has provided adequate content of high quality which can be taken to every classroom, and thereby raise the standards of teaching, irrespective of the location of the schools and colleges. Moreover, such technology enabled learning can also inspire teachers across the country to raise their own standards of teaching.

Scheme for Higher Education Youth in Apprenticeship and Skills (SHREYAS)

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

In News

- **Ministry of Human Resources and Development** along with **Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship** and the **Ministry of Labour & Employment** has launched SHREYAS for providing industry apprenticeship opportunities to the general graduates.
- SHREYAS is a programme conceived for students in degree courses, primarily non-technical, with a view to **introduce employable skills into their learning, promote apprenticeship as integral to education and also amalgamate employment facilitating efforts of the Government into the education system** so that clear pathways towards employment opportunities are available to students during and after their graduation.
- Education with skills is the need of the hour and SHREYAS will be a major effort in this direction to make the degree students more skilled, capable, employable and aligned to the needs of the economy so that they contribute to country's progress and also obtain gainful employment.
- The portal will enable educational institutions and industry to log in and provide their respective demand and supply of apprenticeship. The matching of students with apprenticeship avenues will take place as per pre-specified eligibility criteria.
- State Governments are expected to play a major role in securing apprenticeship opportunities, apart from the Sector Skill Councils, so that general degree students passing out in April 2019, gain the option of industry & service sector apprenticeship.
- Further, the SSCs have identified more than 100 NSQF aligned Job roles/courses in the sectors of IT, Retail, Logistics, Tourism, Healthcare, BFSI, Electronics, Media, Life Sciences and Management, which the exiting graduates can take up under apprenticeship program.
- Additionally, the ministry has also planned to change the curriculum of general courses to make them more employment-friendly. 1000 hours of coursework will be added to BA, BCom and BSc programmes; out of which 250 hours each will be given to soft and ICT skilling and rest 500 hours will be dedicated to specific skill courses. Thus, the courses would be known as BA professional, B Com professional and BSc professional programme.
- While these three courses will be launched from the coming academic year 2019-20 onwards, the ministry also aims to expand and bring other graduate and PG level programmes under the ambit.

Skill Saathi Youth Conclave

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

In News

- Union Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) recently organized the Skill Saathi Youth Conclave in Odisha, to create awareness about various programs under Skill India Mission
- Skill Saathi is a **career counselling initiative of the National Skill Development Corporation**, **under the aegis of MSDE**, to guide candidates by providing them with information on career paths and opportunities.

- Skill Saathis **provide information on vocational education and available market opportunities, facilitate psychometric testing and conduct face-to-face counselling interventions** to guide aspirants to make the right choice of training and subsequent employment/entrepreneurship.
- The qualitative counselling sessions aim to counsel candidates in the age group of 15 – 35 years and steer them towards becoming **'Empowered Drivers of Change'**. The focus lies on school and college students along with dropouts, young adults from the community, students from colleges, polytechnic, ITI, diploma-holders, graduates and post-graduates.
- Key achievements of the Skill Saathi Career Counselling scheme include creation of capacity building workshops across 29 states that have witnessed the participation of more than 450 Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendras (PMKKs) and Counselling Implementing Organizations along with hosting booths at Rozgar Melas held across the country.

Inclusive Internet Index 2019

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

In News

- The Economist Intelligence Unit, commissioned by Facebook, has published the Inclusive Internet Index for a third consecutive year. It covers 100 countries, up from 86 in 2018, representing 94% of the world's population and 96% of global GDP.
- **India has been ranked 47th** in the overall score while **Sweden** topped the chart, followed by Singapore and the US.
- The index measures four domains which, taken together, provide a holistic picture of Internet inclusion:
    - **Availability**: Quality and breadth of available infrastructure required for access and levels of Internet usage.
    - **Affordability**: Cost of access relative to income and the level of competition in the Internet marketplace.
    - **Relevance**: Existence and extent of local language content and relevant content
    - **Readiness**: Capacity to access the Internet, including skills, cultural acceptance, and supporting policy

Report Findings

- According to the report, there are demonstrable benefits from comprehensive female e-inclusion policies, digital skills programmes and targets for women and girls to study science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).
- Men still have more Internet access than women globally, but low and lower middle income countries narrowed the gender gap in 2018.
- However, affordability is declining relative to monthly income in many countries, disproportionately affecting women and people in low income countries, all of whom are more reliant on mobile as their primary means of accessing the Internet.
- While the percentage of households connected to the Internet globally increased, on an average from 53.1 per cent to 54.8 per cent, the rate of growth in Internet connections slowed to 2.9 per cent in 2019 from 7.7 per cent in 2018.

- While lower middle income countries had a significant 66 per cent improvement in 4G coverage, low income countries saw a moderate 22 per cent improvement.
- Web accessibility standards also improved globally, led by low and lower middle income countries.
- Although the overall gap between those with access to the Internet and those without narrowed, the lowest income countries fell behind because they improved at a slower rate than other countries and much slower than last year. There are still about 3.8 billion people around the world without fast and reliable Internet access.
- Internet connections in low income countries increased by only 0.8 per cent compared to 65.1 per cent last year.
- More than half (52.2 per cent) of respondents said they are not confident about their online privacy. Yet the majority of respondents (74.4 per cent) think the Internet has been the most effective tool for finding jobs

International Relations

India Removes MFN Status To Pakistan

Syllabus: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

In News

- India has invoked "**security exceptions**" under **Article 21(c) of the World Trade Organization (WTO)** to withdraw the **unilateral non-discriminatory market status**, popularly known as **Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status**.
- India has decided to withdraw the MFN status in light of Pulwama terror attack.

MFN Status Between India And Pakistan

- India had granted MFN status to Pakistan in 1996.
- Pakistan had agreed to grant MFN status during a secretary-level agreement in September 2012 but later changed its mind.
- Pakistan has, however, moved from a **so-called positive list** trade regime to a **negative list**-based regime with India in which it does not allow imports of 1,209 items from India.
- MFN status would mean abolishing the negative list altogether while maintaining a list of prohibited items that cannot be imported.

Possible Impact Of This Move

- The withdrawal of the MFN status by India is negative in sentiment terms for the bilateral relations, the impact on **trade is unlikely to be substantial** given that volumes of merchandise trade are low.
- Pakistan's exports to India have consistently been about a fourth of what it imports from India, the MFN concessions notwithstanding.
- Total trade between the South Asian neighbours increased by 6% in 2017-18 to $2.4 billion, with $1.9 billion Indian exports and $500 million imports from Pakistan.
- Most Indian exports to Pakistan is **actually routed either through the United Arab Emirates or Singapore to the tune of $3 billio**n—over and above the bilateral trade of $2.4 billion—because of trade restrictions imposed by Islamabad.
- **Trade diversion is likely to increase** after withdrawal of MFN status.

What Is Most Favoured Nation (MFN) Status

- Article 1 of General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), 1994, requires every WTO member country to accord MFN status (or preferential trade terms with respect to tariffs and trade barriers) to all other member countries.
- The primary purpose of the WTO is to **open trade for the benefit of all**. In that sense, "most favoured" **sounds like a contradiction**.
- But even though it suggests special treatment, in the WTO it actually means **non-discrimination** — that is treating virtually everyone equally.
- In effect, then, every WTO member is supposed to be "most favoured" for all other WTO members.

Pakistan To Be On Greylist

Syllabus: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

In News

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the multilateral body on terror financing, has decided not to remove **not to remove Pakistan from the 'grey list'.**
- FATF also condemned the February 14 Pulwama terror attack.
- In June 2018, Pakistan was formally placed on FATF's grey list due to 'strategic deficiencies' in its anti-money laundering and terrorism financing regime.

Key Highlights

- While condemning the Pulwama attack, it issued a stern statement to Pakistan, asking it to comply with an action plan on terror financing or face further action.
- Further reviews of Pakistan's compliance to the 15-month, 27-point action plan it was put on in June 2018 will be taken in coming June and October.

About FATF

- Established in 1989 Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an inter-governmental body for the purpose of dealing with money-laundering and combating the financing of terrorism and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.
- It comprises 36 countries and two regional organisations (European Commission and Gulf Cooperation Council).

*[For detailed analysis, refer the topic **"Pakistan Formally Placed on FATF Grey List"** from CA magazine of June 2018]*

Joint Consultative Commission Between India And Bangladesh

Syllabus: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

In News

- The **Fifth meeting** of the India-Bangladesh Joint Consultative Commission (JCC) was held in New Delhi.
- During the meeting, the Ministers discussed the gamut of bilateral issues of mutual interest.
- Three MoUs/Agreements were signed to further strengthen the existing multifaceted cooperation between the two countries: (i) MoU on mid-career training of 1800 Bangladesh civil servants, (ii)

MoU between AYUSH and the Ministry of Health of Bangladesh on cooperation in the field of medicinal plants, (iii) MoU between Anti-Corruption Commission of Bangladesh and Central Bureau of Investigation of India.

- An MoU was also signed between Hiranandani Group and Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority to facilitate investments in the Indian Economic Zone in Mongla.

Collapse Of The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF)

Syllabus: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

In News

- The US has announced that it would suspend observance of the INF treaty on 2 February, giving six-months' notice of a complete withdrawal.
- Russia has also suspended its involvement in this Cold War-era treaty following a similar decision by the US.
- Two main justifications have been offered by the United States.
- The first is a **Russian violation** of the treaty. The second is that the **treaty is antiquated because China is not a party**.

Strategic Relevance Of INF Treaty In A Post-Cold War

- The treaty prevents the United States and Russia from fielding ground-based missiles with ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometers. This constraint helped **maintain strategic stability** in Europe.
- Today, although the Cold War may be over, Russia and the United States still **maintain large nuclear arsenals** kept on high alert.
- **Neither nation will commit to a no-first use policy**. The risk of nuclear war, especially through accident or misunderstanding, remains intolerably high.
- Treaties like INF puts a legal constraints on arms racing and help lower that risk.

Arm Race: A Possible Danger

- The United States **failed to ratify** the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1996.
- Not long afterwards the United States **unilaterally withdrew from** the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM).
- International negotiations on the **Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT) ground to a halt**.
- The demise of the INF Treaty is another dangerous step in the wrong direction.
- If this trend continues, it may not be long before leaders like Mr. Putin and Mr. Trump begin to **push to resume nuclear testing**.
- **Implication for Asia, specifically China, India, North Korea, and Pakistan?**
    - Analysts believe that these four nuclear weapons states also have missiles in this class.
    - They fear that the collapse of the treaty is a signal to the leadership of all four nations that arms control and disarmament is no longer an important global norm.

[*For detailed analysis on this, please refer the topic **"U.S. Exit from INF Treaty"** from October 2018 issue of CA magazine*]

Military Space Force

Syllabus: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

In News

- President Donald Trump signed **Space Policy Directive-4 (SPD-4)**.
- Through this directive, the Pentagon has been ordered to establish **the Military Space Force**.
- This space force will act as the **sixth branch** of the United States military, to go along with the *Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard*.

SPD-4 is President Trump's **fourth space policy directive**. The first SPD directed NASA to get humans back to the moon as a stepping-stone to Mars.

The second streamlined regulations for the commercial space sector, and the third dealt with management of space traffic.

Key Highlights

- Rather than deploying soldiers in space, the Space Force **will focus on national security and preserving the satellites and vehicles** that are dedicated to international communications and observation.
- The directive has centralized all military space functions under a new Space Force, which will be **overseen by the Department of the Air Force**.
- The space force will be led by a civilian undersecretary of the Air Force for space.
- A four-star general will be serving as the Space Force chief of staff.
- The Space Force will become reality only if US Congress approves the creation of this new military branch.

Why Is A Space Force Needed

- Russia and China are the U.S.'s two greatest space competitors and also potential military threats. And both have **demonstrated formidable space capabilities**.
- In 2007, for example, China launched a missile that climbed skyward for 500 miles until it impacted one of the country's own defunct weather satellites, which rained down in thousands of pieces.
- Similarly, in 2014, a piece of supposed Russian space junk called Object 2014-E28 turned out to be an autonomous robot of sorts that was capable of docking onto satellites.
- Both Russia and China had integrated anti-satellite attacks as part of their wartime protocols.
- Given that the U.S. government and military rely heavily on satellites for forecasting weather, collecting high-resolution images for intelligence and directing missiles with GPS satellites, the threat became obvious.

Does Something Like This Already Exist

- China, Russia and the United States have military sectors already dedicated to space.
- Russia revived the **Russian Space Forces** in 2015 as a branch of the Russian Aerospace Forces.
- In the same year, China established the **People's Liberation Army Strategic Support Force** as the space and cyberwarfare branch of the People's Liberation Army.

*[For detailed analysis on this issue as well as on India's Space Security Policy, please refer the topic **The US 'Space Force'** from CA magazine of July 2018]*

Azov Sea Standoff

Syllabus: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

In News

- The EU has decided to **sanction eight Russian nationals** for their responsibility in incidents in the Azov Sea that took place in November 2018.
- These are "targeted and individual sanctions" with the eight blacklist targets to be banned from entering the EU and their assets frozen.

About The November Incident

- Russian forces seized three Ukrainian vessels and captured two dozen sailors as they tried to pass from the Black Sea to the Sea of Azov.
- This led to the flaring up of Ukraine-Russia conflict. This was the first open military incident between Kiev and Moscow since 2014.
- In 2014, Russia annexed the Crimea peninsula after a conflict erupted in eastern Ukraine.

Why Conflict Occurred In The Sea Of Azov?

- Ukraine and Russia accuse each other of violating international maritime law.
- They refer to the **1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea**, which both states joined in the 1990s.
- Ukraine insists on freedom of movement in the Kerch Strait and the Sea of Azov in accordance with this agreement, while the Russian side is trying to draw territorial borders.
- The countries also have a **bilateral agreement on the free use of the Kerch Strait** and the Sea of Azov, an accord that Russia has never called into question.

Importance of Kerch Strait

- The Kerch Strait is the only connection between the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov.
- It is also the only way to reach two important Ukrainian ports, Mariupol and Berdiansk.
- Russia has **controlled the strait** since annexing Crimea in 2014, which has made traffic significantly more difficult for Ukrainian ships.
- After the completion of Crimean Bridge in May 2018, which connects the Russian mainland with the occupied peninsula, the control of Russia in this region has further strengthened.

US National Emergency at the Border

Syllabus: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

In News

- President Donald Trump has declared the **southern border of the United States** (US-Mexico border) to be a national emergency.

- This move will allow him to circumvent Congress's constitutional powers to control spending and divert federal funds toward the construction of border wall.

Key Highlights

- The national emergency was declared using powers conferred on him by the **National Emergencies Act 1976**.
- Trump has decided to resort to emergency powers after a bitter standoff with Democrats blocking his wall project culminated in a 35-day government shutdown.
- The **US-Mexico border** is 1,954 miles (3,145km) long and crosses vast deserts and mountains in California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas.

Why Trump Is Insistent On Building A Wall?

- Before Trump took office, there were 654 miles (just over 1,000km) of barrier along the southern border - made up of 354 miles of barriers to stop pedestrians and 300 miles of anti-vehicle fencing.
- In the run-up to the 2016 presidential election, Trump had promised to build a wall along the border's entire 2,000-mile length.
- He later clarified that it would only cover half of that - with nature, such as mountains and rivers, helping to take care of the rest.
- Illegal immigration, drug trafficking and criminal activities along the border has been cited as few reasons to build a wall.

The National Emergencies Act 1976

- The National Emergencies Act 1976, authorizes the President to declare such national emergency.
- However, it contains no definition of what constitutes a national emergency; rather, it merely states that "the President is authorized to declare such national emergency".
- Unlike many other constitutions, the US Constitution **confers no additional powers on the executive** during an emergency. But while the constitution itself may be silent on emergency powers, **Congress has over time conferred a vast array** of legislative powers on the president, which they can trigger when a national emergency is declared.
- It is these powers that Trump wants to authorise up to US$6.7 billion in additional funding to build his border wall.
- Under current law, emergency powers lapse within a year unless the president renews them.
- A national emergency can be re-declared indefinitely, and, in practice, that is done frequently.
- Anyone directly affected by the order can challenge it in court.
- Congress can also draft a **concurrent resolution to terminate** the state of emergency, leading to a somewhat novel act. Ordinarily, congressional resolutions support a president's declaration of a national emergency.

Trump-Kim Summit: Vietnam Summit

Syllabus: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

In News

The second summit between US President Donald Trump and North Korea leader Kim Jong-un took place Hanoi, Vietnam.

Key Highlights

- The summit was abruptly cut short as both the leaders **failed to reach an agreement** over how North Korea should denuclearise.
- **The American sides blamed North Korea** for this impasse. According to them, Kim had insisted all economic sanctions against North Korea were lifted while not agreeing to give up his entire nuclear arsenal.
- On the other hand, North Korea said that the US rejected its proposal to dismantle the **Yongbyon nuclear complex** and demanded Pyongyang take further disarmament steps.
- It also said that Pyongyang **sought partial, not complete**, sanctions relief during the sumit.
- North Korea had agreed not to restart nuclear and missile tests and the US would not restart military exercises in South Korea - a continuation of the status quo.
- North Korea promised further negotiations with the US as both sides sought to hold open the door while staking out their positions after negotiations ended abruptly.

Analysis

- The "perception that this summit was a failure" will be damaging for Trump in the US as he has built a brand among his supporters as a dealmaker.
- Many experts believe that this no deal summit actually helped the North Korean leader.
- By standing shoulder to shoulder with Trump, Kim will be able to portray himself to his people and supporters as the charismatic head of a nuclear-armed power.
- However, other analysts believe that the decision to walk away calmly in Hanoi was the right one as **no deal is better than a bad deal**.
- They have lauded the decision to pursue negotiations at the envoy level as the right one.

*[For points related to the Singapore Summit, please refer the topic "**Trump-Kim Summit: Singapore Summit"** for June 2018 CA magazine]*

Chagos Islands Dispute

Syllabus: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

In News

- The UK has been ordered by the International Court of Justice to **hand back the Chagos Islands to Mauritius** "as rapidly as possible".
- The United Nations' highest court ruled that **continued British occupation** of the remote Indian Ocean archipelago is **illega**l.

Key Highlights

- The court in its order said that the detachment of the Chagos archipelago in 1965 from Mauritius had not been based on a **"free and genuine expression of the people concerned"**.
- According to the court, the process of separating the Chagos Islands from Mauritius **during decolonisation** in the 1960s constituted an **"unlawful detachment"** and was a **"wrongful act".**

Analysis

- Many analysts have termed this as a **"blockbuster" of an opinion** from the UN's highest court.
- At the heart of it was the **right of all people to self-determination** as a basic human right, which the UK violated when dismembering its former colony.
- As the ruling power, **the responsibility lay with the UK to respect national unity and territory integrity** of Mauritius as required under international law.
- It also reflected the isolation of UK at global level after BREXIT as many EU countries did not support UK on this matter.

Background

- The UK retained possession of the Chagos archipelago, which includes the strategic US airbase of Diego Garcia, after Mauritius gained its independence in 1968.
- It was done by effectively paying Mauritius more than £4m for the islands.
- The government refers to it as **British Indian Ocean Territory or BIOT**.
- About 1,500 native islanders were deported so the largest island could be leased to the US for the airbase in 1971. They have never been allowed to return home.

About International Court of Justice

- The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is the **principal judicial organ** of the United Nations (UN).
- It was established in June 1945 by the Charter of the United Nations and began work in April 1946.
- The seat of the Court is at the **Peace Palace in The Hague (Netherlands).** Of the six principal organs of the United Nations, it is the only one not located in New York (United States of America).
- The Court's role is to settle, in accordance with international law, legal disputes submitted to it by States and to give advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by authorized United Nations organs and specialized agencies.
- The Court is **composed of 15 judges**, who are elected for terms of office of nine years by the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council.
- Its official languages are **English and French**.

Visit of Prime Minister to the Republic of Korea

Syllabus: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

In News

- Indian Prime Minister paid a State Visit to the Republic of Korea on 21-22 February 2019.
- The visit is part of the new momentum in high-level exchanges between India and ROK.
- This can be seen from the **visit of President Moon to India** for Bilateral Summit in July 2018 and the **participation of the Korean First Lady at the Deepotsav** event in Ayodhya in November 2018.

Key Highlights

- During the visit, Indian Prime Minister was conferred upon with the **2018 Seoul Peace Prize** in recognition of his national and international contributions.
- List of MoUs/Documents signed:

- MOU on **Extension of Korea Plus** (Korea Plus- an organization that facilitates investments by Korean companies in India. It was operationalized in **June 2016**, and comprises representatives from the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Energy of South Korea, Korea Trade Investment and Promotion Agency (KOTRA) and Invest India)
- MoU between Korean **National Police Agency and MHA** on Comba
- ting Transnational Crime And Developing Police Cooperation
- MoU between National Highways Authority of India and Korea Expressway Corporation to promote bilateral cooperation in road and transport infrastructure development projects of India
- MoU on Start-up Cooperation
- MoU on release of commemorative postal stamp on Queen Hur (Suriratna, *a legendary Princess of Ayodhya, who went to Korea in AD 48 and married King Kim-Suro*.)

Seoul Peace prize: In brief

- Established in 1990
- To commemorate the success of the 24th Olympic Games held in Seoul, Republic of Korea
- Awarded to those who have made their mark through contributions to the harmony of mankind, reconciliation between nations and to world peace.
- Given biennially by the Seoul Peace Prize Cultural Foundation,
- Awardee receives a diploma, a plaque and honorarium of US$200,000
- PM Modi was its 14th recipient

India – ROK Relationship : In Nutshell

ROK is an important strategic partner for India and this visit was a manifestation of the importance which India attach to this very important strategic partnership, very multi-dimensional engagement which it has with South Korea.

Economic Relationship

- India is among top 10 trade partners of Korea and India is the 6th largest export destination for Korean goods.
- Our trade volume has reached 21.5 billion Dollars for the calendar year 2018.
- The negotiations to upgrade Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement have been fast-tracked to achieve the bilateral trade target of 50 billion Dollars by 2030.
- Not just trade, in investment terms also we are seeing a positive turn. And, Korean investments into India have reached a cumulative figure of almost 6 billion Dollars.
- Hyundai, Samsung, LG electronics have become trustworthy brands in India. And, Kia is soon to join this club.

Startup Cooperation

- Both countries have signed MoU on Startup Cooperation which will provide a hub for Korean startups and Indian talent to freely communicate.
- South Korean National IT Industry promotion Agency has already opened their Indian office in Bengaluru to facilitate Korean startups to India.
- India-Korea Startup Hub has been inaugurated.

R&D, Innovation

In the field of innovation, both countries have decided to establish 'India-Korea Future Strategy

Group' and 'India-Korea Centre for research and Innovation Cooperation' to provide an institutional framework for future-oriented cooperation based on research, innovation and entrepreneurship.

Infrastructure Development Cooperation

Recognizing the importance of supporting India's infrastructure development, India and South Korea have identified 10 billion Dollars under Korea's Economic Development Cooperation Fund and Export Credit, to finance such projects.

Strategic Relationship

- In 2015, a Special Strategic Partnership was concluded between both the countries.
- The integration of India's Act East Policy and Korea's New Southern Policy is giving a strong platform to further deepen and strengthen our Special Strategic Partnership.

Defense Relationship

Defense sector has an important role in our growing strategic partnership. An example of this can be seen in the inclusion of the K-9 "Vajra" (Joint venture between Larsen & Toubro and Hanwha) artillery gun in the Indian Army.

People to people Contact

- Visa on Arrival for Korean nationals has been put in place since October last year.
- MoU on release of commemorative postal stamp on Queen Hur (Suriratna, a legendary Princess of Ayodhya, who went to Korea in AD 48 and married King Kim-Suro.)

[Please refer the topic *"State Visit of President of Republic of Korea to India"* from July 2018 issue of CA Magazine]

State Visit of Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia to India

Syllabus: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

In News

- Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Crown Prince, Vice President of the Council of Ministers and Minister of Defence of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia paid his **first State visit to India** on February 19-20, 2019.
- The visit follows the highly successful visit of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to Saudi Arabia in April 2016, during which the two countries **agreed to further elevate existing strategic partnership**.

Key Highlights

- List of MoUs/Agreements signed:
    - MoU on investing in the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund
    - MoU on Cooperation in the field of Tourism
    - Framework Cooperation Program between Invest India and Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority on Enhancing Bilateral Investment Relations
    - MoU for Cooperation on Broadcasting between Prasar Bharati, New Delhi, India and Saudi Broadcasting Corporation (SBC), Saudi Arabia for Exchange of Audio Visual Programme
    - MoU on cooperation in the field of Housing
    - Agreement for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to join the International Solar Alliance (ISA)

- Saudis have agreed to align the **Kingdom's Vision 2030 and its 13 Vision Realization Programs** with India's flagship initiatives of "Make in India", "Start Up India", "Smart Cities", "Clean India", and "Digital India" for deepening of trade and investment.
- The Crown Prince decided to invest in the areas of energy, refining, petrochemicals, infrastructure, agriculture, minerals and mining, manufacturing, education and health potentially worth in excess of $100 billion.
- The two sides expressed satisfaction at the **first Joint Venture West Coast Refinery and Petrochemical Project**.
- The quota for Hajj pilgrims from India has been increased to 200,000 to reflect the latest census.
- India was the '**Guest of Honour'** in the **32nd Saudi National Festival of Heritage & Culture – Janadriyah 2018**.

Analysis Of This Visit

- The visit, coming barely days after the terrorist attack on security forces in Pulwama, was undertaken in a tense atmosphere and heightened security concerns in the subcontinent.
- Prior to his visit to India, the crown prince visited Pakistan on February 17-18.
- Saudi Arabia well understands the existing political and security dynamics between India and Pakistan.
- He was cautious so as not to look like being supportive one country over the other.
- While with Pakistan he established the '**Saudi-Pakistan Supreme Coordination Council'** to be jointly chaired by himself and the Pakistani Prime Minister, **with India** he agreed to constitute a '**Comprehensive Security Dialogue'** and to form a '**Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism'.**
- The Crown Prince agreed with Pakistan the importance of **not politicising the UN listing regime**. But he also agreed to join hands with **India to counter terror** and share i**ntelligence**.
- Saudi Arabia condemned the terror attacks on India, but it did not condemn the Pakistani involvement in the cross border terrorism targeting India.

State Visit of President of Argentina to India

Syllabus: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

In News

- President of Argentina Mr. Mauricio Macri paid a State visit to India from 17-19 February 2019.
- The State visit of President Macri is taking place during the 70th year of the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between India and Argentina.
- It closely follows on the heels of the highly successful visit of Prime Minister Modi to Argentina for the G20 from 30 November - 1 December 2018.

Key Highlights

- List of MOUs/Agreements signed during the visit include:
  - MoU on defence cooperation
  - MoU on Tourism

- MoU on Cooperation and Collaboration between Prasar Bharti, India and the Federal System of Media and Public Contents, Argentina
- MoU in pharmaceuticals between Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), GoI, and National Administration of Drugs, Food and Medical Technology, Argentina
- MoU on **Antarctic Co-operation** between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship of the Argentine Republic and the Ministry of Earth Sciences of the Republic of India
- Work Plan on Cooperation between the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare of the Republic of India and the Ministry of Production and Labour of the Argentine Republic within the MoU signed in 2010.
- MOU between Global Centre for Nuclear Energy Partnership (GCNEP), India, and CNEA, the Secretariat of Energy, Argentina
- Agreement for the establishment of India-Argentina Centre of Excellence for Information and Technology

- During the visit, **India-Argentina Special declaration to Fight Terrorism** was made.

India – Argentina Trade Relation (Brief Outlook)

- Bilateral cooperation spans wide range are of areas including nuclear, space, economic and commercial, agriculture, science and technology, culture and tourism.
- Bilateral trade at present is around USD 3 billion. The total Indian investments in Argentina are to the tune of USD 1 billion.
- India exports mainly two wheelers, iron and steel, agro chemicals, yarn, organic chemicals, bulk drugs and drug intermediates and motor vehicles.
- Argentina exports to India mainly vegetable oils (soya bean and sunflower), finished leather, cereals, residual chemicals and allied products and pulses.

Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

Syllabus: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements.

In News

- The **46th Sessio**n of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the **Organisation of Islamic Cooperation** was held in Abu Dhabi.
- The Minister for External Affairs Smt. Sushma Swaraj has been invited by Foreign Minister of the United Arab Emirates as the **"Guest of Honour"** to address the Inaugural Plenary.
- India was **invited to attend the OIC meeting in 1969** but Pakistan prevailed upon and got the **invite withdrawn**.

Analysis

- This invitation was **first of its kind** in last five decade. It is being termed as **major diplomatic victory** for India and a setback for Pakistan.
- The invitation is a result of Modi-Prince (Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan) bonhomie.
- Pakistan, a member of the OIC, tried to get Ms Swaraj "disinvited" from the Abu Dhabi meet following India's air strike on a terror camp in Pakistan but its request was turned down.
- India is growing economically. It is one of the **biggest hydrocarbon importers** and **labour exporters**.

- Also, India has one of the world's **largest Muslim populations**.
- Thus the present situations created a **new framework for India's engagement** with the Muslim world and the Middle East.
- In this context, India's participation in the Abu Dhabi ministerial, therefore, must be viewed as a **diplomatic opening for a sustained and long-term political engagement** of the Islamic world as a collective.

India At OIC

- India is not a member of OIC.
- It was Qatar that first proposed **'Observer' status** for India at the OIC Foreign Ministers' meet in 2002 in recognition of India's significant Muslim population, but Pakistan had consistently blocked the move.
- Last year, Bangladesh proposed a restructuring of the charter of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation to pave way for the inclusion of non-Muslim countries like India as an 'observer state' of the 50-year old grouping.

About OIC

- The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) (formerly Organization of the Islamic Conference) is the second largest inter-governmental organization after the United Nations.
- It has **membership of 57 states** spread over four continents.
- The Organization was established upon a decision of the **historical summit which took place in Rabat**, Kingdom of Morocco on 25 September 1969 as a result of criminal arson of Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied Jerusalem.
- It has a permanent secretariat in **Jeddah, Saudi Arabia**.
- This organization has been termed a **toothless tiger** by many analysts when it comes to dealing with squabbles among member states.
- Every member has a **veto**. As a result, the organization **fails to take a critical stand** on serious disputes that are shaping in the middle east.
- **The theme** of the 46th ministerial meet was "**50 years of Islamic cooperation: The road map for prosperity and development**," coinciding with the **celebration of the 50th anniversary of the organisation**.

Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)

Syllabus: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements.

In News

- China has **refused to dilute** its stand on India's entry into the elite Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).
- It is insisting that New Delhi must sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty to gain entry as there is no precedent for the inclusion of non-NPT countries.

Key Highlights

- Other P5 countries including the US and Russia backed its case **based on New Delhi's non-proliferation record**.
- China has sought **to club India and Pakistan together**, on the basis of **both being non-signatories** of the NPT.

- It has asked the NSG countries to adopt a "**criteria-based approach**" — which essentially means that **either both** can get into the group **or none**.
- India has a clean record as far as track record on non-proliferation is concerned.
- On the other hand, **Pakistan's nuclear programme**, led by A Q Khan, violated all norms of nuclear non-proliferation and had **links with the North Korean nuclear programme**.

About NSG

- **Multilateral export control** regime known originally as the "**London Club**"
- Contribute to non-proliferation of nuclear weapons **by controlling the export** of nuclear technology, equipment and materials.
- Came into existence in 1974– in response to the Indian nuclear test (**smiling Buddha**)
- Not a formal organization; guidelines are non-binding in nature
- **48 member Countries** including all the P5 countries

Fact:

- The term NSG Participant is interchangeable with "**NSG Participating Government**" (PG), i.e. a government that participates in the NSG.
- Since the NSG is **not a treaty-based organisation**, the use of "member" or "Member State" is not used in the NSG.

Importance Of NSG Membership For India

- Membership of the NSG will provide **greater certainty and a legal foundation** for India's nuclear regime.
- It will generate **greater confidence for those countries** investing billions of dollars to set up ambitious nuclear power projects in India.
- India will be able **access state-of-the-art technology** especially the **better enrichment and reprocessing (ENR)** technology from the members of the group.
- India would like to **move into the category of international rule-creating nations** rather than stay in the ranks of rule-adhering nations. For this, it is essential that India gets due recognition and a place on the NSG high table.
- It will also provide a **boost to "Make in India" programme** as the membership will enable the joint production of nuclear equipment.

About NPT:

- The NPT is a multilateral treaty aimed at limiting the spread of nuclear weapons including three elements: (1) **non-proliferation**, (2) **disarmament**, and (3) **peaceful use of nuclear energy**.
- Entered into force: 5 March 1970
- Depositaries: Russia, UK, and US
- States Parties: 191
- The Treaty defines **nuclear weapon states** (NWS) as those that had manufactured and detonated a nuclear explosive device **prior to 1 January 1967**.
- All the other states are therefore considered **non-nuclear weapon states** (NNWS).
- The **five nuclear weapon states** are China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the

United States.

Why India refuses to sign this treaty?

- Today, India is **one of the only five countries** that either did not sign the NPT or signed but withdrew, thus becoming part of a list that includes **Pakistan, Israel, North Korea, and South Sudan**.
- India refuses to accede to the Treaty on grounds that it is a biased legal instrument that **divided the world** into **"nuclear haves**" and "**nuclear have-nots**."

Asia LPG Summit 2019

Syllabus: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements.

In News

- The second edition of Asia LPG Summit was inaugurated by Union Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas at New Delhi.
- The summit was organized by the **World LPG Association** (WLPGA) in association with major Indian public-sector oil companies (OMCs) Indian Oil, Hindustan Petroleum, and Bharat Petroleum.
- Theme - **'LPG – Energy for Life'.**

Success Of India's Initiatives: Deliberated At The Summit

- In the last four years, Indian government increased LPG access to its rural population by almost **50 million LPG connections**, under its flagship programme 'Ujjwala'.
- The target has now been **revised to 80 million**.
- With this, India is now the **world's 2nd largest consumer** of LPG for domestic cooking applications, with annual volumes climbing up to 23 million tonnes in 2017-18.
- LPG access in India has reached almost 80% of its population of around 1.2 billion.
- With this, India presents a viable model for other countries.

About WLPGA

- The World LPG Association (WLPGA) is the voice of the global LPG Industry representing the full LPG value chain.
- It is based in Paris.
- The primary goal of the Association is to **add value** to the sector by driving premium demand for LPG, while also **promoting Compliance** to good business and safety practices.
- The Association was established in 1987 and granted **Special Consultative Status** with the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 1989.

World Government Summit 2019

Syllabus: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements.

In News

- The 7th edition of the World Government Summit was held in Dubai from 10th to 12th February.
- The event hosted participants from 140 countries to discuss key global solutions.

India's Participation

- India was guest country at this year's event and Indian PM addressed the event on day 1.
- In his inaugural speech, Indian PM propounded **the idea of six Rs** for sustainable development- **Reduce**, **Reuse**, **Recycle**, **Recover**, **Redesign** and **Remanufacture**.

About World Government Summit (WGS)

- The World Government Summit is a global platform dedicated to shaping the future of governments worldwide.
- It is a neutral, non-profit organization at the intersection of government and innovation.
- It functions as a knowledge exchange platform for leaders in the public and private sectors to convene and collaborate with world-renowned experts to create a positive impact for citizens worldwide.
- The first WGS was held in Dubai in 2013. Since then, this event is held in Dubai annually.

UN Women

Syllabus: Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

Context

- The **United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women** (UN Women) has lauded the current Odisha government for the **women's reservation proposal**.
- The proposal, which was passed in November 2018 by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, **seeks to implement 33 per cent reservation** for women in Parliament and state assemblies.

Background

- The Rajya Sabha passed the Constitution **108th Amendment Bill** in 2010. However, the Bill lapsed after the dissolution of the 15th Lok Sabha in 2014.
- The Legislative Assemblies of Odisha and Andhra Pradesh have already taken a lead and passed a resolution calling on the Central government to enact the Women's Reservation.

About UN Women

- UN Women is the **United Nations entity dedicated** to gender equality and the empowerment of women.
- UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality, and in all deliberations and agreements linked to the 2030 Agenda.
- It was created by the **United Nations General Assembly** in **July 2010**.
- The creation of UN Women came about as part of the UN reform agenda, bringing together resources and mandates for greater impact.
- It merges and builds on the important work of **four previously distinct parts of the UN system**, which focused exclusively on gender equality and women's empowerment:
    - Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)
    - International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW)
    - Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI)
    - United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

Geneva Convention

Syllabus: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements.

In News

- India has been able to secure the release of the Indian Air Force pilot, Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman under the Geneva Conventions.
- The **Geneva Conventions** and their **Additional Protocols** are international treaties that are at the core of international humanitarian law.
- They contain the most important rules **regulating the conduct of armed conflicts** and seeks to specifically protect civilians, health and aid workers, as well as soldiers no longer participating in the hostilities, such **as prisoners of war (PoW)** and **wounded personnel**.

Objectives

The Geneva Conventions have the following objective:

- Immunity from capture and destruction of all establishments for the treatment of wounded and sick soldiers and their personnel
- Impartial reception and treatment of all combatants,
- Protection of civilians providing aid to the wounded, and
- Recognition of the Red Cross symbol as a means of identifying persons and equipment covered by the agreement.

What Are The Rights Of A Pow?

- According to Article 13 in the Third Geneva Convention, PoWs must be "humanely treated" at all times.
- According to it, any unlawful act or omission by the Detaining Power causing death or seriously endangering the health of a prisoner of war in its custody is prohibited, and will be regarded as a serious breach of the present Convention.
- It also adds that PoW have to be protected against insults and public curiosity as well as acts of violence or intimidation.
- Article 118 of Convention III deals with the release of PoW. According to it, PoWs "shall be released and repatriated without delay after the cessation of active hostilities.

Timeline

- These are a series of treaties concluded in Geneva between 1864 and 1949.
- The rules protecting prisoners of war (POWs) are specific and were first detailed in the 1929 Geneva Convention.
- They were refined in the **third 1949 Geneva Convention**, following the lessons of World War II, as well as in Additional Protocol I of 1977.
- In total, **196 countries** have signed and ratified them over the years.

3. GS PAPER 3

Economic Growth and Development

Unregulated Deposit Schemes To Be Banned

Syllabus: Indian Economy and Issues relating to mobilization of resources

In News

- The Union Cabinet has given its approval to move official amendments to the Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Bill, 2018. The amendments were based on the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Finance (SCF) which reviewed the the Bill that was first introduced in Parliament in July, 2018.
- The Bill seeks to provide for a comprehensive mechanism to ban the unregulated deposit schemes that are being run by non-banking entities and to protect the interest of depositors.
- The Bill has been introduced in view of the frauds that has cropped up in non-banking saving schemes like chit fund, ponzi schemes etc.

Provisions of the Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Bill, 2018

- **Complete prohibition of unregulated deposit taking activity:** The Bill contains a substantive banning clause which bans Deposit Takers from promoting, operating, issuing advertisements or accepting deposits in any Unregulated Deposit Scheme.
- **Types of offences:** The Bill creates three different types of offences: 1) Running of Unregulated Deposit Schemes, 2) Fraudulent default in Regulated Deposit Schemes, and 3) Wrongful inducement in relation to Unregulated Deposit Schemes.
- **Punishment:** The Bill provides for severe punishment and heavy pecuniary fines to act as deterrent. It prescribes monetary penalty, and jail term, which could be extended up to 10 years, for duping gullible depositors.
- **Competent Authority:** The Bill provides for the appointment of Competent Authority, which has the powers similar to a civil court, including powers to attach properties of the deposit takers.
- **Repayments to depositors:** The Bill has provisions for repayment of deposits in cases where such schemes nonetheless manage to raise deposits illegally. The Competent Authority can attach properties/assets and use the subsequent realization of assets for repayment to depositors.
- **Online central database:** The Bill enables creation of an online central database, for collection and sharing of information on deposit-taking activities in the country.
- **Special Courts:** The Bill provides for the designation of Courts to oversee repayment of depositors and to try offences under the Act.
- **Implementation by States:** The Bill entrusts the primary responsibility of implementing the provisions of the legislation to the State Governments.

Benefits of The Bill

- **Protects vulnerable people:** As many as 978 cases of unauthorised deposit schemes came to the notice of the Central Government between 2014 to 2018. The worst victims of these schemes are the poor and the financially illiterate, and the operations of such schemes are often spread over many States. The Bill protects them by banning all unregulated deposit schemes.
- **Separate Law to plug loopholes:** Companies/ institutions running such illicit deposit schemes exploit existing regulatory gaps and lack of strict administrative measures. The Bill plugs all loopholes and provides that every deposit-taking scheme must be registered with one of the regulators (like RBI, SEBI etc.) listed in the Bill.

- **Deterrent Punishments:** By levying huge fines and long jail terms along with special authority and designated courts
- **Best Practices adopted:** The Bill adopted best practices from State laws.

Final Analysis:

There have been rising instances of people in various parts of the country being defrauded by illicit deposit taking schemes. The Bill provides appropriate legislative provisions, along with effective administrative and enforcement measures to protect the hard-earned savings and investments made by millions of people. The government should also ensure that, while drafting the rules, there will be no loopholes left.

Govt To Set Up Unified Authority For Regulating Financial Services In IFSCs

Syllabus: Indian Economy and Issues relating to mobilization of resources

In News

The Union Cabinet has approved the establishment of a unified authority for regulating all financial services in International Financial Services Centres (IFSCs) in India through International Financial Services Centres Authority Bill, 2019.

International Financial Centers

- Such centres deal with flows of finance, financial products and services across borders. London, New York and Singapore can be counted as global financial centres. Many emerging IFSCs around the world, such as Shanghai and Dubai, are aspiring to play a global role in the years to come.
- **GIFT City in India:** Gujarat International Finance Tec-City Co. Ltd, also called GIFT City, has been set up as India's first International Financial Services Centres (IFSC) in Gandhinagar, Gujarat

Benefits of IFSC in India

- **Bringing back Financial Services to India:** An IFSC in India enables bringing back the financial services and transactions are currently carried out in offshore financial centers by Indian corporate entities and overseas branches / subsidiaries of financial institutions (FIs) by offering business and regulatory environment that is comparable to other leading IFSCs in world such as London and Singapore.
- **Develop financial markets in India:** It would provide Indian corporates easier access to global financial markets. IFSC would also compliment and promote further development of financial markets in India.
- **Offer wide variety of financial services:** An IFSC can provide various services like Fund-raising services for individuals, corporations and governments; Asset management and global portfolio diversification undertaken by pension funds, insurance companies and mutual funds; Wealth management; Global tax management; Risk management operations such as insurance and reinsurance; Merger and acquisition activities among trans-national corporations etc.

Need For Unified Authority for IFSCs

- Currently, the banking, capital markets and insurance sectors in IFSC are regulated by multiple regulators, i.e. RBI, SEBI and IRDAI. The dynamic nature of business in the IFSCs necessitates a high degree of inter-regulatory coordination.
- It also requires regular clarifications and frequent amendments in the existing regulations governing financial activities in IFSCs.

- The development of financial services and products in IFSCs would require focussed and dedicated regulatory interventions.
- **Additional benefits:**
    - **Ease of business:** This unified regulator would also be essential from an ease of doing business perspective.
    - **Global best practices:** The unified authority would also provide the much needed impetus to further development of IFSC in India in-sync with the global best practices.
    - **Jobs:** This would also generate significant employment in the IFSCs in particular as well as financial sector in India as a whole.

Provisions of IFSC Authority Bill 2019

- **Management of the Authority:** The Authority shall consist of a Chairperson, one Member each to be nominated by the RBI, SEBI, IRDAI and PFRDA, two members to be dominated by the Central Government and two other members.
- **Functions of the Authority:** The Authority shall regulate all such financial services, financial products and FIs in an IFSC which has already been permitted, or which may be notified later.

Final Analysis

- The establishment of a unified financial regulator for IFSCs will provide a stimulus for further development of IFSCs by creating world-class regulatory environment to market participants from an ease of doing business perspective.
- This will provide a stimulus for further development of IFSCs and generate significant employment in India while also bringing back of financial services and transactions that are currently carried out in offshore financial centres to India.

RBI To Pay Rs 28,000 Crore As Interim Dividend To Government

Syllabus: Indian Economy and Issues relating to mobilization of resources

In News

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will pay Rs 28,000 crore as interim dividend to the government. The interim dividend will help to keep the fiscal deficit at 3.4 per cent of GDP for 2018-19 (FY19) as per the revised estimates.
- Including this interim transfer, government got a total of Rs 68,000 crore for FY19 from RBI, exceeding the Rs 65,896 crore it received in FY16 and Rs 40,659 crore in FY18.

RBI's Balance Sheet

1. **RBI's Income Comes From Three Sources:**
    a) Interest on government bonds held for conducting open market operations (OMOs)
    b) Fees from government's market borrowing programme
    c) Income from investment in foreign currency assets
2. **RBI's Expenditure:** RBI's expenditure is mainly on the printing of currency notes, on staff, on commissions to banks for undertaking transactions on behalf of the government across the country, and to primary dealers.
3. **Surplus:** The central bank's total costs, including expenditure on printing and commissions, is only about a seventh of its total net interest income. This means that RBI generates a large surplus, more than the entire public sector put together.

What Happens To The Surplus?

1. **RBI retains some in contingency reserves:** The RBI retains some of this as equity capital to maintain its creditworthiness, and adds it to its Contingency reserves. For example, at the end of June 2018, RBI put aside Rs 14,190 crore for the contingency fund.
2. **Transfer of part surplus to the government:**
   - After retaining some of the surplus, RBI pays out the remaining surplus to the government. Section 47 of the RBI Act provides for the transfer of surplus to the government. As per the section, after making provision for bad and doubtful debts, depreciation in assets etc., the balance of the profits shall be paid to the Central Government.
   - **Interim dividend:** The central bank follows a July-June accounting year and usually transfers the surplus in August after annual accounts are finalised. However, it sometimes makes an "interim transfer" at the request of government.
   - For example in FY19, the RBI had transferred Rs 40,000 crore to the government in August 2018, and another interim transfer of 28,000 crore in February 2019, making it a total of Rs 68,000 crore for the fiscal.

Controversy Over Amount Of Surplus To Government

There is controversy over how much of the surplus RBI retains, and how much it transfers to the government. For example, the amount RBI retained towards risks and reserves in FY17 and FY18 amount to more than Rs 27,000 crore. While the RBI wants to retain it, the government wants it transferred to it.

About RBI's Reserves - RBI Maintains Two Major Types Of Reserves:

1. Revaluation reserves:

- The revaluation reserves are reserves created due to upward revaluation of RBI's assets like dollars and gold. As the rupee depreciated against the U.S. dollar and other currencies, gold and foreign reserves held by the RBI when translated into the current rupee value, leads to an increase in its asset value (even when the assets remain the same).
- Most of the reserves that RBI holds are in the form of revaluation reserves. All such gains are *non-cash and notional* and the cash realised only when the assets are sold. So, unless these assets are sold, these reserves are not transferable for other purposes.

2. Contingency reserves:

They are needed for the Indian central bank to conduct its usual functions. This is the only capital that can actually be deployed (as the revaluation reserves are only accounting entries). However, there is no agreement on the size of these reserves between the government and the RBI.

Why Does A Central Bank Need Capital

- The Central banks that have foreign assets need capital to absorb potential losses.
- The RBI needs capital to shield the economy from monetary and financial shocks.
- A central bank needs reserves to perform functions such as price and exchange stability.
- The reserves give independence to a central bank. Low capital will force central bank to turn to government in time of need. This will give government influence over the central bank.

Final Analysis

Every country has its own way of handling the issue of central bank capital. Some central banks like Bank of Korea is legally bound to transfer 30% of its annual profits to statutory reserves. The Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934, does not provide clarity on the amount to be transferred to the government. It is now time for more legal clarity on central bank capital, which needs an informed debate. A committee

headed by former Reserve Bank of India governor Bimal Jalan has been set up to review RBI's economic capital framework, which would give clarity on dividend flows to the government.

RBI Cuts Key Repo Rate By 25 Basis Points

Syllabus: Indian Economy and Issues relating to mobilization of resources

Key Highlights

- RBI has released its bi-monthly Monetary Policy Statement.
- **Interest Rates cut:** The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) reduced the repo rate under the liquidity adjustment facility (LAF) by 25 bps to 6.25%. Consequently, the reverse repo rate under the LAF stands adjusted to 6.0 per cent, and the marginal standing facility (MSF) rate and the Bank Rate to 6.5 per cent.
- **CRR:** Cash Reserve Ratio held constant at 4%.
- **Monetary policy stance changed to 'neutral':** RBI has also changed the stance of the monetary policy to 'neutral' from 'calibrated tightening'. Calibrated tightening refers to a situation where a rate cut is ruled out in the existing rate cycle. A neutral policy will mean that depending upon the situation, RBI can increase or decrease interest rates.
- **Growth Rate:** The RBI projected GDP growth for 2019-20 at 7.4 per cent – in the range of 7.2-7.4 per cent in H1, and 7.5 per cent in Q3.
- **Need for private investment:** Investment activity is recovering but supported mainly by public spending on infrastructure. RBI's statement said that there's the need to strengthen private investment activity and buttress private consumption.

Reasons For Interest Rate Cut

- **Inflation under control:** Retail inflation grew by 2.2% in December - its slowest in the last 18 months. The rate cuts are thus in consonance with the objective of achieving the medium-term target for CPI of 4 +/- 2 per cent, while supporting growth.
- **Inflation expectations also good:** Central banks look to the future for decisions, and RBI's surveys capture sentiment and expectations of households and businesses. RBI survey found that inflation expectations have been firmly stabilized, as households now expect inflation to fall in the coming three months as well as a year ahead. The benign outlook on inflation is largely responsible for the rate cut.

Positive Impact Of Rate Cut

- **Address liquidity issues:** The 25 basis point rate reduction is a signal to easy money policy environment, and will help banks to address liquidity issues.
- **More lending activity by banks and other FIs:** Fall in the cost of funds will also aid lending, so it is positive for banks as well as NBFCs.
- **Cheaper loans for borrowers:** When the RBI cuts repo rate, banks are expected to pass on the benefit to their customers (with a time-lag effect) and auto, home and other loans are likely to get cheaper.
- **Boost growth rate:** The MPC referred to a growing slack in the economy and the need to support private consumption and investment. Low cost of funds is likely to boost consumption and aid in higher growth rate.

Risks From Rate Cuts

- **Slows growth in term deposits:** A declining interest rates scenario has also meant that the growth rate in term depostis has been coming down quite sharply over the years, from a range of 17% to a low single-digit rate in the last 3 years. This is a concern because lower term deposit by depositors means lower liquidity for banks**.**
- **Push financial savings into taking more risks:** A regular lowering of interest rates has also meant that the overall savings as per CSO is down from 33.1% in FY13 to 30.1% in FY18. Migration (from savings in banks) to the capital market through the mutual funds route or direct equity has also increased the risk taken by households, as this investment can be volatile depending on market conditions.
- **Does not automatically lead to higher investment:** While lower rates do cause cost of funds to come down, it is not necessary that it will lead to higher investment. This can be seen from the data on credit growth rate across various segments. Housing segment responds positively to lower rates and shows higher investment in housing and auto. In case of industry, a lot would depend on the state of capacity utilisation and investment opportunities that are there.

ILO Released Its "World Employment and Social Outlook Trends 2019" Report

Syllabus: Indian Economy and Issues relating to employment.

In News

- The International Labour Organization (ILO), a UN agency, has released its "World Employment and Social Outlook Trends 2019" report.
- The report provides an overview of global and regional trends in employment, unemployment, labour force participation, productivity, as well as employment status, informal employment and working poverty. It also examines income and social developments, and provides an indicator of social unrest.

Key Findings

1. **Fall in unemployment:** Global unemployment levels fell one percentile to a steady 5 per cent in 2018, the lowest figures since the economic crisis of 2007-08. Unemployment rates were anticipated to fall further to 4.9 per cent this year, which is expected to hold steady into 2020.
2. **Poor quality employment** is the main issue for global labour markets, with millions of people forced to accept inadequate working conditions. About 700 million people are living in extreme or moderate poverty despite having employment.
3. **Slow progress on SDG:** The report found that progress on Sustainable Development Goal 8 has been slower than anticipated. One of the targets under SDG8 is to, by 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men.
4. **Existing labour market achievements could be undermined** - Achievements in areas such as improving employment formality and security, social protection and labour standards etc. could be undermined by some new business models, including those enabled by new technologies (for example, exploitation in gig economy).
5. **Gender gap:** There's lack of progress in closing the gender gap in labour force participation. Only 48 per cent of women are in the labour force, compared to 75 per cent of men. Women also faced a higher risk of unemployment in many regions and earn significantly less than men when they are in employment.

6. **Persistence of informal employment:** Another another major issue is that about 2 billion workers – 61 per cent of the world's workforce (of 3.3 billion) – were in informal employment, that are vulnerable jobs with low pay and no social protection.
7. **Youth not employment-ready:** More than one in five young people (under 25) are not in employment, education or training, compromising their future employment prospects.

About International Labour Organization (ILO)

- It was established in 1919, as part of the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I. It was intended to reflect the belief that universal and lasting peace can be accomplished only if it is based on social justice.
- India is a founder member of ILO.
- The ILO, headquartered at Geneva (Switzerland), became the first specialized agency of the UN in 1946.
- Aim: To promote social justice and internationally recognized human and labour rights. ILO was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1969 for promoting reforms that strengthen the cause of peace by reducing social injustice.
- Functioning: It sets international labour standards, develops policies and devise programmes promoting decent work for all women and men and improving working conditions and social rights of all employees. The ILO registers complaints but does not impose sanctions on governments for violating international rules.

National Minimum Wage

Syllabus: Indian Economy and Issues relating to employment.

In News

- The Expert Committee constituted under the **Chairmanship of Dr. Anoop Satpathy**, Fellow, V. V. Giri National Labour Institute (VVGNLI) by the Ministry of Labour and Employment has submitted its report on "**Determining the Methodology for Fixation of the National Minimum Wage**" to the Government.
- The report has now been placed on the Ministry's website, for facilitating the process of consultation and dialogue among social partners and stakeholders and seeking necessary approval of methodology from tripartite bodies.

New Methodology

- The report has updated the methodological framework of fixation of minimum wages based on the overall guidelines of the ILC 1957 and the Supreme Court Judgment of ***Workmen v Reptakos Brett & Co. in 1992.***
- It has undertaken a rigorous and meticulous analysis and has generated a large amount of evidence relating to changes in the demographic structure, consumption pattern and nutritional intakes, the composition of food baskets and the relative importance of non-food consumption items to address the realities in the Indian context by using official data made available by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO).
- Using the nutritional requirement norms as recommended by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) for Indian population, it **recommends a balanced diet approach** which is culturally palatable for fixation of national minimum wage. Accordingly, it has proposed that food

items amounting to the level of *± 10 per cent of 2,400 calories, along with proteins ≥ 50 gm and fats ≥ 30 gm per day per person* to constitute a national level balanced food basket.

- Further, it proposes minimum wage should include reasonable expenditure on '**essential non-food items'**, such as *clothing, fuel and light, house rent, education, medical expenses, footwear and transport*, which must be equal to the median class and expenditure on any 'other non-food items' be equivalent to the *sixth fractile (25-30 per cent) of the household expenditure* distribution as per the NSSO-CES 2011/12 survey data.
- On the basis of the aforesaid approach, the report has recommended to fix the need based national minimum wage for India at **INR 375 per day (or INR 9,750 per month)** as of July 2018, irrespective of sectors, skills, occupations and rural-urban locations for a family comprising of 3.6 consumption unit.
- It also recommends to introduce an **additional house rent allowance** (city compensatory allowance), averaging up to **INR 55 per day** i.e., INR 1,430 per month for urban workers over and above the NMW.
- Apart from proposing the level of a single national minimum wage at an all-India level, the report has also estimated and recommended **different national minimum wages for different geographical regions of the country to suit the local realities and as per socio-economic and labour market contexts**.
- For the purpose of estimating national minimum wages at regional levels it has **grouped the states into five regions based on a composite index** and have recommended region specific national minimum wages.
- It has also asked for a **review of the consumption basket every five years**, subject to the availability of NSSO-CES data, and – within the period of 5 years - revising and updating the basic minimum wage at least in line with the consumer price index (CPI) every six months, to reflect changes in the cost of living.

National Productivity Week

Syllabus: Indian Economy and Industry

In News

- National Productivity Council (NPC) celebrated its 61st Foundation Day on 12th February as Productivity Day and celebrated the National Productivity Week from February 12-18.
- This year's theme is **'Circular Economy for Productivity & Sustainability'** which represents a unique opportunity for circular business models to **Make-Use-Return**.
- To integrate circular economy principle in strategy and process, NPC has been at the forefront through such efforts in enhancing productivity. Through this event, it aims at collaboration with business and policy makers so as Circular Economy opportunities can be highlighted.
- The event gains significance in the backdrop of the mammoth target of growth to raise the Indian economy to the level of USD 5 trillion by 2025 and USD 10 trillion by 2035. To achieve the desired targets, the productivity levels must be comparable with the competitors in global and regional market value chain so that Indian products can remain competitive.

What Is Circular Economy

- A circular economy is an alternative to a traditional linear economy (make, use, dispose) in which we keep resources in use for as long as possible, extract the maximum value from them whilst in use, then recover and regenerate products and materials at the end of each service life.

- It follows the principle of preservation and enhancement of natural capital by controlling finite stocks and balancing renewable resource flows.
- Circular economy has the potential to increase productivity and create jobs, whilst reducing carbon emissions and preserving valuable raw materials.
- It provides for a way of creating value by extending the product life span through improved design and servicing and relocating waste from the end of the supply chain to the beginning – in effect, using resources more efficiently by using them over and over.

National Productivity Council (NPC)

- NPC is national level organization to promote productivity culture in India.
- Established by the **Ministry of Industry, as a registered society in 1958** by Government of India, it is a tri-partite non-profit organization with equal representation from govt, employers and workers' organizations, apart from technical and professional institutions including members from local productivity councils and chamber of commerce on its governing body.
- It is a constituent of the Tokyo-based Asian Productivity Organisation (APO), an Inter Governmental Body, of which India is a founder member.

Govt. Relaxes Angel Tax Norms For Startups

Syllabus: Indian Economy and Industry

In News

The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) under the Ministry of Commerce, issued a notification that reclassified the definition of startups, and also provided clarity on tax exemptions to them.

Older Norms Regarding Angel Tax And Inconvenience To Startups

- **Angel tax:** Angel tax is a term used to refer to the income tax payable on capital raised by unlisted companies (like startups) via issue of shares where the share price is seen in excess of the fair market value [under Section 56(2)(viib) of the Income Tax Act]. The tax was introduced in the 2012 Union Budget to prevent money laundering in the name of investment.
- **Exemption to startups:** The government issued a notification in 2018 to give exemption to startups under Section 56 of the Income Tax Act in cases where the total investment including funding from angel investors did not exceed Rs 10 crore. For the exemption, startups were also required to get approval from an inter-ministerial board and a certificate of valuation by a merchant banker.
- **Angel Tax notices to startups:** Despite the exemptions provided, many startups have received notices to pay angel tax under Section 56(2)(viib) of the Income Tax Act, 1961. They have been asked to pay up as much as 30% of their funding as tax.

New Norms Provide Relief To Startups

1. **Definition of startups expanded** to cover companies incorporated for up to 10 years and having up to Rs 100 crore turnover.
2. **Greater exemption:** Startups can now receive Angel Funds from domestic Indian Angel Investors to the tune of Rs 25 crore (excluding investments from non-residents, VCs and listed companies).
3. **Inter-Ministerial Board approval is not needed** for receiving exemptions and startups can now make a simple declaration in Form 2. They won't need a merchant banker evaluation and will not need to substantiate the higher valuation with supporting documents and explanations.

4. **Startup will continue to need to be recognised as one:** All the benefits shall continue to be available only for startups getting recognition as a 'Startup' through online application over the mobile app or portal set up by the DPIIT.
5. **Restrictions on investment from raised funds:** To keep a check on diversion of investment funds, startups are restricted for seven years from investing the raised capital in new list of restrictive asset class in lands, buildings, expensive vehicles, further lending or capital investment etc.

Benefits

1. **Impetus to entrepreneurship:** It give an impetus to innovation and entrepreneurship that government is aiming through initiatives such as Digital India, Make in India and Startup India, and further strengthen India's position as a leading startup nation.
2. **Greater domestic investment:** It will unshackle angel investing and bring in domestic money for startups, including from individuals with tax paid income as well as corporates
3. **Foreign investment:** Since most start-ups are focussed on using investment to scale, this is a welcome move and inspires confidence and will allow angels globally to evaluate Indian companies on merit rather than worrying about taxation and regulatory requirements
4. **Innovation:** It will enable innovation in addressing India's pressing challenges in health care, education, agricultural productivity, clean energy etc.
5. **Ease of doing business:** The relaxations are in line with the government's aim to achieve ease of doing business in India, by making the system and process very simple and transparent.

Final Analysis

The new notification on startups and angel tax is a welcome step by the government, and it takes care of a large chunk of issues raised by the startup ecosystem. It will boost Indian startups to be world class and compete with countries which have truly opened up to the start-up culture. The next step would be to further raise exemption limit to Rs 50 crore especially in sectors where experimenting with new technologies have a long gestation period and are capital intensive.

National Policy on Electronics 2019

Syllabus: Indian Economy and Industry

In News

- The Union Cabinet has approved the National Policy on Electronics 2019 (NPE 2019), proposed by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), with the aim to achieve a turnover of US$ 400 billion from theElectronics System Design and Manufacturing (ESDM) sector by 2025.
- NPE 2018 seeks to build on the foundation laid by NPE 2012 to propel the growth of ESDM industry in the country.

Significance Of ESDM Sector

- **Economic:** Electronics Industry is the world's largest and fastest growing Industry and is increasingly finding applications in all sectors of the economy. Electronics hardware manufacturing is one of the important pillars of both "Make in India" and "Digital India".
- **Security:** Focus on electronics hardware manufacturing up to the Chip level is required due to the growing security concerns associated with electronics hardware in critical sectors including cyberspace, communications networks etc.

- **Strategic:** India is a signatory to the Information Technology Agreement (ITA-1) of WTO and Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with various countries/ trading blocs such as ASEAN, Korea and Japan. Lagging in this sector will see it overwhelmed by imports.

Problems The Sector Faces

- Electronics hardware manufacturing sector faces lack of level playing field vis-a-vis competing nations due to several factors which render domestic manufacturing uncompetitive.
- The factors include: Lack of adequate infrastructure; Supply chain and logistics; High cost of finance; Inadequate availability of quality power; Inadequate components manufacturing base; Limited focus on R&D by the industry etc.

Features of The Policy:

- ***Policy targets:*** The policy targets production of ***one billion mobile handsets by 2025***, valued at $190 billion (about Rs. 13 lakh crore) including export of 600 million mobile handsets valued at $110 billion (about Rs. 7 lakh crore).
- ***MeitY to coordinate:*** The Ministry of electronics and information technology (MeitY) will coordinate with the concerned ministries/departments to provide incentives to industry for rapid and robust expansion of electronics hardware manufacturing within the country.
- ***Incentives:*** Some of the measures proposed in the draft include promotion of manufacturing of electronic goods covered under the ***Information Technology Agreement (ITA-1)*** of the World Trade Organization and provision of suitable direct tax benefits, including investment-linked deduction under ***Section 35AD*** of the Income Tax Act for electronics manufacturing sector, for setting up of a new manufacturing unit or expansion of an existing unit.
- ***Replacing M-SIPS:*** It also proposed replacing the ***M-SIPS (Modified Special Incentive Package Scheme)*** with schemes that are easier to implement such as interest subsidy and credit default guarantee *etc* in order to encourage new units and expansion of existing units in electronics manufacturing sector. M-SIPS was launched in 2012 that provided for capital subsidy of 25 % for Electronics Industry located in non-SEZ area and 20 % for those in SEZ areas.
- ***Promoting startups:*** The policy aims to also push the startup ecosystem in emerging technology areas such as 5G, Internet of Things, artificial intelligence and machine learning, and their applications in areas such as defence, agriculture, health, smart cities and automation. Being export-led, it is also targeting to develop core competencies in all the subsectors of electronics, including electronic components and semiconductors, telecommunication equipment, medical electronics, defence electronics, automotive electronics, industrial electronics, strategic electronics *etc.* and fabless chip design.
- ***Skilled manpower:*** One of the 14 objectives of the policy is to provide support for significantly enhancing availability of skilled manpower in the electronics system design and manufacturing industry.
- ***Modification in EMC scheme:*** The draft policy also pitches for support for infrastructure development through formulation of a new scheme or suitable modifications in the existing Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMC) Scheme for supporting both Greenfield and brownfield manufacturing clusters. EMC scheme was also launched in 2012 to provide quality infrastructure within a cluster. Under the scheme, 50% of the project cost for Greenfield EMC and 75% for brownfield EMC is given by the Ministry as grant.
- ***Creation of EMCs:*** The Policy has also proposed creation of ***200 EMCs*** by 2020 that will house entire ecosystem for development and production of specific category of products.

Final Analysis

When implemented, NPE 2019 will lead to formulation of several schemes, initiatives, projects, etc. for the development of ESDM sector in the country. It will enable flow of investment and technology, leading to higher value addition in the domestically manufactured electronic products and increased electronics hardware manufacturing in the country. This will come with substantial employment opportunities, along with reduction in imports of electronics and increase in exports. Considering its economic, strategic and security implications, the focus now must be to put the policy into action.

Draft e-Commerce Policy

Syllabus: Indian Economy and Industry

In News

The government has released the draft national e-commerce policy. The National e-Commerce Policy aims to create a framework for achieving holistic growth of the e-commerce sector alongwith existing policies of Make in India and Digital India.

e-Commerce in India

- The Electronic Commerce market has been witnessing consistent growth in recent years across the world. The Indian B2C e-commerce market was valued at $ 38.5 billion in 2017 and is estimated to rise to $ 200 billion in 2026, while B2B e-commerce was estimated to be around $ 300 billion.
- Despite the high rate of growth of e-commerce in India, the sector is still at a nascent stage and according to some estimates, it is about 3 per cent of the retail market worth $860 billion, excluding travel and tourism.

Features Of The Draft E-Commerce Policy

1. **Data**
    - **Restrictions on Cross border flow of Data:** Stricter restrictions are sought to be brought in through the draft policy on the cross border flow of data generated by users in India, including e-commerce platforms, social media, search engines etc. Data collected or processed in India, even if stored abroad, cannot be shared with other business entities outside India, even with the customer consent. Such data cannot be made available to a foreign government, without the prior permission of Indian authorities and immediate access to all such data is to be given to Indian authorities upon request. These restrictions seek to exercise sovereignty over data.
    - **Establishment of Data Authority:** As per the draft policy, a data authority shall be set up along with a suitable framework for sharing of community data that serves 'larger public interest'.
2. **Infrastructure Development**

The focus of the government is on development of infrastructure to store data in India. Data centres, server farms, towers, optical wires etc. will be accorded 'infrastructure status' to help the industry develop data storage facility.

3. **E-commerce marketplaces**
    - Market place models only: In tune with the current FDI policy for e-commerce, the draft policy emphasises on the allowance of FDI only on market place models and not inventory based models.
    - Registering in India: All ecommerce sites/apps which are available for download in India must have a registered business entity in India. This is important for ensuring compliance with extant laws and regulations.

- Customs route for all imports: All product shipments from other countries to India must be channelized through the customs route. An integrated system that connects Customs, RBI and India Post to be developed to better track imports.
- Anti-counterfeiting measures are also suggested, including trademark protection, seller details being made available on marketplace etc.

4. **Regulatory issues**

- SGoS to track regulatory issues: Issues related to e-Commerce fall under the ambit of different Ministries, Departments as well as State Governments while also being the subject matter of different statutes. The Standing Group of Secretaries on e-commerce (SGoS) shall give recommendations to ensure that the policy keeps pace with the digital environment.
- Technology wings: Regulators and law makers must create dedicated 'technology wings' within their organizational set-ups to deal with new and cutting-edge technology like AI, big data, deep learning etc.
- Online dispute resolution and establishment of e- consumer courts to address grievances online have been stated in the draft policy.
- Others: Regulation of advertising charges in e-commerce, imposing custom duties on electronic transmissions etc.

5. **Stimulating the domestic digital economy**

Draft proposed this through facilitation of online customs clearance by adopting Customs Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) platform; Creation of industrial standards for smart devices and IoT equipment; Minimizing procedures and documentation; Inclusion of e-Commerce in the proposed National Integrated Logistics Plan and Continued focus on Digital India initiatives.

6. **Export promotion through e-commerce**

For this, the draft policy has suggested increased exemption limit for consignments through courier mode; Simplification of documentation for exports; fastracking of implementation mode of Electronic Data Interchange (EDI); Removing application fee for exports by MSMEs and start-ups; Setting up of Air Freight Stations (AFS); Leveraging of India Post negotiate lower costs with international freight carriers.

Analysis

Electronic commerce (e-commerce) and data are emerging as key enablers and critical determinants of India's growth and economic development. In order to enhance the capabilities and realise the potential of the e-commerce sector, it is imperative that India develops robust administrative, regulatory and legal mechanisms. The draft e-Commerce Policy lays down strategies to address issues pertinent to the sector. Feedback of various stakeholders needs to be incorporated into the final National e-Commerce Policy.

Khadi and Gramodyog Vikas Yojana

Syllabus: Indian Economy and Industry

In News

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by the Prime Minister, has approved to continue existing schemes subsumed under Khadi and Gramodyog Vikas Yojana.
- The schemes include ***Market Promotion Development Assistance (MPDA), Khadi Grant, Interest Subsidy Eligibility Certificate (SEC) and Village Industry Grant.***

- The committee has also approved a new component, **Rozgar Yukta Gaon**, which aims at creating employment opportunities for thousands of new artisans in the current and next financial year (2018-19 and 2019-20).
- Rozgar Yukta Gaon aims at introducing **an enterprise-led business model in place of a subsidy-led model**, through partnerships among three stakeholders, namely, Khadi Reform Development Programme-assisted khadi institutions, artisans, and business partners.
- It will be rolled out in **50 villages by providing 10,000 charkhas, 2,000 looms and 100 warping units to khadi artisans**, and would create **direct employment for 250 artisans per village**. Further, the total capital investment per village will be Rs 72 lakh as subsidy, and Rs 1.64 crore in working capital from business partners.
- The focus under village industry verticals will be on the *agro-based and food processing, handmade paper and leather, pottery, and wellness and cosmetics sectors*, through product innovation, design development and product diversification.
- For this initiative, advanced skill development programmes shall be conducted through existing Centres of Excellence, such as CGCRI, CFTRI, IIFPT, CBRTI, KNHPI and IPRITI.
- Four design houses will also be set up across the country to capture regional variations, provide access to khadi Institutions and evolve modern designs, with an investment of Rs 5 crore each.
- Another key component of the initiative is to **make production assistance competitive and incentive-based**. The incentive structure focuses on improving productivity, turnover and quality assurances and will be extended on the basis of an objective scorecard.
- While khadi institutions will automatically be given the financial assistance of 30 percent, they need to strive for efficiency, optimal utilisation of resources, reduction of waste, and effective managerial practices, in order to become eligible for an additional incentive of 30 percent.

Govt Approves Phase-II Of Rooftop Solar Programme

Syllabus: *Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.*

In News

- The union government has approved phase-II of the Grid Connected Rooftop Solar Programme for achieving cumulative capacity of 40 GW from Rooftop Solar (RTS) Projects by the year 2022. Phase-I of the programme was launched in 2014.
- The programme will be implemented with total central financial support of nearly Rs.12,000 crore.
- Including the RTS component, India aims to achieve an installed capacity of 100GW of solar power by 2022.

Grid Connected Solar Rooftop Programme

- Rooftop solar programme aims at generating decentralized and distributed solar power by installing solar plants on the rooftops of industrial, commercial, residential and public buildings.
- **Components:** This program would have two components: 1) Commercial Lending 2) Institutional support and Technical Assistance.
- **Central Financial assistance (CFA)** will be available for the residential sector for phase-II in the range 20-40% for RTS systems depending on the capacity.
- **Discom involvement:** Phase-II will also have an increased involvement of the distribution companies (DISCOM) which will get performance-based incentives on RTS capacity achieved.

Benefits

- **Rapid solar capacity addition:** The programme by facilitating power generation on a distributed basis enables rapid capacity addition in a short time.
- **Economic benefits:** The generated power can be used for self-consumption as well as supply/sale of electricity to the grid.
- **Green power:** It mitigates the dependence on fossil fuel based electricity generation and encourages environment friendly methods. It is expected to result in CO_2 emission reduction of about 45.6 tonnes per year.
- **Investment and jobs:** It seeks to create enabling environment for investment in solar energy sector by private sector, state government and individuals, and to encourage innovation and employment. Besides increasing self-employment, it is likely to generate employment opportunity equivalent to 9.39 lakh job years.

Shortcomings

Limited funding support to Discoms: DISCOMs are required to incur additional expenditure for implementation of scheme in terms of additional man-power, creating infrastructure, capacity building, awareness, etc. However, the incentives to the DISCOMs will be available only for initial capacity addition of 18 GW under the scheme.

Final Analysis

India is blessed with vast solar energy potential which can be harnessed for energy security through conversion of solar radiation into heat (solar thermal) and electricity (photovoltaic technology). The rooftop solar programme is a good innovation to tap the vast potential of generating solar energy from individual homes. However, the success will depend on whether the Discoms, that are already incurring heavy losses, can create an enabling ecosystem for the successful implementation of the scheme.

Agriculture

Govt. Gives Approval To The Creation Of Agri-Market Infrastructure Fund (AMIF)

Syllabus: Storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints

In News

The union government approved the creation of a corpus of Rs. 2000 crore for **Agri-Market Infrastructure Fund (AMIF)** to be created with NABARD for development and up-gradation of agricultural marketing infrastructure.

Agri-Market Infrastructure Fund (AMIF)

1. **Upgradation of APMCs and GrAMs:** The fund will provide the States/UTs subsidized loans for development and up-gradation of agricultural marketing infrastructure in 585 Agriculture Produce Market Committees (APMCs) and 10,000 Gramin Agricultural Markets (GrAMs).
2. **PPP and other agri-infra projects:** States may also access AMIF for innovative integrated market infrastructure projects including Hub-and-Spoke mode (where centers collect agriculture produce from various farms, consolidate them and send to suitable markets) and in Public Private Partnership mode.
3. **The Scheme is demand driven**, and so its progress is subject to the demands from the States and proposals received from them.

Grameen Agricultural Markets (GrAMs)

- Announced during the Union Budget 2018, Gramin Agricultural Markets (GrAMs) provides farmers facility to make direct sale to consumers and bulk purchasers.
- They are electronically linked to e-NAM portal and exempted from regulations of Agriculture Produce Marketing Committees (APMCs),
- In the first phase, the Centre has identified about 1900 rural haats for modernisation and development of infrastructure through MGNREGA and other Government Schemes by March 2019.
- In total, infrastructure in around 22,000 rural haats will be upgraded and modernised.
- Every complex will have provision for allowing space for small processing units like rice huller plant, small cold store, etc.

Govt Announces Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) Scheme

In News

In a bid to reduce farmer's distress, the government, in the Interim Budget 2019, has introduced PM-KISAN, an annual income support scheme for small and marginal farmers.

Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN)

- **Eligibility:** PM-KISAN is a structured income support scheme for small and marginal farmers owning less than 2 hectares of land. There are about 12.50 crore small and marginal farmer families in India.
- **Benefits:** It is a direct cash transfer scheme providing Rs. 6,000 per annum, in three equal installments of Rs. 2,000 each. The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare will transfer the benefit directly into the accounts of the beneficiaries.
- **Funding:** This programme will entail an annual expenditure of Rs 75,000 crore, and will be fully funded by the Central government.
- **Identifying beneficiaries:** The government has developed a portal for managing the scheme. The States have to upload the data of the beneficiaries on the portal.
- There is no distinction between urban and rural cultivable land under the scheme. Both urban and rural cultivable lands are covered under the scheme, provided that land situated in urban areas is under actual cultivation.

Benefits

- **Augments income of poor farmers:** The average annual income of small and marginal farmers is well below the average income of all farmers. The PM-KISAN scheme provide assured supplemental income to these most vulnerable farmers.
- **Help in input costs:** The scheme helps meet their emergent needs especially before the harvest season, for procuring seeds, fertitlizers, equipment etc.
- **Help reduce agricultural indebtedness**
- **Enhance rural consumption**

Shortcomings

- **Inadequate financial support:** PM-KISAN's Rs. 2,000 every four months is not sufficient to remove the stress for even small and marginal farmers. The income support, amounting to Rs. 17 a day for a household, is largely insufficient for even bare minimum sustenance of vulnerable farmers.

- **Land records not proper:** Majority of the States have incomplete tenancy records and land data are not digitised (for instance, in Jharkhand, Bihar, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu). In such states, identification of beneficiaries is a daunting task.
- **Ignores other small farmers:** The scheme ignores many other small farmers like the share-croppers and tenant farmers.
- **No grievance redressal mechanism:** The scheme does not provide a clear design of transfers and a framework for effective grievance redress.

Final Analysis

PM-KISAN is an ambitious scheme that has the potential to deliver significant welfare outcomes. However, a few improvements are needed for it to be successful:

- **Updated and digitized land records:** This is the most important step for a successful identification of beneficiaries and implementation of the scheme.
- **Greater amount of benefits:** To be effective, any cash transfer scheme should ensure that there is enough cash provided to help an affected community. For example, Telangana's **Rythu Bandhu Scheme** (RBS) provides Rs. 4,000 per acre to each farmer in each season.
- **Take inflation into account:** Given the volatile market and price fluctuations in different regions, it is important to index the cash transfers to local inflation.

Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog Annouced

Syllabus: Economics of animal-rearing.

In News

- In the interim budget, the finance minister announced setting up of "Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog" (National Commission for Cows) to upscale sustainable genetic up-gradation of cow resources and to enhance production and productivity of cows.
- The plan falls under **Rashtriya Gokul Mission:**
    - Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM) was a Rs 500-crore programme launched in 2014 to conserve and enhance productivity of India's indigenous cattle breed in mission mode, through professional farm management and superior nutrition.
    - RGM is a focused project under the National Programme for Bovine Breeding and Dairy Development during the 12th Five Year Plan.
    - The interim budget increased allocation to Rashtriya Gokul Mission mission to Rs 750 crore for fiscal year 2019-20.

Benefits

- **Development and Conservation of cattle:** The setting up of Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog will lead to conservation, protection and development of cattle population in the country including development and conservation of indigenous breeds.
- **Inclusive development:** It will result in increased growth of livestock sector which is more inclusive- benefitting women and small and marginal farmers.
- **Provide policy direction:** The Aayog will be a a high-powered permanent body which will formulate policy and issue directions for scaling up sustainable genetic upgradation of bovine resources.
- **Implementation of cow welfare schemes:** The Aayog will also look after effective implementation of laws and welfare schemes for cows.

- **Collaboration for better research and outcomes:** The Aayog will work in collaboration with Veterinary, Animal Sciences or Agriculture organizations of the Central/State Government engaged in the task of research in the field of breeding and rearing of cow, organic manure, biogas etc.

Final Analysis

Cow is a revered animals for Indians and the majority source of milk and dairy products. At present, India has 33 breeds of cows and 16 breeds of buffaloes. The 2012 livestock census had put the total bovine population (cattle, buffalo, Mithun and Yak) in the country at nearly 300 million. The setting up of Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog (National Commission for Cows) as a dedicated body ensures focus on conservation, protection and development of cattle population and genetic up-gradation of cow resources. This will help enhance production and productivity of cows providing not only food and nutritional security but also important source of income to millions of poor and vulnerable people in India.

Technology

Drone Olympics

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

In News

- The Drone Olympics was recently held at the 12th edition of Aero India, wherein national and international players demonstrated their potential.
- The Aero India exhibition, with the **theme** - '**The Runway to a Billion Opportunities**' is designed to bolster business in the international aviation sector and provide a platform to showcase India's aeronautical advancements.
- The 'Drone Olympics' has been organized by Ministry of Defence.
- It **aims to encourage the UAV industry to connect with potential buyers and business partners in the country and also provide an opportunity to the Armed Forces to assess the capabilities of UAVs.**
- The role of UAVs are ever-increasing in the defence sectors, making them the ideal platform for intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, electronic warfare and strike missions.
- The competition was held in three categories: **surveillance challenge** to determine the surveillance capacities of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV); **supply drop challenge** to assess the weight dropping capacity of the UAVs; and the **formation flying challenge** to demonstrate different shapes with group of UAVs.
- During the award ceremony, Atal Tinkering Lab (ATL) of Atal Innovation Mission (AIM), NITI Aayog launched '**ATL Drone Module – Get Set Fly!**' created in collaboration with the blooming drone industry in India.
- The goal of the ATL Drone module is to introduce the young minds of India to the technology and help them to identify and solve community issues using drones as a tool.

Market Opportunity

- Indian UAV market is projected to grow at a CAGR of 18 per cent during 2017-23.
- By 2021, the Indian UAV market is expected to reach $885.7 million, while the global market size will touch $21.47 billion, according to a study by BIS Research.

- UAV demand is mainly derived from **military-end user application, followed by law enforcement, precision agricultural, inspection and monitoring**.
- According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), **India tops the list of drone-importing nations with 22.5 percent of the world's UAV imports**.
- Drone-related firms like the ones which participated in the Aero India can help reduce India's dependence on foreign UAVs.

District Cooling System

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

In News

- The foundation stone **of India's biggest district cooling system was recently laid in Amravati** by the chief minister of Andhra Pradesh.
- UAE-based cooling solutions utility National Central Cooling Company PJSC (Tabreed) has entered into a 30-year concession with Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority (APCRDA) to build, own, operate and transfer the cooling system.
- The agreement is for a contracted cooling capacity of 20,000 refrigeration tonnes and this will be the company's first plant outside its Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) market.
- **District cooling was first set up in India at Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT)**. The first phase of this system, with a capacity of 10,000 RTs, has been operational since April 2015.
- In addition and in line with the ambitious plans for the greenfield capital city to be among the most sustainable cities in the world, the system will meet cooling requirements for the State's Assembly, High Court, Secretariat and other government buildings that are currently under construction, for which cooling services will commence from early 2021.
- Touted as a highly efficient, cost-effective form of air conditioning, **district cooling uses only 50 per cent of primary energy consumption for cooling urban buildings** thereby reducing carbon emissions.
- The system has associated benefits **of improvement in air quality and reduction in general noise levels** when compared to other traditional air conditioning systems.
- The cooling system is a part of the larger vision for Amaravati to create jobs and homes along with a world-class infrastructure, a green city and efficient resource management.

Company Under Department of Space

Syllabus: Awareness in the fields of Space

In News

- The Union Cabinet has given its approval **to the setting up of a new company under Department of Space (DoS).**
- It will be set up **to commercially exploit the research and development work carried out by Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) Centers** and constituent units of DOS.
- The areas which provide opportunities for commercial exploitation of ISRO programmes are
    - small satellite technology transfer to the private industry
    - manufacture of small satellite launch vehicle (SSLV) in collaboration with the private sector,

- production of polar satellite launch vehicle (PSLV) through industry,
- production and marketing of space-based products and services,
- marketing of spin-off technologies and products, both in India and abroad and
- transfer of technology developed by ISRO Centers and constituent units of DoS.

- The cabinet decision will **encourage the private sector to indulge more in production of launchers and satellites**. In recent years, ISRO has been engaging the private sector in the manufacturing of satellite launchers so that it can focus more on R&D work.
- Currently, 80-90% of work relating to launch vehicles is being done by the industry, including private and public sector companies. Only, critical components are manufactured by ISRO.

LOFAR Telescope

Syllabus: Awareness in the fields of Space

In News

- A new map of the night sky has been published and hundreds of thousands of previously undiscovered galaxies are on it.
- The **300,000 new galaxies** were discovered as part of a study involving 200 scientists from 18 countries, using a **Low-Frequency Array (LOFAR) telescope** in the Netherlands.
- The discovery is shedding new light on some of the Universe's deepest secrets, including the physics of black holes and how clusters of galaxies evolve.

How It works

- The study **used radio astronomy** to look at a segment of sky over the northern hemisphere.
- Radio astronomy allows scientists to **detect radiation produced when massive celestial objects interact**. It helps to detect radiation from the tenuous medium that exists between galaxies.

Importance Of The Study

- The discovery of the new light sources may also help scientists to better understand the behaviour of one of space's most enigmatic phenomena.
- Black holes — which have a gravitational pull so strong that no matter can escape them — emit radiation when they engulf other high-mass objects such as stars and gas clouds.
- It would allow astronomers to compare black holes over time to see how they form and develop.
- If one observes an active black hole, the jets (of radiation) disappear after millions of years, and one won't be able to see them at a higher frequency (of light).
- But at a lower frequency they continue to emit these jets for hundreds of millions of years, which leads to visibility of far older electrons.

LOFAR

- The LOFAR telescope is made up of a **network of radio antenna across seven countries**, forming the equivalent of a 1,300-km diameter satellite dish.
- The telescope works by pick up traces, or "jets," of ancient radiation produced when galaxies merge. These jets can extend over millions of light years.
- LOFAR has a remarkable sensitivity and that allows to see that these jets are present in all of the most massive galaxies, which means that their black holes never stop eating.

- It has helped scientists to chart just 2 percent of the sky so far. The team plans to create high-resolution images of the entire northern sky, which according to them will reveal up to 15 million previously undetected radio sources.

GSAT-31 Launched

Syllabus: Awareness in the fields of Space

In News

- India's latest communication satellite, GSAT-31 has been launched successfully by European launch services provider- Arianespace's rocket from French Guiana.
- The satellite derives its heritage from ISRO's earlier INSAT/GSAT satellite series.
- GSAT-31 is a high power satellite, which will **augment the Ku-band transponder capacity in geostationary orbit**. The satellite will provide continuity to operational services on some of the in-orbit satellites.
- It has a unique configuration of providing flexible frequency segments and flexible coverage and will provide communication services to Indian mainland and islands.
- With a mission life of around 15 years, it will provide DTH Television Services, connectivity to VSATs for ATM, stock-exchange, Digital Satellite News Gathering (DSNG), television uplinks, cellular backhaul connectivity and e-governance applications.
- It will be used for bulk data transfer for a host of emerging telecommunication applications.
- It will also provide wide beam coverage to facilitate communication over large oceanic region, comprising large parts of Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean using a wide band transponder.

Induced Pluripotent Stem Cells

Syllabus: Awareness in the fields of Biotechnology

In News

- The Japanese government's health ministry has given the go-ahead for a trial of **human induced pluripotent stem cells** to treat **spinal cord injury.**
- An upcoming trial will mark **the first time** that induced pluripotent stem (iPS) cells have been used to **treat spinal-cord injuries.**

Approach

- The team's intervention involves removing differentiated cells from patients and reprogramming them via human induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) into neural cells.
- Clinicians will then inject about 2 million of these cells into the patient's site of injury.
- The approach has been successfully tested in a monkey, which recovered the ability to walk after paralysis.

Not The First Time

- It is **not the first time** Japan has approved the use of iPSCs in clinical trials.
- Last year, researchers at Kyoto University launched a trial using the **cells to treat Parkinson's disease**.

- And in 2014, a team at the RIKEN Center for Developmental Biology led the **first transplant of retina cells** grown from iPSCs to treat a patient's eye disease.

Stem Cells

- The body is made up of many different types of cells. Most cells are specialised to perform particular functions, such as red blood cells that carry oxygen around our bodies in the blood, but they are unable to divide.
- Stem cells provide new cells for the body as it grows, and replace specialised cells that are damaged or lost.
- The **unique property that enables them to do this is the ability to divide over and over again to produce new cells**.
- As they divide, **they can change into the other types of cell that make up the body**.
- Three main types of stem cells are **embryonic stem cells**, **adult stem cells** and **induced pluripotent stem cells.**
- **Embryonic stem cells** supply new cells for an embryo as it grows and develops into a baby. These stem cells are said to be pluripotent, which means they can change into any cell in the body.
- **Adult stem cells** supply new cells as an organism grows and to **replace cells that get damaged**.
- They are **said to be multipotent, which means they can only change into some cells in the body, not any cell**.
- For example, blood (or 'haematopoietic') stem cells can only replace the various types of cells in the blood.
- **Induced pluripotent stem cells**, or 'iPS cells', are stem cells that scientists make in the laboratory.
- 'Induced' means **that they are made in the lab by taking normal adult cells**, like skin or blood cells, and reprogramming them to become stem cells.
- Just **like embryonic stem cells**, they are **pluripotent** so they can develop into any cell type.
- Further, because embryonic stem cells can only be derived from embryos, it has so far not been feasible to create patient-matched embryonic stem cell lines.
- Currently, damaged organs can be replaced by obtaining healthy organs from a donor, however donated organs may be 'rejected' by the body as the immune system sees it as something that is foreign.
- Since iPSCs can be derived directly from adult tissues, they not only bypass the need for embryos, but can be made in a patient-matched manner, which means that each individual **could have their own pluripotent stem** cell line.
- These unlimited supplies of autologous cells could be used to generate transplants without the risk of immune rejection.

IPrism

Syllabus: Issues relating to IPR.

In News

- The Cell for IPR Promotion and Management (CIPAM), Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, in collaboration with ASSOCHAM and ERICSSON India, has launched the second edition of 'IPrism'.

- It is an Intellectual Property (IP) competition for students of schools, polytechnic institutes, colleges and universities.
- Aiming to foster a culture of innovation and creativity in the younger generation, the competition will provide young creators an opportunity to see their creations recognized on a national platform.
- This year, entries are invited on **IP in Daily Life** in two categories – film making and comic book making.

Need For Such Event

- Creating IP awareness has become significant in today's knowledge economy where innovations determine the development and success of a nation.
- Generating awareness will not only inspire students about innovation and its limitless possibilities, but will also aid in building respect for IP rights and deterring counterfeiting and piracy.
- The National IPR Policy was adopted in May 2016, to create a vibrant IP ecosystem in the country.
- **Creating IPR Awareness through outreach** and **promotional activities** is a key objective of the Policy.

CIPAM

- A professional body under the aegis of Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) which ensures focused action on issues related to IPRs and addresses the 7 identified objectives of the policy.
- CIPAM assists in simplifying and streamlining of IP processes, apart from undertaking steps for furthering IPR awareness, commercialization and enforcement.
- CIPAM in partnership with industry associations has conducted IPR awareness programmes in various states.
- The awareness campaign is being conducted in schools, universities and industries across India.

International IP Index 2019

Syllabus: Issues relating to IPR.

In News

- The U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Global Innovation Policy Center (GIPC) has released its International IP Index, "**Inspiring Tomorrow**".
- This index assesses the intellectual property (IP) environments of 50 world economies.

About The Index

- The index covers over 90 per cent of global gross domestic product.
- It provides both an IP report card for the world and a blueprint for policymakers in countries like India, that wish to bolster economic growth and jobs, innovation and creativity.
- It is based on **45 indicators** that are critical to an **innovation-led economy** supported by robust patent, trademark, copyright, and trade secrets protection.

Key Highlights

- This year, the index included **four new indicators** on commercialisation of IP assets and market access that shed light on factors that either disrupt or facilitate technology transfer in global markets.

- These are - *barriers to technology transfer*, *registration and disclosure requirements of licensing deals*, *direct government intervention in setting licensing terms* and *tax incentives for the creation of IP assets*.
- US, UK, Sweden, France and Germany remained the **top five economies** on the intellectual property index in 2019 retaining their spots from the last year.

India Specific Observations

- **India has jumped eight places to 36th (from previous 44) position on the index**.
- The eight-point jump is the highest increase among 50 nations mapped by the index. For the second year in a row, India's score represents the **largest gain of any country** measured on the Index.
- India's overall score has also increased substantially from **30.07 per cent** (12.03 out of 40) in the previous edition to **36.04 per cent** (16.22 out of 45) in the present edition.
- The improvement reflects important reforms implemented by Indian policy-makers towards building and sustaining an innovation ecosystem for domestic entrepreneurs and foreign investors alike and the country's efforts to align and incorporate the IP environment with the international IP environment.
- The increase is a result of specific reforms, including its **accession to the WIPO Internet Treaties, the agreement to initiate a Patent Prosecution Highway (PPH) with international offices, a dedicated set of IP incentives for small business and administrative reforms to address the patent backlog**.
- **Among the weaknesses**, the index has cited barriers to licensing and technology transfer, including strict registration norms, limited framework for the protection **of** biopharmaceutical IP rights, patentability rules outside international standards, lengthy pre-grant opposition proceedings and previously used compulsory licensing for commercial and non-emergency situations as key hurdles.

Intellectual Property

- Intellectual property (IP) refers to creations of the mind, such as inventions; literary and artistic works; designs; and symbols, names and images used in commerce.
- IP is protected in law by, for example, patents, copyright and trademarks, which enable people to earn recognition or financial benefit from what they invent or create.

National IPR policy 2016:

- The Union Cabinet has approved the National Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Policy in May 2016 that shall lay the future roadmap for IPRs in India.
- The policy recognises the abundance of creative and innovative energies that flow in India and the need to tap into and channelize these energies towards a better and brighter future for all.
- The policy lays down the following seven objectives:
    1. **IPR Awareness**: Outreach and Promotion- Generation of IPRs: To create public awareness about the economic, social and cultural benefits of IPRs among all sections of society;
    2. **Generation of IPRs**- To stimulate the generation of IPRs;
    3. **Legal and Legislative Framework**: To have strong and effective IPR laws, which balance the interests of rights owners with larger public interest;

4. **Administration and Management**: To modernize and strengthen service-oriented IPR administration;
5. **Commercialization of IPR**: Get value for IPRs through commercialization;
6. **Enforcement and Adjudication**: To strengthen the enforcement and adjudicatory mechanisms for combating IPR infringements;
7. **Human Capital Development**: To strengthen and expand human resources, institutions and capacities for teaching, training, research and skill building in IPRs;

- The department of industrial policy and promotion (DIPP) will be the nodal agency for all IPR issues. Copyrights related issues will also come under DIPP's ambit from that of the Human Resource Development (HRD) Ministry.

Significance

- Increased awareness
- Perception management through legal, administrative and institutional management.
- It will help in reducing the time taken on clearing the backlog of IPR applications from current 5 to 7 years to 18 months by March 2018 as stated by the goals of the policy.
- Reviewing of provisions in every five year will help the Indian IPR-ecosystem to update and improve them or to remove anomalies and inconsistencies.
- It will promote incorporation of globally best practices and will be helpful in promotion of R&D through tax benefits.

Criticism

- It is driven by the agenda of IP maximalism where owner's rights will be maximized at the cost of public interest.
- Intellectual Property rights accelerate innovation in certain sectors/technology but impedes innovation in other sectors. This policy fails to take notice of this and hence lacks integrated approach.
- Criminalising what is essentially a civil wrong is too much, not to mention the potential for abuse at the hands of our police.
- Although the policy seeks to promote & develop the IP field to ensure commercialization and expansion but it does not address the specifics.
- It does not address the present condition of patent filing in the country and how do we improve that, while it does mention that most of the patents in the country are filed by foreign companies/investors.

Conclusion

The policy seems to be a welcoming change but all depends on the way it is enforced. If the all the aspects mentioned in the policy are dealt with in a strict sense, keeping in mind the rights and interests of the indigenous innovators, the policy can change India's stand in the world and foster innovation to a great extent.

National Science Day

Syllabus: Achievements of Indians in science & technology;

In News

- National Science Day is **celebrated on February 28 every year to remember Nobel laureate Sir Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman's contribution to the field of science**.
- For his discovery, Sir CV Raman was **awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1930**.
- In honour of this discovery and as a mark of tribute to the scientist, National Science Day was marked **for the first time on February 28, 1987**.
- He was **also awarded Bharat Ratna in 1954** for his contribution in science especially Physics.
- Science Day is celebrated to spread awareness about the importance of science and its application in the daily life of the people.
- This year the theme for the National Science Day is **Science for people and people for science**.

Raman Effect

- Raman effect is the **inelastic scattering** of a photon by molecules which are excited to **higher vibrational or rotational energy levels**. It is also called **Raman scattering**.
- The Raman effect forms the basis for **Raman spectroscopy** - an instrument developed by him for observing the vibrational, rotational and other low frequency modes - which is used by chemists and physicists to gain information about materials.

QRSAM

Syllabus: Indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

In News

- India has test-fired two **Quick Reaction Surface-to-Air short-range Missiles (QR-SAM)** from the integrated test range (ITR) at Chandipur in Balasore district, off the Odisha coast.
- It has been **jointly developed by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Bharat Electronics (BEL)**.
- The test successfully demonstrated the robust control, aerodynamics, propulsion, structural performance and high manoeuvring capabilities thus proving the design configuration.
- The missile is **an all-weather, all-terrain missile with electronic counter measures against jamming by aircraft radars**. It is also capable of tracking.
- The network-centric missile system can engage multiple threats such as aerial targets, tanks and bunkers within a strike range of 20km to 30km.
- It is equipped with an electronic-mechanically operated, turret-based launch unit and uses a solid fuel propellant.
- It has been **developed to replace the Akash missile defence system**, and has a **360-degree coverage**, lightweight, high mobility and shorter second reaction time as compared to Akash.

Atmospheric Water Generator (AWG)

Syllabus: Indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

In News

- Navratna Defence PSU Bharat Electronics Ltd (BEL) has unveiled a new product, the **Atmospheric Water Generator (AWG)** at Aero India 2019.
- It is **an innovative solution to meet the ever-increasing need for drinking water worldwide.**

- It has been **manufactured by BEL in collaboration with CSIR-IICT and MAITHRI**, a start-up company based in Hyderabad.
- The water generator **employs a novel technology to extract water from the humidity present in the atmosphere and purify it**.
- It **uses heat exchange for condensing the atmospheric moisture** to produce pure, safe and clean potable water.
- It **comes with a Mineralisation Unit, which is used to add minerals** which are required to make the water potable.
- It is configurable in static and mobile (vehicular) versions and is available in 30 litres/day, 100 litres/day, 500 litres/day and 1,000 litres/day capacities. It can provide one litre of drinking water at a cost of less than Rs 1.75 per litre.
- It can be used to provide drinking water in community centres and public places like health care centres, schools, colleges etc.

India To Launch Public DNS Server

Syllabus: Indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

In News

- The Ministry of electronics and IT (MeitY) has announced that **the government will soon roll out a public Domain Name Server for India.**
- **It will be aimed at providing a faster and more secure browsing experience** for Internet users in the country, while **ensuring that citizens' data is stored locally**.
- A DNS is a like a directory for the Internet, it **helps to convert domain names that are easy for people to remember into IP addresses**, which are used by computers/machines to communicate.
- If the DNS is either slow or fails to work, users will not be able to locate web addresses.
- The roll-out, will be executed by the National Informatics Centre – the technology arm of the government. **NIC is already using the public DNS within the government network**.
- The new platform is an upgraded version with enhanced in-built security features compared to the earlier created by the National Informatics Centre (NIC).
- It **has a capability to host as many as 5 million users** that can be scaled up further if needed.
- It is **developed in the wake of critical digital services being delivered online requiring enhanced security to discourage cyber-attacks and a quicker site loading time**.
- It will be placed across the country to minimise outage and would be available round the clock.
- If a user inadvertently accesses a malicious or phishing site, the new public system would immediately open up a page or popup to alert the user of such potential threat so that the suspicious resource could be avoided.
- It will also ensure availability, particularly for smaller Interest Service Providers (ISPs) who do not have a credible DNS, the bigger ones usually have their own DNS.
- The users will be free to choose any DNS of their choice and will not be required to compulsorily shift to the public DNS.

Govt Announces Asiatic Lion Conservation Project

In News

- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has launched the "Asiatic Lion Conservation Project".
- The project is aimed to protect and conserve the **world's last ranging free population of Asiatic Lion** and its associated ecosystem.

Asiatic lion

- At one time, **Asiatic lions (Panthera leo persica**) ranged from Persia (Iran) to Palamau in Eastern India.
- They were almost driven to extinction by indiscriminate hunting and habitat loss.
- It is one of the 21 **critically endangered** species identified by the MoEFCC for taking up recovery programmes.
- At present, Gir National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary is the only abode of the Asiatic lion (Panthera leo persica).
- A single population of less than 50 lions persisted in the Gir forests of Gujarat by late 1890s.
- With timely and stringent protection offered by the State Government and the Center Government, Asiatic lions have increased to the current population of over 500 numbers.
- The last census in the year 2015 showed the population of 523 Asiatic Lions in Gir Protected Area Network.

Asiatic Lion Conservation Project

- The project would be beneficial in strengthening the conservation and protection of Asiatic Lion in the country.
- **Funding:** The project will be funded from the Centrally Sponsored Scheme- Development of Wildlife Habitat (CSS-DWH) with the contributing ratio being 60:40 of Central and State share.
- **Healthcare:** Stepping up veterinary care by construction of veterinary hospitals, backing up stocks of vaccines, increasing the number of lion ambulances, and ringing together multi-sectoral agencies for disease control.
- **Use of ICT:** GPS Based Tracking (for Surveillance Tracking, Animal Tracking and Vehicle Tracking), Automated Sensor Grid (with Magnetic Sensors, Movement Sensors and Infra-red heat sensors), Night vision capability enhancement and GIS based real time monitoring, analysis and report generation.

- **Zone Plans and Theme Plans:** Management approach of "Zone Plans and Theme Plans" will be taken up for the conservation of the Asiatic Lion.
  - Under Zone Plans, the Greater Gir Region (GGR) will being divided into various zones for the conservation of the Asiatic Lion. "Zone Plans" include **the Core Zone, the Sanctuary Zone, the buffer Zon**e and the Greater Gir Region outside the Gir PA system for people's participation and eco-development.
  - Theme Plans include Habitat improvement, protection, wildlife health service, addressing to man-wild animal conflict issues, eco-development and voluntary relocation of PA resident people, research and monitoring, awareness generation, and ecotourism**.**

Other Initiatives Taken Up For The Conservation Of Asiatic Lions

- **Larger habitat and protected area:** The concept of Greater Gir has been adopted through which additional suitable habitat for lion is being developed for the habitation of lion.
- Besides Gir National Park & Sanctuary, Girnar, Pania and Mitiyala have been notified as sanctuaries to widen the protected area network and home of lion.
- **Habitat improvement:** Habitat improvement measures have been undertaken.
- **Wildlife Crime Cell and Task Force:** Protection mechanism has been strengthened with creation of Wildlife Crime Cell at state level and Task Force for the GGR (Greater Gir region).
- **Others:** Additional water points, parapet walls on open wells, intelligence gathering system etc.

Securing The Elephant Corridors

In News

- An elephant conservation initiative by few NGOs are raising £20 million to secure 96 of the corridors used by elephants in India.
- They joined together under the Asian Elephant Alliance to raise money as money was the main constraint in securing the land.
- One of the approaches for securing and protecting elephant corridors in India is the Private Purchase Model.
- Under this model, conservationists directly purchase the land, rehabilitate affected local people, and transfer the land to the relevant state forest department for legal protection.

The Asian Elephant

- India has by far the largest number of wild **Asian elephants (Elephas maximus)** in the world, estimated at 27,312 according to the 2017 census, about 55% of the species' global population.
- They range in 29 Elephant Reserves spread over 10 elephant landscapes in 14 states in northeast, central, north-west and south India.

Importance of Elephants

Elephants are a **keystone species**. Their nomadic behaviour – the daily and seasonal migrations they make through their home ranges – is immensely important to the environment. They play various roles, including **Landscape architects; Seed dispersal; Nutrition through elephant dung; Food chain etc.**

Importance Of Elephant Corridors

- Elephant corridors are relatively narrow, linear patches of vegetation that form vital natural linkages between larger forest patches which elephants inhabit.

- To secure a future for wild elephants, designated corridors must be legally secured and protected. They are important for: **Elephant conservation, Avoiding human-animal conflict, Preserving Ecosystem.**

Project REPLAN

In News

- The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) has launched a project called **REPLAN (REducing PLastic in Nature)** to **make carry bags** by mixing processed and treated plastic waste with cotton fibre rags in the ratio 20:80.
- This paper was found to have good strength and durability, and can be used to make paper bags, fine tissues and other paper-based items.

Benefits

- **Reducing HDP/LDP plastic waste:** About 2/3rd of the plastic waste generated in India is High Density Polyethylene (HDP) (used in Tupperware, shampoo bottles etc.) and Low Density Polyethylene (LDP) (used in plastic bags for computer components, juice cartons, plastic wraps etc.). The **recycling of HDP/LDP plastic waste is very low** in India and REPLAN project can go a long way in recycling this plastic waste.
- **Cheaper carry bags:** The carry bags made out of REPLAN were found to be more durable, and cheaper.
- **No wastage:** KVIC says the remaining debris can be utilised with soil for gardening purposes, thus eliminating any waste.

Forest Rights Act

In News

- The Supreme Court has **ordered the eviction** of nearly lakhs of tribals and other forest dewellers from forestland whose claims over forestland under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) had been **rejected by the states.**
- The judgement came in response to a PIL which challenged the constitutional validity of the FRA and argued that it encourages encroachment of forestland.

Forest Rights Act, 2006

- **The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006** (in short, called as Forest Rights Act or FRA) came into force in 2007.
- **Eligibility:** The Act recognizes two classes of persons:
    1. Forest Dwelling Scheduled Tribe - members of scheduled tribe living in forests

2. Other Traditional Forest Dweller (OTFD) - persons traditionally residing in forest, or dependent on forest produce for 75 years

- **Rights:** It seeks to recognize the forest rights of these persons, such as their rights to hold and live in the forest land, including right of ownership, access to collect, use and dispose of minor forest produce etc.
- **Procedure:** Section 6 of the Act lays down the procedure for establishing claims. Once established, the forest dwellers will get land rights, use rights and rights to conserve and protect forestland.

Reasons For Eviction

- Encroachment: Those not eligible under the Act are occupying a huge area of forest land, including within national parks and sanctuaries.
- Claimants do not satisfy the requirements of law:

Implications To Those Whose Claims Have Been Rejected

- **No rights under the Act**: Those whose claims are rejected are not entitled for the grant of any Patta (ownership document) or any other right under the Act.
- **Eviction from the forests**: They are also either required to be evicted from that parcel of land or some other action is to be taken in accordance with law.

Criticism Of The Judgement

- **Hurts already vulnerable people:** The order negates the claims of STs and vulnerable communities who are in precarious situation due to gross governmental neglect.
- **No recourse for those whose claims have been rejected:** Studies found that the right to appeal is not being explained to those who claims have been rejected and their appeal is also not being facilitated.
- **Procedural lapses in assessing the claims:** The Virginius Xaxa committee found lapses in assessing the claims under the FRA, including lack of communication of reasons, rejections based on wrong interpretation of the 'OTFD' (Other Traditional Forest Dwellers) definition, wrongly considering some land as 'not forest land' etc.
- **Against the earlier SC judgements:** The order goes against the **Samata judgment** (the landmark case of ***Samata vs. State of Andhra Pradesh* in 1997**) where the apex court delivered a verdict in favour of the right to livelihood of the tribals inhabiting the scheduled areas of the country.
- **Violative of fundamental rights:** The judgement is in complete disregard of the fundamental right under Art 19(5) which requires the state to make laws "for the protection of the interests of any Scheduled Tribe".
- **Judicial overreach:** Some activists say it is not clear if the Supreme Court has the authority to order evictions of Scheduled Tribes from areas designated under Schedule V and Schedule VI of the Constitution.

Conclusion

- The judgement is in the right spirit to protect the sanctity of the law and the forests.
- However, in light of the allegations that there were procedural lapses, and the centre and activists' appeal to not order eviction, the Supreme Court **stayed the eviction and permitted the states to temporarily withhold the eviction from forests**.
- The court said there is a need to check if gram sabhas and state authorities under FRA followed due process while dealing with the forest right claims.

- If a claim is rejected, the claimant has to be informed about the reasons for rejection and should be informed of avenues to appeal.
- Considering the large number of people who face eviction, government should take a compassionate view and do everything to safeguard their interests, especially of the tribals, and explore options for their betterment.

The State Of The World's Biodiversity For Food And Agriculture

In News

- The State of the World's **Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture report 2019** has been published by UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).
- The report noted that the **global biodiversity** — the variety of life at the genetic, species and ecosystem levels — is **under severe threat**.

Biodiversity For Food And Agriculture (BFA)

- BFA is essentially the diversity of plants, animals, and other organisms, both wild and domesticated, that provide us with food, fuel and fibre.
- It includes those organisms that provide essential services, such as bees and other pollinators, worms, mangroves etc. which work to keep soils fertile and purify the air and water.
- Biodiversity is critical for safeguarding global food security, improving rural livelihoods, and enhancing the resilience of people and communities.

The Report Highlights Two Key Messages

1. Decline in food crop diversity:

The world is relying on an ever-smaller number of foodstuffs to feed a growing population. Of the 6,000 plant species cultivated for food, just nine account for 66% of total crop production. World's livestock production is also based on only a few species.

2. Decline in support system for food and agriculture:

- Many of these species that support food and agriculture are under threat or declining.
- Forests, mangroves, coral reefs, wetlands etc. are key ecosystems that deliver many essential services to food and agriculture, including freshwater, habitat, protection against floods and other hazards, carbon sequestration; they are declining rapidly.

Significant Causes Of Biodiversity Loss

- Changes in land and water use and management
- Pollution and external inputs
- Overexploitation and overharvesting
- Climate change
- Population growth and urbanization
- Pests, diseases and invasive alien species
- Natural disasters
- Markets, trade and the private sector

Way Ahead

- The plants, animals, and micro-organisms that are fundamental to our food production are in decline. If these critical species are lost, it can leave food production much more vulnerable to shocks, such as outbreaks of disease and pests.
- **All stakeholders to coordinate:** There is a need both to enhance the multiple contributions that BFA makes to sustainable development and to tackle the multiple threats currently causing its loss. Urgent action and long-term commitment are needed from stakeholders at all levels, nationally and internationally.
- **Implementation global action plans:** Implementation of global plans of action for genetic resources in the plant, animal and forest sectors (developed under the aegis of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture) needs to be stepped up.
- **Sustainable use of biodiversity** so that we can better respond to rising climate change challenges and produce food in a way that doesn't harm our environment.

About FAO

- The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is a **specialized agency** of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger.
- Serving both developed and developing countries, FAO acts as a neutral forum where all nations meet as equals to negotiate arguments and debate policy.
- Founded in 1945, it is headquartered at Rome, Italy.

Ganga River Basin Planning Assessment Report

In News

- to protect the ecological health of the Ganga river, its river basin could see rising crop failures and drinking water shortages in some States by 2040, according to an assessment commissioned by the World Bank.
- The government has committed to reduce pollution in the Ganga by 70% by March 2019.
- The key objective of the assessment, submitted to Central Water Commission, is to significantly strengthen the capability of relevant central and state agencies to undertake evidence-based strategic basin planning for the Ganga river basin.

Significance of Ganga River Basin

- The Ganga River basin, draining through 11 states, is the most populated river basin in the world and is home to half the population of India including two-thirds of the nation's poor people.
- The basin provides over one third of the available surface water in India and contributes to more than half the national water use of which 90 percent is diverted to irrigation.

Deteriorating Ecological Health Of The River

The ecological health of the Ganga river and some if its tributaries has deteriorated significantly as a result of

- High pollution loads from point (specific source like a factory) and non-point sources (like flowing water from a large polluted area)
- High levels of water abstraction for consumptive use, mostly for irrigation, but also for municipal and industrial uses;
- Flow regime and river modifications caused by water resources infrastructure, dams and barrages for diverting and regulating the river and generating hydropower.

Pulwama Attack

Syllabus: Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.

In News

- At least 40 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) paramilitary troopers were killed in the deadliest terror attack witnessed in three decades of Kashmir's insurgency.
- It was a surprise attack by a Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) suicide bomber.

Analysis

- Suicide attacks are one of the most potent and effective options available to terrorists. However, **frequency of suicide attacks** in India has **been lower**.
- India has lost more security forces personnel in Jammu and Kashmir over the last three decades than in any single war fought against adversaries.
- This is because, the prolonged character of **hybrid conflicts** (unlike conventional war) induces a **sense of complacency**.
- In other words, once such conflicts achieve a degree of normality, it becomes business as usual.
- The immediate aftermath of such attacks is marked by an **inadvertent misrepresentation** of the source of terrorist attacks.
- The attack itself is often described in a way that reinforces the message that terror groups seek to convey.
- Public debates tend to demand extreme military and diplomatic measures, irrespective of whether these can be realistically executed.
- There is also an **upsurge in articulation of popular support** for the security forces, often with a **limited shelf-life**.
- We must remember that battles are fought not **merely in the operational domain**, but in the **psychological domain** as well.
- In this context, as a component of counter terrorism measures, India must focus on formulating an effective strategic communication in order to achieve the desired national objectives.

What Could Be The Key Elements In Strategic Communications

- **Word fidayeen** has a **religious connotation** and must not be included to address these bombers. Instead, India needs to highlight the fact that suicide is a sin in Islam.
- The hybrid war which India is fighting in Kashmir includes terrorism in conjunction with other elements such as firing along the Line of Control (LoC), subversion of Kashmir's population, and pumping fake currency notes into India.
- This cannot be a handiwork of JeM or any other terrorist groups. Hence, India need to communicate the role of Pakistan in an effective manner.
- **Disharmony in India** is an asset for Pakistan. Diversity of views on this issue reflects disharmony and it gives a chance to an adversary looking to exploit fissures within the target society.
- Hence, the strategic communication **must not give a perception** of divided house which would be disservice to the ends of National security.
- The value of a message **lies in its implementation**. Hence, in order to remain effective, messaging must be backed up by action.
- Selection of platform, target and the desired end state should guide strategic communications.

- In other words, strategic messaging is not a one-size-fits-all instrument. Its impact on Pakistan, its armed forces and the Pakistani people should be distinctive.

About CRPF

- Raised in 1939 as '**Crown Representative Police'**, to assist the then British government in dealing with political disturbances, the force was redesignated CRPF in 1947.
- With nearly 3.25 lakh personnel, it is **the largest central armed police force**, and is engaged in various duties from internal security and polls to rescue and relief.
- States prefer it over other central forces due to its **skills at crowd management.**
- For the first time in the history of para-military Forces in India, thirteen companies of CRPF including a detachment of women were airlifted to join the Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka to fight the militant caders.
- Besides, CRPF personnel were also sent to Haiti, Namibia, Somalia and Maldives to deal with law and order situation there, as a part of the UN Peace Keeping Force.

Current CRPF Deployment Map:

- **9 LWE-hit states**: 90 battalions*, maximum in Chhattisgarh (30 battalions)
- **J&K**: 62 battalions
- **7 Northeast states**: 28 battalions
- **VIP duty**: 4 battalions across India, mostly in Delhi
- **Rapid Action Force teams**: 15 battalions, in Delhi, Aligarh, Meerut, Allahabad, Hyderabad, Coimbatore, Bhopal, Jamshedpur, Jaipur

Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act

Syllabus: Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.

In News

- The Union Home Ministry has banned the Tehreek-ul-Mujahideen (TuM) under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) for its alleged **involvement in a series of terror acts.**
- Set up in 1990s, TuM claims that it has been fighting for "liberation of Kashmir".
- **41 terrorist organisations** have been banned under the UAPA so far.

About UAPA

- The UAPA, 1967 essentially and primarily dealt with "**unlawful activity**".
- It was introduced as a legislation to set out **reasonable restrictions** on the freedoms under Article 19(1) of Constitution, such as freedom of speech, right to assemble peacefully etc.
- Over the years, terror specific legislations like Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) and Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) were repealed after running into legal trouble, and the UAPA became the primary anti-terror legislation in India.
- Its main objective is **to make powers available for dealing with activities directed against the integrity and sovereignty of India**.
- Offences include – Terrorist acts, membership of terrorist organizations, funding, support and recruitment for terrorist organization.

- The Act makes it **a crime to support any secessionist movement** or to support claims by a foreign power to what India claims as its territory.
- UAPA has been amended twice: in 20018 and in 2012.

Criticism

- The provisions of UAPA have an extremely wide ambit, which makes it possible to use them against not just criminals and terrorists, but even authors, academics, lawyers for alleged terrorists, and human rights activist.
- The definition of unlawful activities includes terms which are vague and broad. For instance, under section 2(o) of the UAPA, questioning the territorial integrity of India is an unlawful activity.
- Similarly, it is also an unlawful activity to cause "**disaffection against India**" with no definition in the UAPA itself.
- There is no definition of membership in the UAPA, making it susceptible to misuse.
- Although, SC in 2011 had ruled that **mere membership** of a banned organization **will not make a person a criminal** unless he resorts to violence or creates public disorder by violence.
- However, under UAPA, if one is found to be a member of banned organisations, he/she **could be imprisoned for life**.
- Some of the provisions such as e**xtended detention periods, no anticipatory bail, no bail if case seems prima facie true** etc. have been termed as draconian.
- It authorises the **creation of special courts**, with wide discretion to hold in-camera proceedings (closed-door hearings) and use secret witnesses but contains no sunset clause and provisions for mandatory periodic review.

Large Aircraft Infrared Countermeasures Self Protection Suites

In News

- The US State Department has approved sale of two **Large Aircraft Infrared Countermeasures (LAIRCM) Self Protection Suites (SPS)** for Boeing aircraft to be used in India.
- The proposed sale is expected to improve India's capability to deter regional threats with the SPS facilitating a more robust capability into areas of increased missile threats.
- Two Large Aircraft Infrared Countermeasures (LAIRCM) Self Protection Suites (SPS) is installed on aircraft to **protect them against missiles**.
- The system detects incoming threats then dispenses flares to distract a missile's sensors.

India – US Defence Cooperation: In Nut Shell

- US has already recognised India as a **"Major Defense Partner"**, a status that which commits the US to facilitate technology sharing with India and is also the second-largest arms supplier to India.
- The two countries have already inked the **Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)** in 2016 and the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) in 2002.
- The LEMOA agreement allows the use of each other's land, air and naval bases for repair and resupply, a step toward building defence relations.
- In 2018, US granted India **Strategic Trade Authorisation-1 (STA-1).** India is the only south asian country to get STA1 and 3rd Asian country after Japan and South Korea.
- Last year during **the 2+2 dialogue**, India and US signed the **Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)** which will help New Delhi get access to advanced US defense systems and enable it to utilize its existing US-origin platforms.