



VAJIRAM & RAVI

(Institute for Civil Services Examination)

FEBRUARY 2020

the RECITALS

Explore Current Affairs Through Q&A

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**Featured
Articles**

**Mains
Q & A**

**Prelims
Q & A**

**Bridging
Gaps**

*India and United
States of America*

*Digital Payments
In India*

*Bhima-Koregaon
And The UAPA Act*

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The Recitals

Explore Current Affairs Through Q&A

(February 2020)

VAJIRAM & RAVI

(INSTITUTE FOR IAS EXAMINATION)

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Message From The Desk Of Director	1
1. Feature Article	2-13
a. India and United States of America	
b. Digital Payments In India	
c. Bhima-Koregaon And The UAPA Act	
2. Mains Q&A	14-31
3. Prelims Q&A	32-60
4. Bridging Gaps	61-115
1. International Day of Women and Girls in Science	
2. Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS)	
3. Yongle Blue Hole	
4. Mini-moon	
5. Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra	
6. SATHI	
7. WHO Releases Report On Cancer	
8. International Mother Language Day	
9. Worldwide Educating For The Future Index	
10. Sharp Rise In LPG Prices	
11. SPICe+	
12. Anti-Dumping Duty On PTA Removed	
13. BharatNet: Free Wifi To All Villages By March 2020	

14. Supreme Court (SC) Directs States To Establish Gram Nyayalayas
15. Supreme Court (SC) Panel On Prison Reforms
16. India 5th Most Polluted Country In the World
17. Demand For Declaring Eastern Ghats As UNESCO Cultural Heritage Site
18. New Migratory Species Protected Under Global Wildlife Agreement
19. State of India's Birds Report, 2020
20. Permanent Commission to Women Officers
21. India's First Integrated Air Defence Command
22. The Military Balance 2020
23. World's Cheapest Gun Shot Locator
24. India Attends Munich Security Conference
25. Bandhan Ceremony
26. Sharang Artillery Guns
27. New Light Combat Helicopter Production Centre
28. VAJRA: Indian Coast Guard's Offshore Patrol Vessel
29. Amendments in Arms Act, 1959 and Arms Rules, 2016
30. Clause 6 of Assam Accord
31. NCRB Study on Women & Child Trafficking Cases
32. Pakistan Court Sentences Hafiz Saeed to 11 Years in Jail
33. UAE Discovers New Natural Gas Reserves
34. Malaysia's Prime Minister Resigned
35. Sri Lanka Withdraws from UNHRC Resolution on War Crimes
36. Afghanistan's Taliban, US Sign Agreement Aimed at Ending War
37. Egypt's Former President Hosni Mubarak Dies
38. Reverse Osmosis
39. Vaccine for Classical Swine Fever
40. WHO Guidelines On Naming A Disease
41. Handling Child Witnesses
42. Tribal Initiatives
43. System Risk Indicator
44. EU Data Strategy
45. Banking Regulation (Amendment) Bill, 2020
46. USTR Takes India Off Developing Country List
47. Revamping of Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana
48. A Future For The World's Children Report
49. Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen)
50. J&K Global Investors' Summit 2020
51. Organic Food Festival for Women Entrepreneurs
52. BIMSTEC Conference on Drug Trafficking
53. First 'Jerusalem-Mumbai Festival'
54. International Seafood Show
55. International Judicial Conference
56. Largest Conference On Traditional Medicine
57. Govt to Host Artificial Intelligence Summit 'RAISE 2020'

58. Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety
59. Excavations At Sanauli
60. Visit of Vice-President of Vietnam to India
61. Visit of President of Portugal to India
62. Visit of President of Myanmar to India
63. India and Norway Strengthen Partnership on Blue Economy
64. Addu Tourism zone
65. India-South Korea Meeting to Enhance Bilateral Security Cooperation
66. First Term Contract for Importing Russian Crude Oil
67. India-Central Asia Business Council
68. Bhutan Ends Free Travel for Indian Passport Holders
69. BBIN Motor Vehicle Agreement (BBIN-MVA)
70. India-Iceland Pact in Fisheries Sector
71. India, Norway Pledge to Address issue of Marine Plastic Litter
72. Curative Petitions
73. An Analysis Of Sedition Cases
74. Delimitation of J&K
75. Need For Course Correction On Speaker's Office
76. Important Dates



From the Desk of the Director

Dear Students

The preparation of current affairs magazine is an evolutionary process as its nature and content keeps changing according to the demands of Civil Service Exam. As you are aware about the importance of current affairs for the prelims as well as mains exam, our aim is to follow an **integrated approach** covering all stages of examination from prelims to interview. Keeping these things in mind, we, at Vajiram and Ravi Institute, are always in the process of evolving our self so as to help aspirants counter the challenges put forward by UPSC.

In fulfillment of our objective and commitment towards the students, we have introduced some changes in our current affairs magazine. The CA Magazines, now with the name of “**The Recitals**”, will have four sections. These are:

1. **Feature Article:** As you are aware of the fact that civil service mains exam has become quite exhaustive and analytical, especially since 2013 after the change in syllabus, we have decided to focus on 2-3 topics every month that will provide an insight into the issue so as to help students understand the core of the issue. This will help in Essay writing as well as Mains Exam.
2. **Mains Q&A:** New students quite often struggle to find out that in what way the given topic is useful for them and in what form questions can be framed from the article. To help those students, we at Vajiram and Ravi have designed an innovative way to teach current affairs. Now, we will cover the current issues through questions and answers so as to make it more targeted towards exam. This will not just provide the information and analysis on current issues but will also help in learning the art of answer writing. Further the related information on the topics on which questions have been framed but that is outside the purview of answer will be given in the Box as ‘**Extra Mile**’.
3. **Prelims Q&A:** This section will contain prelims based MCQs that will test your diligence while reading the current issues. These MCQs will be of UPSC standard and will contain detailed explanation. Students are advised to attempt these MCQs honestly and read the Explanation carefully. The idea is to also provide students with a question bank of around 600 current affairs MCQs (50 Qs × 12 months = 600 Qs) just before their prelims examination, which will act as revision on issues spanning over the entire year.
4. **Bridging Gaps:** This section will contain miscellaneous topics which has not been covered through Q&A. That is why it is called Bridging Gaps, meaning the left-over topics.

So, the new magazine is a complete overhaul of what we have been doing for so long. We hope that the new beginning will be to the liking of students.

Thanks

Best Wishes

India and United States of America

Donald J. Trump, President of the United States, paid a State Visit to India on 24-25 February 2020. This was the President's first visit to India. The visit provided an opportunity for the two leaders to review progress in bilateral ties and further strengthen our strategic partnership.

Key Highlights

- The two sides announced the **finalization of a defence package worth over \$3 billion** for 24 multi-role MH-60R Seahawk maritime helicopters and six AH-64E Apache attack helicopters.
- A \$1.9 billion deal for a **missile defence system** (Integrated Air Defence Weapon System) is also in the pipeline.
- In addition, the two sides inked following MoU:
 - **Mou on Mental Health** between India's Department of Health and Family Welfare and the US' Department of Health and Human Services;
 - **MoU on Safety of Medical Products** between India's Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation and the US' Food and Drug Administration;
 - A Letter of Cooperation on **supplying Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG)** between Indian Oil Corporation Limited, ExxonMobil India LNG Limited and Chart Industries Inc.
- The two leaders decided to raise India-US ties to the level of a "**comprehensive global strategic partnership**".

Analysis

- Trump's trip was **only the eighth** by a serving US president, but he was also the **fourth consecutive president to visit**. The increased frequency of presidential travel to India captures the growing importance of the country for the US.
- The India-US security partnership witnessed another arms purchase, **bringing to seven** the number of US military platforms that will feature in India's arsenal, many with components manufactured or assembled in India.
- On the economic side, two-way trade in goods and services has increased; India is now the **US' eighth-largest trade partner** and the **US is India's largest**. Energy trade, in particular, has taken off. Coordination on connectivity infrastructure, maritime security, counterterrorism, and cyber security have all increased.

- The number of Indian students in US and the number of US companies active in India have both grown.
- The two nations have similar concerns about China's Belt and Road Initiative. Hence, there is now a push for **greater collaboration on regional infrastructure projects**. This includes the **Blue Dot Network**, with the aim of supporting projects which are "open and inclusive, transparent, economically viable, financially, environmentally and socially sustainable, and compliant with international standards, laws, and regulations".
- Worries over **possible US sanctions against India** related to the purchase of Russian defence equipment have diminished following complications arising from Turkey's acquisition of similar equipment.
- The consequences of heightened US tensions with Iran have been managed, with India **given time and space to diversify its energy supplies** while receiving a waiver from US sanctions for the port project in Chabahar.
- Also, Trump's comments on his good relations with Pakistan and his statement related to mediation over Kashmir issue should be **viewed in the context of his desire to get US troops out of Afghanistan**. For US-Taliban peace deal to work, Trump needs Pakistan's help.
- However, new points of friction have arisen **related to digital payments, data localisation, and e-commerce**. Differences remain, as between any two countries. But attempts have been made over the past year to reach accommodations.

Missed Opportunity

- During the visit, **three cooperation agreements on the energy sector were expected to be signed** with respect to the export of increased crude oil, LNG at discounted rates, and supply of nuclear reactors. However, only one deal was signed during the present visit. Deals related to supply at discounted rate and nuclear reactors could not be finalized.
- Both the countries failed to **fix the issue pertaining to India's nuclear liability law**, during President Trump's visit.
- There was **no word** on India finalising the recently cleared **Integrated Air Defence Weapon System** – which would possibly help in tempering US apprehensions on India also purchasing the Russian S-400 missile system.
- **Trade related issues** such as signing of new trade deal, issues related to Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) were not discussed.

[These issues have been discussed in following sections]

Trade Related Issue:

- Trump's maiden visit to India was viewed as important, particularly, with the **possibility of signing up for a new trade deal** between India and the US. However, with the statement by President Trump of saving a **'big trade deal' with India only after the presidential election is over**, there was no possibility of signing the new deal during the present visit.
- Ahead of the visit however, **negotiations reportedly hit a stalemate** due to both sides alleging either party of "changing goalposts", such as the last-minute American insistence of India increasing import of products like pecan nuts.
- The US, under the Trump Administration, is striving hard to **bridge its huge deficit with its Asian trading partners like China and India**. In the case of India, this trade deficit has fallen down by 9% in 2018, over 2017, that stood at \$20.8 billion. It has happened due to the complementary nature of hydrocarbon exports of the US to India.

GSP Related Tension

- In the recent past, trade tensions escalated owing to the US adopting punitive measures. Beginning with **levying steel and aluminum tariffs on India**, in mid-2019, the Trump administration revoked **India's beneficiary status under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) programme** – under which exports worth \$5.7 billion to the US enjoyed duty-free status in 2017.
- the US preemptively **closed the door to restoration of India's GSP benefits**. Few days after Trump's visit was announced, the office of the US Trade Representative released a federal notice on **removing countries like India from their list of developing countries** that "are exempt from investigations into whether they harm American industry with unfairly subsidised exports."
- This effectively rendered **India to be classified as a developed country**, and thus no longer eligible for benefits under GSP – which is a preferential arrangement for developing countries alone.

India-US Strategic Energy Partnership (SEP)

- Both India & US are increasing their cooperation in the field of energy. Increasing energy cooperation can be assessed from following facts:
 - Till December 2019, there has been a remarkable increase in **crude oil imports to the tune of over 9 million tonnes**, accounting for **88% increase over 2018**.
 - India has become the **fourth-largest export destination for US crude** and the **fifth-largest buyer of liquefied natural gas (LNG)** from the US.

- During the present visit, an agreement was signed between the two countries which would further increase the supply of LNG.
- Besides discussions related to the supply of crude and LNG at discounted rate is going on.
- This energy cooperation has various advantages for both the countries. For US, it **helped in bringing the trade deficit** with India which had become a bone of contention lately.
- For India, it not only **succeeded in replacing Iranian crudes** but also help meet India's natural gas demand, through LNG exports, **from a new source**, in addition to existing places like Qatar, Russia, and Australia under long-term gas supply deals.
- It also seeks to **enhance energy security** through innovation linkages across the energy value chain.
- The key areas of engagement under SEP were to **pursue four primary pillars of cooperation, namely, Oil and Gas; Power and Energy Efficiency; Renewable Energy and Sustainable Growth; and Coal.**

Suggestions To Realise Full Potential Of SEP

- The **US-India Gas Task Force** can find new means to tap India's unconventional resources, including shale gas prospects.
- the US should cooperate with India in **providing clean coal technologies**, while **promoting efficiency improvements** at existing coal plants in a cost-effective way.
- **Good energy data management** is key to monitoring energy policy and tracking their progress, however, there is **no one-stop-shop for energy data in India**. This creates yet **another opportunity for both countries** to strengthen and streamline their existing energy cooperation.
- Earlier, **United States Agency for International Development, US Energy Information Administration and NITI Aayog** has already signed cooperation to support a **nodal agency for Energy Data Management**, which should be reviewed and taken forward.

Conclusion

- The global strategic partnership between India and the U.S. is based on trust, shared values, mutual respect and understanding, and marked by warmth and friendship between the peoples of the two countries.
- Arrival of the President Trump with his family gives the relations between India and America the sweetness and intimacy which are the identity of a unified family. India-USA relations are no longer just another partnership. It is a far greater and closer relationship.

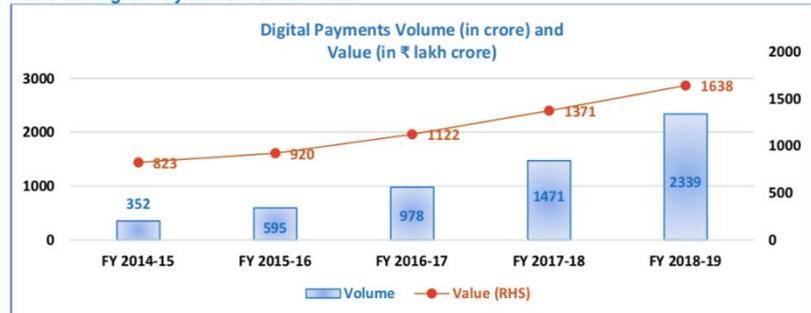
Digital Payments In India

Recently, RBI came up with a report after conducting a study on the usage of digital payment systems in India. The study analyses the measures of cash, the enablers for payment systems and the measures of electronic payments over a timeframe of the last 5 years to identify the shift in India, if any, from cash to digital payments.

Findings Of The Report

- The digital revolution is taking the world by storm and no other area has witnessed such metamorphosis as payment and settlement systems, resulting in a myriad of digital options for the common man.
- Consumers now have a range of options to choose from when selecting a payment method to complete a transaction. They make this selection based on the value they assign to a payment method in a certain situation as each payment mode has its own use and purpose.
- In India, like in many parts of the world, cash is the well-established and widely used payment instrument. It is, however, reassuring that non-cash payments, especially those using electronic or digital modes are rapidly increasing.
- Virtual payments are increasing in popularity, but the country's ethnic and economic diversity have made the shift toward digital payments geographically variable and certain regions and economic strata show more openness to digitisation than others.

Table 12: Digital Payments Trend in India



Source: RBI Data

- The factors holding back the digital push are connectivity issues, inadequate acceptance infrastructure, lack of familiarity with newer, alternative payment methods, delay in getting complaints resolved and security and privacy concerns.

Measure Of Cash

Currency In Circulation

- The amount of Currency in Circulation (CIC) is related to the use of cash as a payment instrument since one of the major forces of demand for currency is its use for making payments.

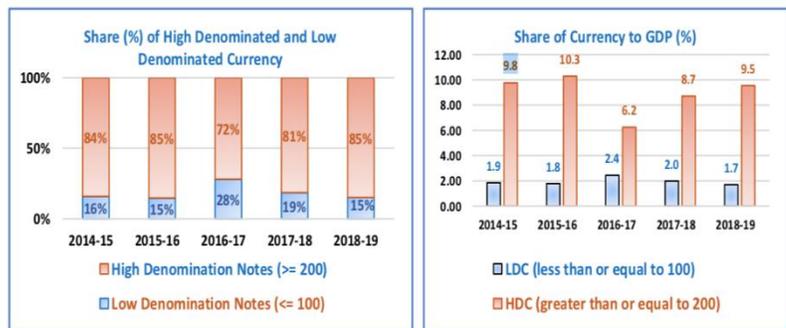
- The CIC across the country increased at a Compounded Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 10.2% over the past 5 years, i.e., between the financial years (FY) 2014-15 and 2018-19.
- Demonetisation and an active growth in GDP brought down the cash in circulation as a percentage of GDP to 8.70% in 2016-17. This increased to 10.70% in 2017- 18 and to 11.2% in 2018-19 which, however, is less than the pre-demonetisation level of 12.1% in 2015-16.

Share of High Value Denominated Currency and Low Value Denominated Currency

- Cash, like other forms of money, is used both as a means of payment and as a store of value.
- A common way to separate the two types of cash demand is to assume that high value denomination notes are mostly held as a store of value and low denomination for payments.

Over the past 5 years, the demand for high value denominated currency has overtaken low value denominated currency which may indicate that cash is increasingly used as a store of value and less for making payments.

Table 4: High and Low Value Denominated Currency - India



Cash Withdrawals from ATMs

- The cash withdrawals from ATMs increased over the past 5 years and India is next only to China in terms of the cash withdrawals from ATMs. However, the percentage of cash withdrawals to GDP has been constant in India at around 17%.
- In addition, with a CAGR of 9% in terms of volume and 10% in terms of value, the growth has been slow when compared to digital payment transactions (which grew at a CAGR of 61% and 19% in terms of volume and value, respectively), indicating a shift towards digitisation.
- Further, the infrastructure for cash withdrawal, i.e., ATMs has grown at a low pace (CAGR of 4% during the past 5 years).

Digital Payment Enablers

Mobile Phones and Internet

- By the end of Nov’ 2019, India had over 115.5 crore wireless telephone subscribers resulting in a tele-density of 88.90%. The urban tele-density and rural tele-density was 157.33% and 56.69%, respectively.

- The increasing mobile density and mobile internet users are being used by payment systems providers, both banks and non-banks, to offer payment services using mobile as an access device.
- Further, it has also led to numerous innovations in payment mechanisms, such as tokenisation and scanning of QR code for making payments using smartphones.
- Internet usage has grown significantly in India, which reflects in the figures, as by the end of November 2019, there were over 64.2 crore and 1.9 crore wireless and wireline broadband subscribers, respectively across the country.
- This increase in internet penetration has also helped adoption of digital modes of payments across the country.

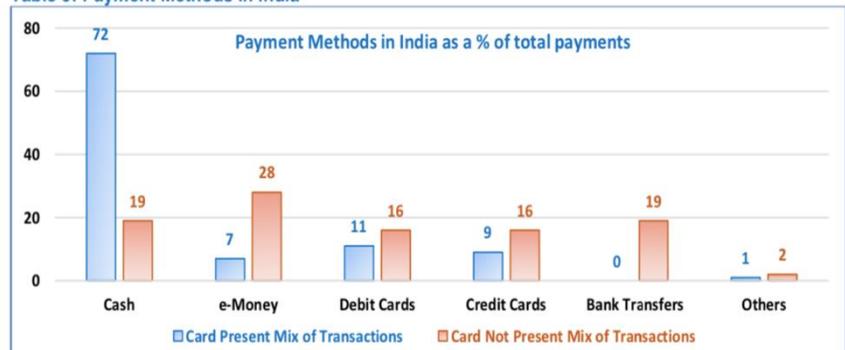
Bank Accounts

By March 2019, the number of deposit accounts had grown to 217.40 crore in the country. This increase in availability of bank accounts has played a key role in initiating digital payments from/to such accounts.

Aadhaar

- Since its launch in 2009, the Aadhaar, a unique identity for all Indian citizens has been issued to over 124 crore individuals across the country.
- Aadhaar enabled eKYC (electronic Know Your Customer) has resulted in an exponential growth of digital payments in India.
- The use of Aadhaar has also been used for authenticating payments to merchants and through business correspondents. It has helped significantly to widen the reach and access of payment systems across the country.

Table 9: Payment Methods in India



Source: Worldpay Global Payments Report – November 2018

Debit and Credit Cards

- In respect of card issuance, during the past 5 years, the number of credit cards issued increased from 211 lakh to over 550 lakh. The same period also witnessed a steep increase in debit cards from 5535 lakh to over 8000 lakh.
- Increase in cards has facilitated growth in both online and physical PoS terminals based card payments resulting in an increase in digital transactions.

Findings Of Reports By Various Other Agencies

- The **Payments Global Cash Index for Asia Pacific** published in June 2018, computed the “cash share of the wallet”, as the amount of cash withdrawn in a country as a share of its annual GDP, according to which, India was observed to be highly dependent on cash.
- The **JP Morgan 2019 Global Payments Trends Report** observed that Indian payments market, historically dominated by cash, is evolving to meet the demands of smartphone led online shopping culture, with cards and digital wallets rising in prominence.
- The **Worldpay Global Payments Report 2018** observed that in India, while cash continued to be the primary payment method for point of sale purchases and eMoney dominated the online payments. The report observed that as internet penetration and the digital economy continues to grow, there will be room for ongoing shift of payment forms.
- According to a report by **Credit Suisse Group AG**, 72% of India’s consumer transactions take place in cash, double the rate as in China.
- According to the report, many merchants, especially in rural areas, remain unable or unwilling to accept digital transactions due to network connectivity issues and a reluctance to pay charges for what are often low-value transactions.

Steps Taken By RBI To Increase Digital Payments

- The factors inhibiting the digital push are connectivity issues, inadequate acceptance infrastructure, lack of familiarity with newer, alternative payment methods, delay in getting complaints resolved and security and privacy concerns.
- In order to address the various issues, RBI has put in place systems like consumer awareness programmes, ombudsman schemes and increasing the category of billers in Bharat Bill Pay.
- Further, in order to realise the vision of the Payments and Settlement Systems Vision 2019-2021 to empower every citizen with an exceptional payment experience and to provide her a variety of options, the RBI has taken the following steps:
 - It has made NEFT available 24x7 with effect from December 16, 2019
 - It directed banks not to charge savings bank account customers for online transactions in the NEFT system with effect from January 2020.
 - It permitted all authorised payment systems and instruments (non-bank PPIs, cards and UPI) for linking with National Electronic Toll Collection (NETC) FASTags.

- It enabled processing of e- mandates for transactions through UPI.
- Both cash and non-cash payment instruments fulfil unique needs, and as long as these needs do not change, both types of payment instruments are required to meet the full spectrum of user's needs. However, India's growing use of retail digital payments, along with the radical reconstruction of its cash economy, indicates a shift in its relationship with cash.
- Speed, convenience and competition are shaping the future of payments and the endeavour is to make digital payments a divine experience to the users, where Cash is King, but Digital is Divine.

Bhima-Koregaon And The UAPA Act

Recently, Maharashtra government has withdrawn 348 of 649 Bhima Koregaon violence cases. The accused included activists and lawyers who had been booked under the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)**. Earlier, the Supreme Court (SC) has ordered the Pune police to place the five well-known rights activists, they detained in a countrywide crackdown, under house arrest, and that too, in their own homes. The court was hearing a petition filed by five eminent persons *i.e.* Romila Thapar, Devaki Jain, Prabhat Patnaik, Satish Deshpande and Maja Dharuwala.

A three-judge Bench, led by Chief Justice of India, lashed out at the sweeping round of arrests, observing that democracy could not survive without dissenting voices. Dissent is the safety valve of democracy. If **dissent is not allowed, democracy will burst under pressure**.

The said order of the SC had **raised a fundamental question**. Namely, whether the arrests were the culmination of a legitimate probe into a Maoist plot, as the police claim, or whether this is yet another clumsy failure to distinguish between those who indulge in or actively support violent activity, and those who attempt to understand or empathies with the social conditions that breed extremism and insurgency.

About UAPA

- The UAPA authorizes the government to ban unlawful organizations and terrorist organizations (subject to judicial review), and penalizes membership of such organizations.
- In 2004, the government chose to strengthen ***The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967***. It was amended to overcome some of the difficulties in its enforcement and to update it in accordance with international commitments.
 - By inserting specific chapters, the amendment criminalized the raising of funds for a terrorist act, holding of the proceeds of terrorism, membership of a terrorist organisation, support to a terrorist organisation and the raising of funds for a terrorist organisation.

- It increased the time available to law-enforcement agencies to file a charge sheet ***to six months from three.***
- The law was amended in 2008 after the Mumbai attacks, and again in 2012. The definition of “terrorist act” was expanded to include offences that threaten economic security, counterfeiting Indian currency, and procurement of weapons, etc. Additional powers were granted to courts to provide for attachment or forfeiture of property equivalent to the value of the counterfeit Indian currency, or the proceeds of terrorism involved in the offence.

Problems with UAPA

- ***Vague And Broad Definition:*** The problems begin with the definition clause itself. The definition of “unlawful activities” includes “disclaiming” or “questioning” the territorial integrity of India, and causing “disaffection” against India. These words are staggeringly vague and broad.
- ***Fails To Define What Membership Entails:*** Similarly, under the act “Membership” of unlawful and terrorist organisations is a criminal offence, and in the latter case, it can be punished with life imprisonment. But the Act fails entirely to define what “membership” entails. The question arises are you a “member” if you possess literature or books about a banned organisation? If you express sympathy with its aims? If you’ve met other, “active” members? These are not theoretical considerations: charge sheets under the UAPA often cite the seizure of books or magazines, and presence at “meetings”, as clinching evidence of membership. In 2011, the Supreme Court attempted to narrow the scope of these provisions, holding that “membership” was limited to cases where an individual engaged in active incitement to violence. Anything broader than that, it ruled, would violate the constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech and of association. The application of this ruling, however, has been patchy and arbitrary by different High courts.
- ***Problems Associated With Section 43D(5):*** Section 43D(5) of the Act prohibits courts from granting bail to a person if “on a perusal of the case diary or the police report ... the court is of the opinion that there are reasonable grounds for believing that the accusation against such person is prima facie true.” But the problem is case diary and the charge sheet is the version of the state. Therefore, under the UAPA, as long as the state’s version appears to make out an offence, a court cannot, under law, grant bail. When we juxtapose this with the inordinately slow pace at which criminal trials progress, Section 43D(5) of the UAPA is effectively a warrant for perpetual imprisonment without trial. This is not a theoretical concern either: on more than one occasion in recent years, terrors accused have been acquitted after spending more than a decade in jail.

- ***Draconian Provisions:*** The draconian provisions of the Act deprive the accused of the right to bail, allow police remand for over 30 days as opposed to the 14 days under the IPC and give leave to the prosecution to file a chargesheet in 180 days rather than the usual mandate of 90 days.
- ***Large Acquittal Rate:*** The National Crime Bureau Statistics indicate that **67 %** of the cases under the UAPA 1967 end up in acquittal or discharge of the persons accused, after their having lived in detention, often for years.
- ***Limited Only To Organization And Individuals:*** Recently, India's inability to designate the Haqqani brothers as terrorists because of a lacuna in Indian terror laws is turning into a thorny issue for the US, which has complied with almost all Indian requests on terror designations. The problem on the Indian side is that the Unlawful Activities and Prevention Act only allows proscribing organizations and not individuals. The government had decided to amend the UAPA to include the category of individuals in the list, but the process hasn't moved fast enough.
- ***Subordinated Every Other Constitutional Rights:*** The traditional argument in defence of laws such as the UAPA is that the state must be given a strong hand to control terrorist and other violent and disruptive activities, proves too much. It proves too much because it subordinates every other constitutional value such as freedom of speech, personal liberty, the right to a fair trial to the overarching concern of order. Such an attitude can be justified only in times of war or Emergency (and even then, subject to safeguards). But what the UAPA does is to normalize this "state of exception", and make it a permanent feature of the legal landscape.
- ***Person Can Speak For Extreme Causes:*** It is important to make a fundamental distinction here. No democracy permits violent acts against the state or unsanctioned violence against individuals. But one is allowed to speak even in favour of extreme causes and ideologies like Maoism or Hindutva. Ideas must be fought with better ideas, not through coercion or repression. This is what distinguishes a democracy from an authoritarian state.
- ***Arrest Under Such Act Requires Higher Degree Of Proof:*** Charges such as sedition, waging war against the government and promoting disaffection against the state rarely end in conviction. One reason for the failure is that prosecuting agencies typically believe in guilt by association; they confuse empathy with incitement and compassion with collaboration. Also, cases are often filed with utter disregard for the principle that charges such as 'unlawful activities' and 'terrorist acts' should not be invoked in the absence of actual acts of violence or incitement to violence; mere verbal expression of support cannot and should not be the basis for arrest.

Way forward

- Maharashtra police must follow the evidence rather than go overboard.
- Given the sweeping allegations of unlawful activity and the enormity of implicating them in unverified assassination plots, the burden of proof on the police is extremely high. Unless proven, it will only confirm suspicions that the law has been bent with the sole purpose of targeting dissent.
- Thus, if a democratic state is permitted to arm itself with legislations such as the UAPA, empowering it to deny someone who opposes the government their freedom for an almost indefinite period of time, it casts a duty upon the judiciary to ensure that the arrest itself is based on cogent and irrefutable evidence.

MAINS Q&A

- 1. The Finance Ministry has recently introduced The Direct Tax Vivad se Vishwas Bill, 2020. Highlight the provisions of the Bill along with its intended impact.**

Answer

- The finance minister has introduced The Direct Tax Vivad se Vishwas Bill, 2020 in the Lok Sabha to give effect to the Budget announcement to resolve direct tax disputes.
- The scheme is modelled on a similar scheme (Sabka Vishwas Scheme) for indirect tax which was announced in last year's Budget and the window to avail it closed on January 15 this year.
- The government said that nearly 95% of 1.9 lakh outstanding cases were resolved under Sabka Vishwas Scheme, resulting in over Rs 35,000 crore of revenue for the government.

Need For The Bill

- As many as 4,83,000 direct tax worth over Rs 9 lakh crore cases are pending in various appellate forums i.e. Commissioner (Appeals), ITAT, High Court and Supreme Court.
- Tax disputes consume lots of time, energy and resources both on the part of the government as well as taxpayers and deprives the government of timely collection of revenue. Therefore, there is an urgent need to provide for resolution of pending tax disputes.

Provisions Of The Bill

- The bill offers waiver of interest, penalty and prosecution for settlement of disputes that are pending before the commissioner (appeals), Income Tax Appellate Tribunals (ITATs), high courts or the Supreme Court as on January 31, 2020.
- The pending appeal may be against disputed tax, interest or penalty in relation to an assessment or reassessment order or against disputed interest or fee. In fact, the appeal may even be against tax determined on defaults in respect to tax deducted or collected at source.
- The scheme provides that if a taxpayer avails it by March 31, 2020, then he/she would get complete waiver of interest and penalty. However, a taxpayer who chooses the scheme post this cut-off date will have to pay the disputed tax and 10% of it extra.
- In case of tax arrears pertaining to only disputed interest or penalty, 25 per cent of the disputed penalty or interest will need to be paid while settling appeals up to March 31. Cases coming for resolution after this date would have to pay 30% of penalty and interest.
- The order passed by designated authority determining the amount payable will be final and no further recourse in terms of appeals, arbitration, mediation or conciliation will be available to the taxpayer.
- **Cases Not Covered Under The Scheme**
 - The scheme will not apply to prosecution cases under the Indian Penal Code (IPC), the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) and the Prohibition of Benami Property Transactions Act.
 - Besides, the disputed tax amount should not relate to undisclosed foreign income, assets, assessment or reassessment.

Impact

- As the Bill emphasises on trust building and provides a formula-based solution without any discrimination, it is expected that the scheme will reduce litigation expenditure for the government.

- This will not only benefit the government by generating timely revenue but also the taxpayers, as they will be able to deploy time, energy and resources saved by opting for such dispute resolution towards their business activities.
- The scheme will also come in handy for cases such as additions of unexplained cash deposited during demonetisation, additions for penny stocks, etc. where factually the taxpayers have high exposures.
- It would be beneficial for such taxpayers, to pay the tax amount and settle the disputes without imposition of interest and penalty.

The current step will not only help in clearing the huge backlog of pending cases but will also help to change the current perception of the tax regime from indulging in tax terrorism to a tax friendly regime and act as a confidence building measure for taxpayers, consequently leading to improved tax compliance.

2. The Economic Survey 2020 has severely criticised the Essential Commodities Act (ECA). What is the Essential Commodities Act? Highlight the problems associated with the Act.

Answer

- The ECA was enacted in 1955 to give government the power to regulate the production, supply and distribution of a whole host of commodities it declares 'essential' in order to make them available to consumers at fair prices.
- The list of items under the Act include drugs, fertilisers, pulses and edible oils, and petroleum and petroleum products. The Centre can include new commodities as and when the need arises, and take them off the list once the situation improves.
- If the Centre finds that a certain commodity is in short supply and its price is spiking, it can notify stock-holding limits on it for a specified period. The States act on this notification to specify limits and take steps to ensure that these are adhered to.
- A State can, however, choose not to impose any restrictions. But once it does, traders have to immediately sell into the market any stocks held beyond the mandated quantity.

Shortcomings of the Act

- However, the Act has created market distortions that have prevented the efficient development of agricultural markets.
- Given that almost all crops are seasonal, ensuring round-the-clock supply requires adequate build-up of stocks during the season. So, it may not always be possible to differentiate between genuine stock build-up and speculative hoarding.
- Also, there can be genuine shortages triggered by weather-related disruptions in which case prices will move up. So, if prices are always monitored, farmers may have no incentive to farm.
- Further, the Act does not distinguish between hoarders and firms that "genuinely" need to hold on to these stocks due to the nature of their operations.
- These stock limits have also had "limited" success in containing volatility of prices of these commodities.
- For instance, stock limits imposed in September 2019 on onions to prevent hoarding by traders had no effect in controlling the rise in their prices and instead had led to a sharp increase in the volatility of their prices since November.

- The lower stock limits must have led the traders and wholesalers to offload most of the kharif crop in October itself. The Economic Survey argues that if the government had not intervened, traders would have stored part of their produce to ensure smooth availability of the commodity at stable prices throughout the year.
- In the long term, the Act disincentivizes development of storage infrastructure thereby leading to increased volatility in prices following production/consumption shocks—the opposite of what it was intended for.
- The Act has also reduced the effectiveness of free trade and flow of commodities from areas with surplus stock to markets with higher demand.
- The Survey added that despite 76,000 raids conducted under the ECA in 2019, the conviction rate was abysmally low. This goes on to show that the ECA only seems to enable rent-seeking and harassment.

Although the ECA has novel intentions but the interventions that were apt in instances of severe market failures have lost their relevance in a transformed economy. Eliminating such instances of needless government intervention will enable competitive markets and thereby spur investments and economic growth.

3. The Indian Railways recently launched its third corporate train - the Kashi Mahakal express. Highlight the workings of this new model along with its benefits.

Answer

- The Kashi Mahakal Express is the country's third corporate train after the two Tejas Express trains between Delhi-Lucknow and Mumbai-Ahmedabad started over the past few months.
- This is a new model being actively pushed by Indian Railways to outsource the running of regular passenger trains to its PSU, the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC).
- This has been dubbed an experiment as a natural extension of this model is to lease out 100 routes to private players to run 150 trains, something that is in the works.

Working of the IRCTC Model

- In this model, the IRCTC takes all the decisions of running the service — fare, food, onboard facilities, complaints etc and Indian Railways is free from these encumbrances and gets to earn from IRCTC a pre-decided amount, being the owner of the network. This amount has three components- haulage, lease and custody.
- The haulage charge IRCTC is paying for the Tejas trains is in the range of Rs 800 per kilometer. This includes use of the fixed infrastructure like tracks, signalling, driver, station staff, traction and pretty much everything needed to physically move the rake.
- On top of that IRCTC has to pay the lease charges on the rake as Indian Railways coaches are leased to its financing arm, the Indian Railway Finance Corporation (IRFC).
- Added to that there is a per-day custody charge, of keeping the rake safe and sound while it is in the custody of the PSU. Roughly each of these components works out to be around Rs 2 lakh per day for the New Delhi-Lucknow Tejas rake.
- In other words, IRCTC has to pay Indian Railways a sum total of these three charges, roughly Rs 14 lakh for the Lucknow Tejas runs in a day (up and down) and then factor in a profit over and above

this. This money is payable even if the occupancy is below expectation and the train is not doing good business.

Powers of IRCTC

- Being a corporate entity with a Board of Directors and investors, IRCTC insists that the coaches it gets from Railways are new and not in a run-down condition, as is seen in many trains.
- In this model, IRCTC has full flexibility to decide the service parameters and even alter them without having to go to Railway ministry or its policies.
- To that end, the business of running trains can be run with the independence needed to run a business with profit motive. This, policymakers believe creates the environment for enhanced service quality and user experience for the passengers.
- IRCTC gets the freedom to decide even the number of stoppages it wants to afford on a route, depending on the needs of its business model.

Model For Private Train Operators

- The model in which private train operators are sought to be engaged is different wherein along with haulage of Rs 668 per kilometer the operator needs to agree to revenue sharing with Railways.
- The company willing to share the highest percentage of revenue will win the contract. Private players may not need to pay lease and custody charges as it is expected that they will bring in their own rolling stock.

Benefit for Indian Railways (IR)

- This is being done as over the next five years, after the two dedicated freight corridors are operationalised and a lion's share of freight trains move to the corridors, a lot of capacity will free up in the conventional railway lines for more passenger trains to run to cater to the demand.
- The entry of the corporate sector, will reduce the burden on Indian Railways, of pumping in more trains into the system.
- Further, Indian Railways does not have to suffer the losses associated with running these trains thanks to under-recovery of cost due to low fares and its own hefty overheads. Moreover, the lease on its coaches is also taken care of through this model.

The new model will not only supplement railways in adding new trains to its infrastructure but also bring in the much needed professionalism in the sector along with improving its finances, which can be used to create an environment of enhanced service quality and to improve passenger safety.

4. **Recently, the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) administration has invoked the stringent Public Safety Act (PSA) against former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Ministers. However, its use has been criticized on various grounds, thus, requires sufficient safeguards to protect its misuse.**

Answer

The former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Ministers have now been detained under the stringent PSA, which enables authorities to **detain any individual for two years without trial**. The invocation has been in context of inciting a civilian agitation, violence *etc.*

About J&K PSA

- **The J&K PSA, 1978** was introduced by the government of Sheikh Abdullah as a tough law to prevent the smuggling of timber and keep the smugglers out of circulation.

- The law allowed the government to detain any person **above the age of 16** without trial for a period of **two years**.
- The **object of preventive detention is not to punish** but to prevent the detenu from doing something which is prejudicial to the State, **for ex.- security of the State, public order etc.**

Opposition To The Aforementioned Act

- The Act is alleged to be **misused widely and was repeatedly employed against political opponents** by consecutive governments.
- After the emergence of militancy, the J&K government frequently invoked the PSA to **crack down on separatists**.
- Further, as per **Amnesty report** published in 2019, about **58% of PSA cases** were quashed by the courts. Thus, showing its arbitrary application.
- Detention orders under PSA can be issued by Divisional Commissioners or District Magistrates. The detaining authority **need not disclose any facts** about the detention.
- The issue is further complicated by the provisions under **Section 22 of the Act**, where protection is provided to the public servant for any action taken in good faith.
- Lastly, **PSA does not distinguish between minor and major offences**, allowing detention for up to one year for disturbance of public order and two years for actions prejudicial to the security of the State.

Constitutional Safeguards Against Detention

- As per **Article 22** of the Constitution, a person detained under the preventive detention Act shall be produced before the nearest magistrate within a period of **24 hours**.
- No person shall be detained in the custody without being informed **ground of his detention**.
- The detained person should have right to make representation his arrest.
- The **Article 22** also provides for establishment of Advisory board for approving detention **beyond 3 months**.

Way forward

- There is a need for **detailed recording of facts** leading to satisfaction of authority conveying the grounds of detention to the detenu.
 - **People should be sensitized** about various personal liberties.
 - Further, in case there is unlawful detention, need to have **provision for interim relief/compensation**.
 - Lastly, the detenu should be given the **right to take assistance of legal representative** to make case against detention.
5. **A German cyber security firm reported that the medical details of many Indian patients were leaked and are freely available on the Internet. In this light need for a strong data protection in India and current status of data protection in India.**

Answer

Recently, as per the German firm listed **1.02 million studies** of Indian patients and many medical images like CT Scans, MRIs and patients' photos as being available online. Such information has the potential to be mined for deeper data analysis and for creating profiles that could be further used for **social engineering, phishing and online identity theft etc.**

In this light need for data protection is due to following reasons:

- The database protection framework is indispensable to develop an ecosystem of **data driven innovation and entrepreneurship** and thus ensuring growth of digital economy in India.
- There are **emerging technological challenges** such as Big Data, the Internet of Things and Artificial Intelligence that have necessitated that a balance between innovation and privacy.
- The **concept of data protection** is primarily linked with the idea of privacy of an individual.
- Further, **cyber security threats** such as ransomware may otherwise result into heavy damages, including loss of data and disruptions in business and need to be accounted for in legislative framework.
- Sensitive Financial Information on debts and defaults also needs to be safeguarded for **fair process and sound financial decision making**.
- Lastly, in line with FDI liberalization and capital flows across borders it becomes impertinent for India to **follow global standards on data privacy** as data breaches may lead to cutting of sovereign ratings.

Decoding the data protection bill

WHAT IT MEANS FOR CONSUMERS

- **DATA** can be processed or shared by any entity only after consent.
- **SAFEGUARDS**, including penalties, introduced to prevent misuse of personal data.
- **ALL** data to be categorized under three heads—general, sensitive and critical.

THE GOVERNMENT & REGULATORY ROLE

- **GOVT** will have the power to obtain any user's non-personal data from companies.
- **THE** bill mandates that all financial and critical data has to be stored in India.
- **SENSITIVE** data has to be stored in India but can be processed outside with consent.

WHAT COMPANIES HAVE TO DO

- **SOCIAL** media firms to formulate a voluntary verification process for users.
- **SHARING** data without consent will entail a fine of ₹15 crore or 4% of global turnover.
- **DATA** breach or inaction will entail a fine of ₹5 crore or 2% of global turnover.

Source: Mint research

Status Of Data Protection In India

- Supreme Court in **Puttaswamy case** held the right to privacy as an intrinsic part of the right to life and personal liberty.
- **Information Technology (Reasonable Security Practices and Sensitive Personal Data or Information) Rules, 2011** provide for protection of sensitive personal data.
- **Aadhaar Act, 2016** provides for collection of biometric information and establishes UIDAI to deals with privacy and security of personal data.
- Recently, the government has also introduced **Draft Data protection Bill, 2019** as a comprehensive law on data protection.

Way forward

- India legislation needs to be in sync with emerging global practices. The most recent milestone in the growing body of data regulation is the **EU's General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)**.
- Thus, India data protection law will have to strike a balance by being a stringent law without hurting its growing digital economy.

7 Principles For Data Protection Given By The BN Srikrishna Committee:

- **Technology agnosticism:** Law should be flexible to take into account changing technologies,
- **Holistic application:** It must apply to both government and private sector entities.
- **Informed Consent:** Consent should be genuine, informed, and meaningful
- **Data Minimization:** Processing of data should be minimal and only for the purpose for which it is sought
- **Controller Accountability:** Entities controlling the data should be accountable for any data processing,

- **Structured Enforcement:** Enforcement of the data protection framework should be by a high-powered statutory authority.
- **Deterrent Penalties:** Penalties should be adequate to discourage any wrongful acts.

6. Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) has ruled that there is no fundamental right which inheres in an individual to claim reservation in promotion and that no mandamus can be issued by court directing state government to provide reservations. In this light discuss the arguments for and against reservation in promotion.

Answer

The SC in case of **Mukesh Kumar v. State of Uttarakhand** has observed that the State Government is not required to justify its decision to not give reservation in promotion on the basis of quantifiable data. The court also held that **no mandamus can be issued** against to provide reservation. The case has heated the issue as to correctness of reservation in promotion.

In **M. Nagaraj vs. Union of India Case (2006)**, the SC validated the state's decision to extend reservation in promotion for SCs and STs, but gave direction that the state should provide proof on the following **three parameters** *i.e.* empirical data on backwardness of the class benefitting from the reservation; empirical data on inadequate representation in the position/ service for which reservation in promotion is to be granted and impact on efficiency.

Cases, constitutional provisions and amendments relating to reservation in promotion:

- **Article 15(4)** allows State to make special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for SCs and STs.
- **Article 16(4B)** provides that reserved promotion posts for SCs and STs that remain unfilled can be carried forward to the subsequent year. |
- **Article 335** mandates that reservations have to be balanced with the maintenance of efficiency.
- In the **Indira Sawhney case (1992)**, the SC held that the reservation policy cannot be extended to promotions.
- However, **77th Constitutional Amendment** inserted **Clause 4A in Article 16**, which enables the state to make any law regarding reservation in promotion for SCs and STs.
- **85th amendment** gave back consequential seniority to SC/ST promotees.

Arguments In Favour Of Reservation

- Such affirmative action seeks to provide a **level playing field** and **equality of opportunity** to the oppressed classes with the overall objective to achieve equality of opportunity.
- The **makers of the Constitution** used the reservation policy (including in promotion) for giving protection to the deprived sections of society due to systemic deprivation of rights, social discrimination and violence.
- There is a **skewed SC/ST representation at senior levels** due to prejudices. Thus, there is a need for reservation in promotion. **For ex.-** There were only 4 SC/ST officers at the secretary rank in the government in 2017.
- Further, case of **efficiency and merit in government is sometimes hard to quantify**, and the reporting of output by officers is not free from social bias.

Argument Against The Reservation In Promotions

- Provisions under **Articles 16(4), 16(4A) and 16(4B)** of the Constitution are only **enabling provisions**, and not a fundamental right.

- The **intent of framers of the constitution** behind including reservation policy was not reservation without merit.
- Gaining employment and position does not ensure the end of social discrimination and, hence, should **not be used as a single yardstick for calculating backwardness**.
- The reservation in promotion may hurt the **efficiency of administration**.

Way Forward

- At difference levels, studies and empirical data should to be collected to decide the level of promotions needed.
 - The Constitution envisages not just a formal equality of opportunity but also the achievement of substantive equality. Currently, there is ambiguity in promotion process. Thus, there is a need for a new, comprehensive law to be enacted.
7. **Recently, the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) has informed the National Green Tribunal (NGT) that it has created 243,499 biodiversity management committees (BMC) and 95,525 people's biodiversity registers (PBR). In this light, discuss the salient features of the Biodiversity Act, 2002 and the various lacunas in the implementation of the Act.**

Answer

The green bench is hearing a case on the full implementation of the **Biodiversity Act, 2002**. BMCs are created for purpose of promoting conservation, sustainable use and documentation of biological diversity by local bodies across the country. Further, PBRs contain comprehensive information on availability and knowledge of local biological resources.

In this background, some of the salient features of 2002 are as follows:

- NBA was established in 2003 by the Central Government to implement India's **Biological Diversity Act, 2002**.
- NBA performs **facilitative, regulatory and advisory function** for Government of India on issue of conservation, sustainable use of biological resource and fair equitable sharing of benefits of use.
- NBA also **advise the State Government** in the selection of areas of biodiversity importance to be notified as heritage sites and measures for the management of such heritage sites.
- The other structural bodies that have been established under the Act are **State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs)** at state level, **Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs)** at local levels *i.e.* in panchayats, municipalities and corporations.
- The Act also provides for **safeguarding traditional knowledge, preservation of threatened species and prevention of bio-piracy**.

Lacunas In The Implementation Of The Act

- Though 17 years have passed since the enactment of the Act, most of the local bodies of 23 states have not prepared the **People's Biodiversity Registers (PBRs)**, which are considered to be the basic records of a region's biological resources such as plants, animals and the traditional knowledge of the local people.
- As per the reliable sources **less than 3 per cent of local bodies**, spread over 15 states, had prepared PBRs till 2018.

- In the absence of the PBRs, when the Act is not implemented, whatever **environmental clearances** are given for various projects without recording the real state of biodiversity, results in the environment impact assessment reports becoming illogical and invalid.
- Experts are also of the opinion that the country is **losing a minimum of Rs 30,000 crores** annually by not implementing the Biological Diversity Act, which has provisions for access and benefit sharing for commercial utilisation of bio-resources.
- As the Biological Diversity Act is not given due importance, protection of forests and wildlife has become secondary in many parts of India, leading to **water scarcity and human-animal conflict**.
- Lastly, during 2014, the **number of threatened Indian species** was 988. But in 2017, it increased to 1,065, with an increase of 7.8 per cent. If the Act had been implemented on time, this increase could have been prevented or at least reduced to a great extent.

Way forward

- It is high time that the central and state governments should wake up from their deep slumber and take speedy and earnest action to overcome disastrous calamities by implementing the Biological Diversity Act in its true spirit.
- For the same there is a need to implement BMC and PBR at the earliest possible time. Moreover, there is also a need for establishment of independent **National level environment impact assessment body**.

8. Union Cabinet has approved the Pesticide Management Bill, 2020 to promote the use of organic pesticides in the country. In this light, discuss its salient features of the Bill and its possible impact.

Answer

The government has recently approved this bill to replace the 50-year-old **Insecticides Act, 1968** together with **Insecticides Rules, 1971** that govern pesticide registration which is unable to respond to various hazardous situations, toxicity implications and socio-economic issues thrown up by the harmful effects of the dangerous agro-chemicals.

Lack of a 360-degree regulation of toxic pesticides has probably resulted in numerous pesticide poisoning incidents over the years, including the latest 2017 poisonings and deaths reported from **Yavatmal in Maharashtra and Perambalur in Tamil Nadu**.

Some of the salient features of the Bill are as follows:

- Some of the **objectives stated in the Bill** are: to ensure the availability of quality pesticides; to prevent or minimize the contamination of agricultural commodities from the pesticide residue; to create an awareness among the farmers and other users of pesticides about its safe and judicious use.
- The draft contains clauses relating to allowance of **provisional registration of new pesticides in India** in case of “national exigency” for a period of **2 years**.
- The Bill contains detailed clauses for **registration of new molecules**. Further, it has also tightened the guidelines for registration and licensing of new molecules.
- The state government has a duty to report all cases of poisoning to the centre on a **quarterly basis**.

- States have been given **power to ban chemical pesticides for up to 6 months**, unlike the current provision which allows ban for up to 2 months.
- The draft bill proposes an **increase in penalties** on sale of spurious, substandard and misbranded pesticides and gives State Governments more power to deal with the issue and take action against them.
- According to the bill, the maximum punishment for violation is a penalty of up to **50 lacs and up to five years imprisonment**.
- The proposed Bill provides for paying of compensation to the affected farmers or users under the provisions of **Consumer Protection Act, 1986**.

Need For Such A Bill

- **Excessive use of pesticide** may have a deteriorating effect on health of both humans and animals.
- The **incidence of rejection of export bound Agri cargoes** has been on rise due to presence of unacceptably high level of toxic residue.
- Further, to meet commitments made under **Sustainable development goals and agenda 2030**, India need to update its pesticide legislation.
- It is estimated that there are around **104 pesticides** that are continued to be produced/ used in India despite having been banned in two or more countries in the world.
- Lastly, lack of 360-degree regulation of toxic pesticide has resulted in **numerous pesticide poisoning incidents**.

Concerns Relating To The New Bill

- The Centre for Science and Environment has criticized the Bill for **not following the global standards**, which provide for the regulation of pesticides by the Health Ministry and not the Agriculture Ministry.
- The definitions of the terms like spurious, pests etc. leaves a huge scope of interpretation and can result in **multiple unnecessary litigations**. This can deter the victims from claiming remedy and lead to a spurt in the problem.
- As per some experts, it will **harm the domestic industry** by not making it mandatory for the active ingredients of pesticides to be revealed in the registration process. Thus, would prevent Indian manufacturers from registering **me-too registrations** and producing pesticides at a cheaper rate.
- The Bill is **old wine in new bottle** merely lays down steps of registration that transition from paper-based procedure to digital system, without adding any facilitating provision for transparency, consultative and sharing mechanisms.
- The Bill **does not specifically provide for the persons who are to be held liable** in case of damage caused by the use of pesticides.

Way forward:

Thus, the proposed Bill needs to be thoroughly reappraised and duly amended before it is made into a law. Otherwise, it would be a wasteful exercise.

9. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has notified changes in the Medical Devices Rules, 2017, to regulate medical devices on the same lines as drugs. Throw light on the said changes along with the need for the current move.

Answer

- As per the changes notified in the Medical Devices Rules, 2017 all the medical devices would be regulated on the same lines as drugs from April 1, 2020 under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act. The changes come in the backdrop of similar recommendations made by the Drugs Technical Advisory Board (DTAB), to ensure safety and quality standards.
- Called the Medical Devices (Amendment) Rules, 2020, these are applicable to devices intended for internal or external use in the diagnosis, treatment, mitigation or prevention of disease/disorder in human beings or animals.

Need For The Move

- For much of the last one year, the health sector has been at the centre of attention following revelations about faulty hip implants marketed by pharma major Johnson & Johnson.
- This has caused major embarrassment to the government, too, as it exposed the lack of regulatory teeth when it came to medical devices.
- In fact, even after Johnson & Johnson agreed in a Texas court to shell out \$1 billion to settle about 6,000 lawsuits in the US before the product was withdrawn, in India for a very long time it maintained that it had not received any adverse events report in the product.
- The matter dragged on, exposing the regulatory loopholes until finally the company agreed in court to pay Rs 25 lakh each to the 67 people who had had to undergo revision surgeries because the implants were defective.
- The said incident led to the beginning of the discussion regarding the regulation of medical devices.

Changes Notified In The Rules

- As per the rules, the devices would need to get online registration with the Central Licensing Authority through an identified online portal established by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation for this purpose.
- The manufacturer will also have to submit a certificate of compliance with respect to ISO 13485 standard accredited by National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies or International Accreditation Forum in respect of such medical device.
- This would mean that every medical device, either manufactured in India or imported, will have to have quality assurance before they can be sold anywhere in the country
- The notification calls for a voluntary registration within a period of 18 months from April 2020 and obtaining manufacturing/import licence under the Medical Device Rules within 36 months for some devices and 42 months for others.
- The registration process carries no government processing fees and does not expire till the manufacturer/importer obtain the import/manufacturing licence within a period of 36 and 42 months.
- Once registered the local registration holder will be required to notify the CDSCO and Materiovigilance Programme of India (MvPi) of Serious Adverse Events (SEA) occurring in India.
- The temporary registration may be cancelled or suspended by the CDSCO for product safety concerns, or when superseded by an Import/ Manufacturing License.

Impact

- Given that there were only 37 medical devices that are notified as drugs, the move will ensure that the companies are not allowed to exploit the regulatory oversight and that all the medical devices are safe, effective and meet the desired quality standards.
- Apart from expanding the scope of regulation, the move will also pave the way for regulation of prices under the Drugs Price Control Order (DPCO) which would bring transparency in the pricing mechanism.
- Further, it will also make companies, in case of violations, liable to be penalised in a court of law, which would act as a deterrence and reduce exploitation of unsuspecting and innocent patients.

Although the move is a step in the right direction, doubts remain about the ability of the CDSCOs competence, expertise and most importantly its commitment towards patient safety given its dismal track record. Hence, in order for the current move to bear fruit there is an urgent need for comprehensive reforms to strengthen the regulatory mechanism in relation to patients' safety.

Extra Mile**Penal Provisions Under Indian Law**

- There are various penal provisions under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 for various kinds of offences.
- Manufacture or sale of substandard items is punishable with imprisonment of at least 10 years, which may extend to imprisonment for life.
- There is also a provision for fine that will not be less than Rs 10 lakh rupees or three times value of the confiscated items.

Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940

- The Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 is a Central Act that regulates the import, manufacture and distribution of drugs in India.
- The primary objective of the act is to ensure that the drugs and cosmetics sold in India are safe, effective and conform to state quality standards.
- The related Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945 contains provisions for classification of drugs under given schedules and there are guidelines for storage, sale, display & prescription of each schedule.
- The term "drug" as defined in the act includes a wide variety of substance, diagnostic and medical devices. The act defines "cosmetic" as any product that is meant to be applied to the human body for the purpose of beautifying or cleansing.
- In the year 1964, the act was amended to include Ayurveda and Unani drugs as well.

Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO)

- The CDSCO is the national regulatory body for Indian pharmaceuticals and medical devices, and serves parallel function to the Food and Drug Administration of the United States.
- Within the CDSCO, the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) regulates pharmaceutical and medical devices, under the gamut of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- The DCGI is advised by the Drug Technical Advisory Board (DTAB) and the Drug Consultative Committee (DCC).
- It is divided into zonal offices which do pre-licensing and post-licensing inspections, post-market surveillance, and recalls when needed.

10. The Union Cabinet has recently approved the Assisted Reproductive Technology Regulation Bill, 2020. What is Assisted Reproductive Technology? Highlight the provisions of the bill along with the need for the bill.

Answer

- Assisted Reproductive Technology includes all fertility treatments in which both eggs and embryos are handled. It comprises procedures such as in-vitro fertilisation (IVF), intra-uterine insemination (IUI), oocyte and sperm donation, cryopreservation and includes surrogacy as well.
- In general, ART procedures involve surgically removing eggs from a woman's ovaries, combining them with sperm in the laboratory, and returning them to the woman's body or donating them to another woman.

Need For The Bill

- India has one of the highest growths in the number of ART centres and ART cycles performed every year. In the process, it has become one of the major centres of the global fertility industry, with reproductive medical tourism becoming a significant activity.
- This has introduced a range of issues, yet, there is no standardisation of protocols and reporting is still very inadequate.
- The nod for the ART bill comes after the parliamentary committee recommendations on the Surrogacy Regulation Bill in Rajya Sabha and the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Amendment Bill, 2020, that was approved by the Cabinet last month.
- While all the three bills are designed around protecting women's reproductive rights, experts have been insisting the ART Regulation Bill is supposed to be more comprehensive and the first step to regulate the sector.
- As without registration and a proper database of medical institutions and clinics providing such services, it is impossible to regulate services like surrogacy and abortion.

Provisions of the Bill

The Bill seeks to establish a national registry and registration authority which will be applicable to all medical professionals and clinics operating or providing services in the field of ART.

National and State Boards

- The Bill provides for a National Board which will lay down a code of conduct to be observed by the operating clinics, to set the minimum standards of physical infrastructure, laboratory and diagnostic equipment and expert manpower to be employed by clinics and banks.
- The States and Union Territories will also have to form State Boards and State authorities within three months of the notification of the proposed legislation.
- The State Boards shall have the responsibility to follow the policies and plans laid by the National Board for clinics and banks in the state.

Central Database

- The Bill also proposes to create a central database of all clinics and banks across the country. The database will also include detailed information about services like the nature of the method through which the outcome is achieved.
- Moreover, the central database will also be used for research purposes in this particular segment of health.

Punitive Measures

- The Bill proposes stringent punishment for those who practise sex selection, indulge in sale of human embryos or gametes and those who operate rackets.
- It proposes a fine of up to Rs 10 lakh for anyone indulging in sale of embryo or trafficking at the first instance, and jail term of up to 12 years after that.

Confidentiality Clause

- Ensuring confidentiality of the commissioning couples, women and donors will also be done under the said bill.
- The bill seeks to protect not only the commissioning couple but also the lady who will be part of this process.

In regulating the ART services in the country the bill will help to address the various social, legal and ethical issues associated with the ARTs. Consequently, the infertile couples will be more assured and confident of the ethical practices in ARTs in the country. Further, by ensuring confidentiality, the bill will go a long way in respecting and protecting the reproductive rights of all the agents involved in the process.

11. The Global Innovation Policy Center of the US Chamber of Commerce has recently released the International IP Index 2020. Highlight the findings of the Index on India's IP ecosystem.**Answer**

- The International IP Index creates a template for economies that aspire to become 21st century, knowledge-based economies through more effective IP protection.
- The Index evaluates the IP framework in each economy across 50 unique indicators spanning across nine categories of protection viz. patents, copyrights, trademarks, design rights, trade secrets, commercialization of IP assets, enforcement, systemic efficiency, and membership and ratification of international treaties.

Findings on India

- India stands at 40th place out of 53 economies in the 2020 Index, as against 36th place out of 50 economies in the 2019 Index. Reflecting the country's growing investment in IP driven innovation, India's overall score has increased to 38.46% from 36.04% in 2019, with a 2.42 per cent jump in absolute score.
- As the 2020 index includes three new countries — Dominican Republic, Greece, and Kuwait — and five new indicators, India's relative score has increased by 6.71% which reflects the positive momentum on IP in India
- India has embraced a series of reforms and issued court rules that strengthen IP enforcement, address administrative inefficiencies and increase penalties for IP infringement.
- With the release of the 2016 National IPR Policy, the Indian government had made a focused effort to support investments in innovation and creativity through increasingly robust IP protection and enforcement.
- Implementation of the policy has resulted in improving rates of patent and trademark pendency, greater awareness of IP rights among Indian innovators
- India's key areas of strength in IP domain include continued strong efforts to combat copyright piracy through 2019 by issuing of dynamic injunction orders, precedent-setting case law on online trademark

infringement and damages, new pilot patent prosecution highway (PPH) programme and generous R&D along with IP-based incentives.

- India remained a global leader on targeted administrative incentives for the creation and use of IP assets for SMEs while the country's strong awareness-raising efforts on the negative impact of piracy and counterfeiting have made a mark in the overall IP spectrum.
- To continue this upward trajectory, much work remains to be done to introduce transformative changes to India's overall IP framework and take serious steps to consistently implement strong IP standards.
- The index, points out that serious hurdles remain — particularly in terms of patent eligibility and enforcement. Besides, compulsory licensing in the case of pharma companies, patent opposition, regulatory data protection and transparency in reporting seizures by customs are the main challenges faced by the country.

The government should demonstrate its commitment to strengthen its IP framework in ways that promote the legal and regulatory certainty necessary for greater R&D investment and high-value jobs. Consequently, stronger IP standards will further solidify India's position as the world's fastest growing economy, bolstering its reputation as a destination for doing business, thereby supporting the growth of India's own innovative and creative industries.

Extra mile

The US tops the scorecard with 95.28% out of an 100% scale, while the UK (93.92%), France (91.50%), Germany (91.08%), Sweden (90.56%) and Japan (90.40%) follow closely.

12. The government has recently given clearance to a gene mapping project, called The Genome India Project. What is Genome Mapping? Throw light on the Genome India Project along with the issues involved with the project.

Answer

- Every organism's genetic code is contained in its Deoxyribose Nucleic Acid (DNA), the building blocks of life. A genome, simply put, is all the genetic matter in an organism. It is defined as an organism's complete set of DNA, including all of its genes and contains all of the information needed to build and maintain that organism.
- One of the most comprehensive genome mapping projects in the world is the Human Genome Project (HGP), which began in 1990 and reached completion in 2003.
- The international project was undertaken with the aim of sequencing the human genome and identifying the genes that contain it. The project was able to identify the locations of many human genes and provide information about their structure and organisation.
- In humans, each cell consists of 23 pairs of chromosomes for a total of 46 chromosomes, which means that for 23 pairs of chromosomes in each cell, there are roughly 20,500 genes located on them.
- Mapping these genes simply means finding out the location of these genes in a chromosome and also determining the location of and relative distances between other genes on that chromosome
- Significantly, genome mapping enables scientists to gather evidence if a disease transmitted from the parent to the child is linked to one or more genes. Genetic maps may also point out scientists to the

genes that play a role in more common disorders and diseases such as asthma, cancer and heart disease among others.

The Genome India Project

- The Genome India Project is being spearheaded by the Centre for Brain Research at Indian Institute of Science as the nodal point of about 20 institutions. Its aim is to ultimately build a grid of the Indian “reference genome”, to understand fully the type and nature of diseases and traits that comprise the diverse Indian population.
- For example, if the Northeast sees a tendency towards a specific disease, interventions can be made in the region, assisting public health, which make it easier to battle the illness.
- The mega project hopes to form a grid after collecting 10,000 samples in the first phase from across India, to arrive at a representative Indian genome. This has been found necessary as over 95% of the genome samples available, which are the basis of new, cutting-edge research in medicine and pharmacology, use the white, Caucasian genome as the base.
- Most genomes have been sourced from urban middle-class persons and are not really seen as representative. The Indian project will aim to vastly add to the available information on the human species and advance the cause, both because of the scale of the Indian population and the diversity here.

Challenges Involved

- **Medical Ethics:** In a project that aims only to create a database of genetic information, gene modification is not among the stated objectives. It is important to note, however, that this has been a very fraught subject globally.
- The risk of doctors privately running away with the idea of fixing genetic issues came to light most recently after a Shenzhen-based scientist, who helped create the world’s first gene-edited babies
- **Data & Storage:** After collection of the sample, anonymity of the data and questions of its possible use and misuse would need to be addressed. Keeping the data on a cloud is full of problems and would raise questions of ownership of the data.
- India is yet to pass a Data Privacy Bill with adequate safeguards. Launching a Genome India Project before the privacy question is settled could give rise to another set of problems.
- **Social Issues:** The question of heredity and racial purity has obsessed civilisations, and more scientific studies of genes and classifying them could reinforce stereotypes and allow for politics and history to acquire a racial twist.
- In India a lot of politics is now on the lines of who are “indigenous” people and who are not. A Genome India Project could further add a genetic dimension to the issue.

Given the significant prospects of this project and consequent benefits of eliminating various diseases and improving longevity of humans, it is important that appropriate safeguards are built through appropriate legislative frameworks to keep a check on the misuse of this technology, while at the same time working to expand the horizon of medical knowledge to make this a legitimate part of the future of medicine.

13. The Union Cabinet recently approved the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020. Highlight the provisions of the bill, along with the need for the said legislation.

Answer

The Union cabinet has approved the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020, that proposes to permit the termination of pregnancy up to 24 weeks from the existing 20 weeks.

Need For The Current Bill

- The bill follows several petitions that have been received by the Courts seeking permission for aborting pregnancies at a gestational age beyond the present permissible limit on grounds of foetal abnormalities or pregnancies due to sexual violence faced by women.
- In the current framework at all stages of the pregnancy, the healthcare providers, rather than the women seeking abortion, have the final say on whether the abortion can be carried out.
- This is unlike the abortion laws in 67 countries, including Iceland, France, Canada, South Africa and Uruguay, where a woman can get an abortion 'on request' with or without a specific gestational limit (which is usually 12 weeks).
- Thus, at present, pregnant women lack autonomy in making the decision to terminate their pregnancy, and have to bear additional mental stress, as well as the financial burden of getting a doctor's approval.
- Further, due to advancements in science, foetal abnormalities can now be detected even after 20 weeks. However, the MTP Act presently allows abortion post 20 weeks only where it is necessary to save the life of the mother.
- This means that even if a substantial foetal abnormality is detected and the mother doesn't want to bear life-long caregiving responsibilities and the mental agony associated with it, the law gives her no recourse unless there is a prospect of her death.
- Despite a sustained government push over years, contraceptive use in India is not very popular. According to a 2018 study by the Guttmacher Institute, 50% of pregnancies in six of the larger Indian states — Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh — are unintended.
- Data from the National Family Health Survey 4 show that just 47.8% of couples in the country use modern contraceptive methods and only 53% use any method at all.
- In 2015, a study in The Lancet Global Health, estimated that 15.6 million abortions were performed in India in 2015. This translates to an abortion rate of 47 per 1,000 women aged 15-49.
- Further, recent reports have shown that more than 10 women die every day due to unsafe abortions in India, and backward abortion laws only contribute to women seeking illegal and unsafe options.

Changes In The Bill

- It increases the maximum permissible gestation age for abortion to 24 weeks, with the proviso that for pregnancies that are between 20-24 weeks opinions will be required from two doctors rather than one.
- This has been specially done keeping in mind vulnerable women including survivors of rape, victims of incest and other vulnerable women like differently-abled women, minors etc.
- The upper gestation limit will not apply in cases of substantial foetal abnormalities diagnosed by a Medical Board. This clause has been put to keep such cases out of courts, as the government deemed a Medical Board should examine the various aspects of the case and take a call.

- Further, name and other particulars of a woman whose pregnancy has been terminated shall not be revealed except to a person authorized in any law for the time being in force.

Issues With The Current Bill

- While the current bill is a step in the right direction, it still doesn't allow abortion on request at any point after the pregnancy.
- Further, it enhances the gestational limit for legal abortion from 20 to 24 weeks only for specific categories of women such as survivors of rape, victims of incest, and minors.
- This means that a woman who does not fall into these categories would not be able to seek an abortion beyond 20 weeks, even if she suffers from grave physical or mental injury due to the pregnancy.

Although there are still some areas that the bill leaves unaddressed, it will go a long way in ensuring the safety and well-being of women by expanding access of women to safe and legal abortion services on therapeutic, eugenic, humanitarian and social grounds.

PRELIMS MCQS

1. A Solar Orbiter was recently launched. Consider the following statements about the Solar Orbiter:

1. The Solar Orbiter is a collaborative mission of NASA and European Space Agency.
2. The Solar Orbiter is designed to provide the first ever image of the Sun's poles.
3. The Solar Orbiter Mission will help in forecasting space weather events.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: D

Explanation:

- The Solar Orbiter, a collaborative mission between the European Space Agency and NASA to study the Sun, recently took off from Cape Canaveral in Florida.
- The mission, worth approximately Rs 11,700 crore (1.5 billion EUR), launched on an Atlas V rocket, will face the sun at approximately 42 million kilometres from its surface.
- In 1990, NASA and ESA had sent the **Ulysses mission**, which also passed over the sun's poles but at much farther distances, and did not carry a camera.
- Solar Orbiter is on a unique trajectory that will allow its comprehensive set of instruments to provide humanity with the first-ever images of the Sun's poles.
- This trajectory includes 22 close approaches to the Sun, bringing the spacecraft within the orbit of Mercury to study the Sun, and its influence on space.

Functioning of The Solar Orbiter

- The Solar Orbiter combines two main modes of study. The in-situ instruments will measure the environment around the spacecraft, detecting such things as electric and magnetic fields, and passing particles and waves.
- The remote-sensing instruments will image the Sun from afar, along with its atmosphere and its outflow of material, collecting data that will help scientists understand the Sun's inner workings.
- Solar Orbiter's unique orbit will bring the spacecraft out of the plane that roughly aligns with the Sun's equator where Earth and the other planets orbit.
- Spacecraft launched from the Earth naturally stay in this plane, which means that telescopes on the Earth and those on satellites have limited views of the Sun's north and south poles. The new spacecraft will use the gravity of Venus and Earth to swing itself out of the ecliptic plane, passing inside the orbit of Mercury, and will be able to get a bird's eye view of the sun's poles for the first time.
- The Orbiter will then take pictures using telescopes through a heat shield that is partly made of baked animal bones, to help it withstand temperatures of up to 600 degrees Celsius.

Outcome of the Mission

- By understanding behaviour of sun, the Orbiter aims to provide information on how the former would affect technology such as satellites, navigation systems, power grids, & telecommunication services.
- It will also help scientists understand the sun's dynamic behaviour, and solve mysteries such as the sunspot cycle, or why the star spews out high velocity charged particles through the solar system.

- Further, with more data on the global magnetic field of the star, scientists would also be able to forecast space weather events.

2. Bats are natural hosts of which of the following viruses?

1. Ebola virus
2. Nipah virus
3. Rabies virus
4. Coronavirus
5. Tuberculosis virus

Choose the correct option using the codes below:

- a) 2, 3 and 4 only
- b) 1 and 5 only
- c) 1, 2, 3 and 4 only
- d) 1, 2, 4 and 5 only

Answer: C

Explanation:

- With more than 95,000 confirmed cases across the world and about 3000 deaths, the Wuhan coronavirus is yet another bat-borne virus that has caused an outbreak.
- Bats serve as natural hosts for numerous viruses including Ebola virus, Nipah virus, coronaviruses such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS), the 2019 novel coronavirus, Marburg, Hendra and rabies viruses.
- Tuberculosis is caused by a bacteria called Mycobacterium Tuberculosis and not a virus.
- Researchers have found that bats around the world carry at least 200 types of coronaviruses.

Reasons For Bats Being A Host Of Various Viruses

- Researchers have found that bats carry the highest number of zoonotic viruses among mammals, as their unique immune systems allow them to host several viruses without getting sick from them.
- One of the evolutionary adaptations to their ability to fly has been changes to their immune system. The energy demands of flight cause cells in bats' bodies to break down and release pieces of DNA.
- So as not to mistake these pieces of DNA as disease-causing organisms, bats have "weakened" immune systems, which would normally cause inflammation in such instances.
- A weakened immune environment means a bat can tolerate viruses more than other mammals without overreacting through excessive virus-induced inflammation, which often causes severe diseases in animals and people infected with viruses.

Reasons For Various Bat Related Outbreaks In China

- Three major virus outbreaks, traced back to bats, have occurred in China. China's geographical spread means it has a variety of climates and biodiversity that includes many species of bats.
- Coupled with the ability to fly and relatively long life-spans — between 20 and 40 years — for mammals of their size, bats are capable of spreading viruses much farther than other land mammals.
- China is also the world's most populous country, which is increasingly becoming urbanised and encroaching upon the wilderness, including the natural habitats of bats.
- More and more bats and other disease carrying organisms are living closer to human settlements than before and spreading infection either directly to people or through livestock. These factors combined make China a hotspot for outbreaks.

3. Consider the following statements about the InSight Lander:

1. The InSight lander is a part of NASA's Discovery Program.
2. The InSight Mission is the first mission dedicated to the study of deep interiors of the planet Mars.
3. The InSight Mission will also to help understand how Earth was first formed.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3 only

Answer: D

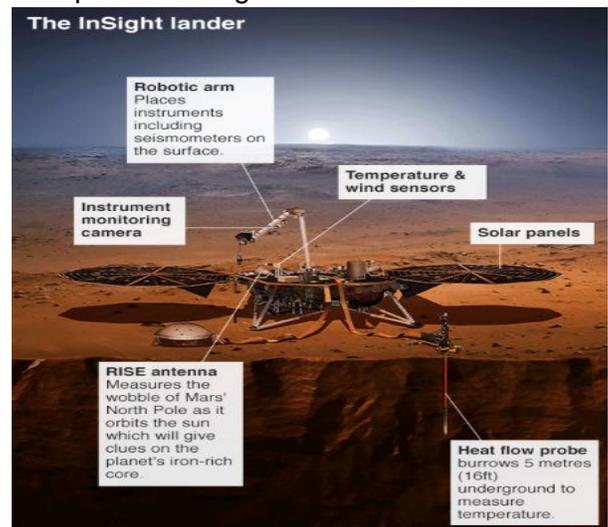
Explanation:

- NASA has recently published a set of six papers, to reveal its learnings from NASA's InSight lander mission since its landing on Mars on November 26, 2018.
- The InSight mission is part of NASA's Discovery Program and is the first mission dedicated to looking deep beneath the Martian surface.
- Among its science tools are a seismometer for detecting quakes, sensors for measuring wind and air pressure, a magnetometer, and a heat flow probe designed to take the planet's temperature.
- It is being supported by a number of European partners, which include France's Centre National d'Études Spatiales (CNES), the German Aerospace Center (DLR) and the United Kingdom Space Agency (UKSA).

Learnings from the Mission

A. Underground Tremors

- The Mission uses an ultra-sensitive seismometer, called the **Seismic Experiment for Interior Structure (SEIS)**, that enables scientists to hear multiple trembling events from hundreds to thousands of miles away.
- The readings of SEIS tell that Mars trembles more often than expected but the tremors are mild. Mars doesn't have tectonic plates like Earth, but it does have volcanically active regions that can cause tremors.
- SEIS has found more than 450 seismic signals to date, the majority of which are believed to be quakes (as opposed to data noise created by environmental factors, like wind). The largest quake was just about magnitude 4.0 in size.
- Seismic waves are affected by the materials they move through, due to which, they help scientists study the composition of the planet's inner structure.
- With the help of this learning, Mars will be able to help the team better understand how all rocky planets — including Earth — first formed.



B. Magnetism on Mars

- Billions of years ago, Mars had a magnetic field. Although it is no longer present, it left behind what NASA describes as “ghosts” – magnetised rocks that are now between 61 m to several km below ground.

- At a Martian site called **Homestead hollow**, the magnetic signals are 10 times stronger than what was predicted earlier (based on data from orbiting spacecraft). As InSight's measurements are more local, they are more precise.
- At InSight's location, most surface rocks are too young to have been magnetised by the former magnetic field. Hence, this magnetism must be coming from ancient rocks underground.
- Scientists are also using this data and what was previously known to understand the magnetised layers below InSight.

C. Wind on Mars

- Weather sensors have detected thousands of passing whirlwinds, which are called **dust devils** when they pick up grit (dust and pebbles) and become visible.
- The site has more whirlwinds than any other place where a landing has been made on Mars while carrying weather sensors.
- Despite all that activity in the wind and frequent imaging, InSight's cameras have yet to see dust devils, but SEIS can feel these whirlwinds pulling on the surface. These whirlwinds are perfect for subsurface seismic exploration.

D. Core of Mars

- InSight has two radios - one is for regularly sending and receiving data while the other radio, which is more powerful, is designed to measure the "wobble" of Mars as it spins.
- This X-band radio, also known as the **Rotation and Interior Structure Experiment (RISE)**, can eventually reveal whether the planet's core is solid or liquid. A solid core would cause Mars to wobble less than a liquid one would.
- When it is two years on Earth, Mars will have completed one year. A full Martian year will give scientists a much better idea of the size and speed of the planet's wobble.

4. Consider the following statements regarding *Henneguya salminicola*:

1. *Henneguya salminicola* is a non-oxygen breathing animal.
2. *Henneguya salminicola* does not have a Mitochondria genome.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: C

Explanation

- Researchers at Tel Aviv University (TAU) have discovered an animal fewer than 10-celled microscopic parasite that lives in salmon muscle, called *Henneguya salminicola*.
- *Henneguya salminicola* is a non-oxygen breathing animal, which significantly changes one of science's assumptions about the animal world — that all animals use aerobic respiration and therefore, oxygen.
- The parasite does not have a mitochondrial genome. Mitochondria is the "powerhouse" of the cell, which captures oxygen to make energy and its absence in the *H. salminicola* genome indicates that the parasite does not breathe oxygen.
- Animals, including humans, need energy to perform the various tasks that are essential for survival. Aerobic respiration is one such chemical reaction through which organisms take in oxygen and

release carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Through this mechanism, energy is transferred to cells, which can use it for multiple purposes — for instance, to burn food.

- It also challenges what may be generally thought of as evolution in organisms — that they become more complex as they evolve. In the case of this non-oxygen breathing organism, evolution turned it into a simpler organism that shed “unnecessary genes” responsible for aerobic respiration.
- According to the researchers, as the organism evolved, it gave up breathing and stopped the consumption of oxygen for the production of energy — which means it relies on anaerobic respiration (through which cells extract energy without using oxygen).
- Other organisms such as fungi and amoebas that are found in anaerobic environments lost the ability to breathe over time. The new study shows that the same can happen in the case of animals, too.

5. Consider the following statements regarding Raman Effect:

- 1. National Science Day is celebrated in the honour of C.V. Raman for the discovery of the Raman Effect.**
- 2. Raman Effect can be used in the discovery of counterfeit drugs.**

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- 1 only**
- 2 only**
- Both 1 and 2**
- Neither 1 nor 2**

Answer: C

Explanation

- India celebrates National Science Day on 28 February every year in honour of physicist C.V. Raman’s discovery of the Raman Effect, which gave Asia its first Nobel in the Sciences in 1930. It was the first Nobel to a non-white person, and for an Indian scientist. This year’s theme is Women in Science.
- 28 February was declared as the National Science Day in 1986. However, the first National Science Day was celebrated on February 28, 1987.
- Further, DST instituted National Awards for Science Popularization in February 1987 to stimulate, encourage and recognize outstanding efforts in the area of science and technology for popularization, communication and promoting scientific temper. These awards are presented every year on National Science Day.
- National Council for Science & Technology Communication (NCSTC), Department of Science and Technology (DST) acts as a nodal agency to support, catalyze and coordinate celebration of the National Science Day throughout the country.

Raman Effect

- Raman Effect is a change in the wavelength of light that occurs when a light beam is deflected by molecules. When a beam of light traverses a dust-free, transparent sample of a chemical compound, a small fraction of the light emerges in directions other than that of the incident (incoming) beam.
- Most of this scattered light is of unchanged wavelength. A small part, however, has wavelengths different from that of the incident light; its presence is a result of the Raman Effect.
- Raman Effect can help in determining chemical bonding structures, characterise materials, determine temperature, find out crystalline orientation, identify pharmaceutical chemicals, discover counterfeit drugs, identify pigments in old paintings and historical documents, and detect explosives using lasers from a distance.

6. Which of the following Locusts are found in India?

1. Desert Locust
2. Migratory Locust
3. Bombay Locust
4. Tree Locust

Choose the correct option using the codes below:

- a) 1 and 3 only
- b) 2 and 4 only
- c) 1, 2 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

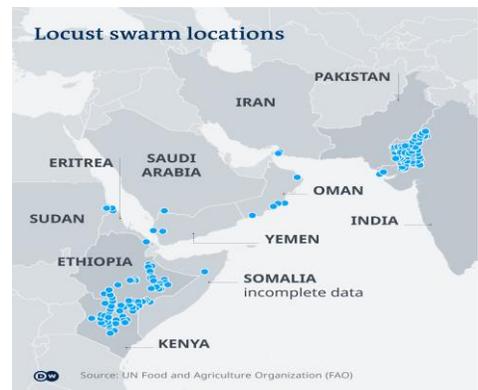
Answer: D

Explanation:

- During the past few weeks, major locust attacks have been observed in several countries. In India, locust attacks emanating from the desert area in Pakistan have struck parts of Rajasthan and Gujarat, causing heavy damage to standing crop. Pakistan's government declared a national emergency **in response to swarms of desert locusts in the eastern part of the country.**
- Pakistan is also facing the worst locust infestation in more than two decades. The desert locusts — large herbivores that resemble grasshoppers — **arrived in Pakistan from Iran** in June and have already **ravaged cotton, wheat, maize and other crops.** Their potential for large-scale destruction is raising **fears of food insecurity.**

What Are Locusts

- Locusts are a group of short-horned grasshoppers that are about the length of a finger (on average 6-8 centimeters (2-3 inches) in size. According to the FAO, eggs can hatch in about two weeks, with locusts maturing to adulthood in two to four months on average.
- They multiply in numbers as they migrate long distances in destructive swarms (up to 150km in one day), which can contain as many as 80 million locusts per square kilometer. Swarms can vary from less than 1 square kilometer in size to several hundred square kilometers.
- Four species of locusts are found in India: Desert locust (*Schistocerca gregaria*), Migratory locust (*Locusta migratoria*), Bombay Locust (*Nomadacris succincta*) and Tree locust (*Anacridium sp.*). The desert locust is regarded as the most destructive pest in India as well as internationally.
- One locust can consume its own weight in food each day, and the swarms devour leaves, flowers, fruits, seeds, bark and also destroy plants by their sheer weight as they descend on them in massive numbers.
- The locust division of the Directorate of Plant Protection, Quarantine and Storage, Faridabad, under the Union Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare, says that a small swarm of the desert locust eats on average as much food in one day as about 10 elephants, 25 camels or 2500 people.



Trigger For The Current Invasion And The Areas Affected

- Years of drought in the region, followed by heavy rains and warmer temperatures in 2019, created "exceptional" breeding conditions for the locusts.
- The wet, warm weather has created the ideal circumstances for vegetation to grow — and more vegetation means more food for the locusts.

- The FAO has currently identified three hotspots of threatening locust activity, where the situation has been called “extremely alarming” — the ***Horn of Africa, the Red Sea area, and southwest Asia***.
- Locust swarms from Ethiopia and Somalia have travelled south to Kenya and 14 other countries in the continent. The outbreak is the worst to strike Ethiopia and Somalia in 25 years, and the worst infestation in Kenya in the past 70 years.
- In the Red Sea area, locusts have struck in Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Yemen, while in southwest Asia, locusts swarms have caused damage in Iran, India, and Pakistan.
- Surveys have shown that India is most at risk of a swarm invasion just before the onset of the monsoon.

Steps Taken To Contain The Outbreak

- Locals have tried using loud noises to shoo the insects away — firing off gunshots, banging cans and honking horns — but that hasn't done much to deter the swarms, and can help them to spread further.
- According to the United Nations, aerial pesticide spraying is the only effective way to combat these swarms. UN has already allocated \$10 million to the effort, but it said that about \$70 million will be needed to intensify the campaign.
- The Gujarat government has formed 27 locust control teams that has been engaged in spraying insecticides in the affected regions, especially in the Banaskantha district of North Gujarat. It further said that the menace will continue for a few more days till the direction of the wind changes.

7. Recently a programme called the ‘School Health Programme’ was launched. Under which ministry has the said programme been launched:

- 1. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**
- 2. Ministry of Human Resource Development**
- 3. Ministry of Women and Child Development**

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only**
- b) 2 only**
- c) 1 and 2 only**
- d) 1 and 3 only**

Answer: C

Explanation

- The Union Government has launched a School Health Programme under Ayushman Bharat-Health & Wellness Centres that will teach skills ranging from emotional wellbeing, mental health, interpersonal relationships to values and maintaining healthy lifestyle.
- The program has been jointly rolled out by Ministries of Health & Family Welfare and Human Resource Development.
- The initiative will further strengthen the concept of preventive, promotive and positive health, which forms the fundamental cornerstone of the Health & Wellness Centres of Ayushman Bharat scheme.
- It will be effectively linked with other government initiatives such as Fit India movement, Eat Right campaign, Poshan Abhiyaan for an all-round and holistic development model of health for the school children.
- The first phase of implementation will be in all the public upper primary, secondary and senior secondary schools of aspirational districts. Subsequently, remaining districts will be taken up in the second year.

- There are 11 themes under the programme viz. growing up healthy, emotional wellbeing and mental health, interpersonal relationships, values and responsible citizenship, gender equality, nutrition, health and sanitation, promotion of healthy lifestyles, prevention and management of substance misuse, reproductive health and HIV prevention, safety and security against violence and injuries, and promotion of safe use of internet, media and social media.
 - In this new initiative, health promotion and prevention activities program has been added in addition to ongoing health screening program through Rasthriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK) teams and provision of services (IFA, Albendazole and sanitary napkins).
 - The newly added health promotion and prevention component will be implemented by two teachers identified in every school as "**Health and Wellness Ambassador**". These ambassadors will be supported by class monitors as **Health and Wellness Messengers**.
8. Consider the following statements regarding Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana (PMKSY):
1. PMKSY aims to create food processing and preservation capacities to increase the level of food processing.
 2. PMKSY is implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare.
 3. The Mega Food Parks scheme is implemented under PMKSY.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3 only

Answer: C

Explanation

- Thirty-two projects, spread across 17 states and leveraging an investment of Rs 406 crore were recently sanctioned in the inter-ministerial approval committee under the 'Unit' scheme of Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana (PMKSY) headed by Food Processing Industries minister.
- The projects approved are running across quadrilaterals of the country covering over 100 agro-climatic zones. These projects envisage the creation of direct and indirect employment for approximately fifteen thousand persons

Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana

- The Central Sector Scheme - SAMPADA (Scheme for Agro-Marine Processing and Development of Agro-Processing Clusters) was approved by the cabinet in May 2017 for the period of 2016-20 coterminous with the 14th Finance Commission cycle.
- The scheme has now been renamed as the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana (PMKSY) and is implemented by the Ministry of Food Processing Industries.
- The main objective of this scheme is creation of processing and preservation capacities and modernisation/ expansion of existing food processing units with a view to increasing the level of processing, value addition leading to reduction of wastage.

Schemes under PMKSY

Under PMKSY the following schemes are to be implemented.

- Mega Food Parks
- Integrated Cold Chain, Value Addition and Preservation Infrastructure

- Creation/Expansion of Food Processing/Preservation Capacities
- Infrastructure for Agro Processing Clusters
- Scheme for Creation of Backward and Forward Linkages
- Food Safety & Quality Assurance Infrastructure
- Human Resources and Institutions

Impact

- The implementation of PMKSY will result in creation of modern infrastructure with efficient supply chain management from farm gate to retail outlet.
- It will provide a big boost to the growth of food processing sector in the country and will help in providing better prices to farmers and is a big step towards doubling of farmers' income
- It will create huge employment opportunities especially in the rural areas and will also help in reducing wastage of agricultural produce, increasing the processing level, availability of safe and convenient processed foods at affordable price to consumers and enhancing the export of the processed foods.

9. Consider the following statements regarding SUTRA PIC:

1. SUTRA PIC is a research programme on indigenous cows.
2. SUTRA PIC is led by the Department of Science and Technology.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: C

Explanation

- The government has unveiled a programme to research on indigenous cows. To be funded by multiple scientific ministries, the initiative, SUTRA PIC (Scientific Utilisation Through Research Augmentation-Prime Products from Indigenous Cows), is led by the Department of Science and Technology (DST).
- It has the Department of Biotechnology, the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, the Ministry for AYUSH (Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha, Homoeopathy) among others and the Indian Council of Medical Research as partners.

Objectives

- Scientific research on complete characterisation of milk and milk products derived from Indian indigenous cows.
- Scientific research on nutritional and therapeutic properties of curd and ghee prepared from indigenous breeds of cows by traditional methods and
- Development of standards for traditionally processed dairy products of Indian-origin cow.

Themes

The programme has five themes: Uniqueness of Indigenous Cows, Prime-products from Indigenous Cows for Medicine and Health, Prime-products from Indigenous Cows for Agricultural Applications, Prime-products from Indigenous Cows for Food and Nutrition, Prime-products from indigenous cows-based utility items.

10. Consider the following statements about the Reserve Bank of India:

1. RBI is the regulator and supervisor of payment and settlements systems in India.
2. RBI is a banker to the Central and State governments.
3. RBI is the principal regulator of the capital markets in India.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3 only

Answer: A

Explanation:

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is aligning its accounting year with the government's April-March fiscal year in order to ensure more effective management of the country's finances.
- The **Bimal Jalan Committee on Economic Capital Framework (ECF)** of the RBI had proposed a more transparent presentation of the RBI's annual accounts, and a change in its accounting year to April-March from the financial year 2020-21.
- When it commenced operations in 1935, the RBI followed a January-December accounting year. In 1940, however, the bank changed its accounting year to July-June.
- Now, after nearly eight decades, the RBI is making another switch: the next accounting year will be a nine-month period from July 2020 to March 31, 2021 and thereafter, all financial years will start from April, as it happens with the central and state governments.

Importance of RBI's Accounts

- The RBI is the country's monetary authority, regulator, and supervisor of the financial system, manager of foreign exchange, issuer of currency, regulator and supervisor of payment and settlement systems, banker to the central and the state governments, and also banker to banks.
- Hence, the RBI's balance sheet plays a critical role in the functioning of the country's economy — largely reflecting the activities carried out in pursuance of its currency issue function, as well as monetary policy and reserve management objectives.

Impact Of The Change

- It is expected to result in better management of transfer of dividend or surplus to the government and reduce the need for interim dividend being paid by the RBI, and such payments may then be restricted to extraordinary circumstances.
- Further, RBI would be able to provide better estimates of projected surplus transfers to the government for the financial year for budgeting purposes.
- It will bring greater cohesiveness in monetary policy projections and reports published by the RBI, which mostly use the fiscal year as the base.
- Moreover, as governments, companies, and other institutions follow the April-March year, it will help with effective management of accounting.
- It will also obviate any timing considerations that may enter into the selection of open market operations or Market Stabilization Scheme as monetary policy tools.

Note: SEBI and not RBI is the principal regulator of the capital markets in India.

11. Consider the following statements regarding Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK):

1. KVKs act as a link between the Indian Council of Agricultural Research and farmers.
2. KVKs can be formed under agricultural universities, state departments and NGOs.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: C

Explanation

The 11th Krishi Vigyan Kendra Conference was recently held in New Delhi, where the Minister for Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare said KVKs should serve not only the affluent, resourceful and progressive farmers but also focus on the small and deprived farmers.

Krishi Vigyan Kendra

- A Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) is an agricultural extension center in India. Usually associated with a local agricultural university, these centers serve as the ultimate link between the Indian Council of Agricultural Research and farmers, and aim to apply agricultural research in a practical, localized setting.
- The first KVK was established in 1974 in Pondicherry. Since then, KVKs have been established in all states, and there are more than 700 KVKs today.
- A KVK can be formed under a variety of host institutions, including agricultural universities, state departments, ICAR institutes, other educational institutions, or NGOs.

Responsibilities

- **On-Farm Testing:** Each KVK operates a small farm to test new technologies, such as seed varieties or innovative farming methods, developed by ICAR institutes. This allows new technologies to be tested at the local level before being transferred to farmers.
- **Front-line Demonstration:** Due to the KVK's farm and its proximity to nearby villages, it organizes programs to show the efficacy of new technologies on farmer fields.
- **Capacity Building:** In addition to demonstrating new technologies, the KVK also hosts capacity building exercises and workshops to discuss modern farming techniques with groups of farmers.
- **Multi-sector Support:** Offer support to various private and public initiatives through its local network and expertise. It is very common for government research institutes to leverage the network of KVKs when performing surveys with a wide range of farmers.
- **Advisory Services:** Due to the growing use of ICT, KVKs have implemented technologies to provide farmers information, such as weather advisories or market pricing, through radio and mobile phones.
- In each of these activities, the KVK focuses on crops and methods specific to the local climate and industry. Some factors which may impact this decision are: soil type, crops grown, water availability, seasonal temperatures, and allied sectors such as dairy and aquaculture.
- In addition to addressing local factors, KVKs are also mandated to increase adoption of practices that align with remunerative agriculture, climate smart agriculture, and dietary diversification. Some KVKs also host social activities to facilitate rapport between the institutions and the local community.

12. Consider the following pairs:

Name of Exercise	Participating Countries
1. Ajeya Warrior	India & Indonesia
2. Milan	India & France
3. Matla Abhiyan	India & Bangladesh

Which of the above pairs is/are correctly matched?

- a) 1 & 2 Only
- b) 2 & 3 Only
- c) 1 & 3 Only
- d) None of the above

Answer: D

Explanation**MILAN 2020**

- MILAN is a biennial, multilateral naval exercise. MILAN stands for '**Multilateral Naval Exercise**'.
- It commenced in 1995, and was conducted at Andaman and Nicobar Command until 2018
- MILAN 2020 will be held at **Visakhapatnam**. It is being conducted for the **first time on the mainland at Eastern Naval Command** with increased scope and complexity of the exercise
- Theme -- **Synergy Across the Seas**

Ajeya Warrior

- It is a **joint military exercise between India & UK**. The **fifth edition** of this exercise was conducted at **Salisbury Plains, United Kingdom**.
- Other joint exercises between India and UK: **Konkan (Navy), Indradhanush (Air Force)**. The 5th edition of 'Indradhanush' was conducted at Air Force Station, Hindan (Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh).
- The aim of exercises, is to conduct training of troops in counter insurgency and counter terrorist operations in both urban and semi-urban areas.

Matla Abhiyan

- It is a **unique coastal security exercise** launched by Indian Navy from Kolkata.
- The exercise was conducted in Sunderbans region in order to create awareness about the coastal security to the local community.
- Under this exercise, two naval boats were flagged off to move along the river Matla in the Sunderbans up to Hemnagar (at Hemnagara a customs checkpost exists).
- The purpose is to **interact with the local community, spread awareness** on coastal security and understand the navigational complexities in the Sunderbans Delta.
- Once a proper route is charted, it will allow Navy to carry out patrols of its own if some input comes in.
- Security in the Sunderbans is otherwise the **responsibility of BSF**.
- **Why This Route**
 - This is an **international trade protocol route** between India and Bangladesh. The Navy has always been apprehensive of barges moving nearly unchecked along this route where contraband as well as men and deadly equipment can be dropped off easily.
 - An expert boatman can move away from his given course and stop at any of the numerous villages dotting the landscape to drop off men and equipment.

13. Which of the following states has recently inaugurated the first Disha Mahila Police Station?

- a) Andhra Pradesh
- b) Telangana
- c) Rajasthan
- d) Madhya Pradesh

Answer: A

Explanation

Andhra Pradesh has inaugurated the **first Disha Mahila Police Station** in the state in Rajahmundry. A total of 18 such police stations will be set up across the state by the end of the February. These police stations will **exclusively deal with crimes against women and children**.

Key Highlights

- Each police station will be headed by a DSP rank officer and have a staff of 26 to 47 police officers.
- The staff will mostly comprise of female officers.

Background

- The state government is implementing a series of measures under the name of Disha.
- It is being seen as a tribute to the veterinary doctor gang-raped and murdered recently in neighbouring Telangana.
- the State is preparing to equip itself with all facilities like forensic laboratories, special courts, and public prosecutors to effectively implement the **Disha Bill 2019 by June**.

About DISHA Bill

- In December 2019, the Andhra Pradesh Government passed the Disha Bill, 2019.
- The bill mandates **completion of the investigation into cases** of sexual offences **within 7 working days** from the time of record, and the **trial must be concluded within 14 working days** from the date of filing the charge sheet.
- The appeal against the sentence passed under the new law has to be disposed of within six months.
- The Bill amends the Indian Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure to enable speedy investigation and trial, and award of death penalty in cases with adequate, conclusive evidence. It is awaiting Presidential assent.

14. Consider the following statements regarding International Hydrographic Organization (IHO):

1. It is an intergovernmental organization that works to ensure all the world's seas, oceans and navigable waters are surveyed and charted.
2. The organisation enjoys observer status at the United Nations.

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

- a) 1 Only
- b) 2 Only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: C

Explanation

- The Indian Navy Hydrographic Survey Ship, INS Jamuna has been deployed to carry out Joint Hydrographic Survey off the South – West coast of Sri Lanka.
- The Hydrographic survey is the measurement and study of features that affect maritime navigation. It also includes offshore oil exploration, dredging, oil drilling and other related activities.

About IHO

- The IHO is an intergovernmental organization that works to ensure all the world's seas, oceans and navigable waters are surveyed and charted.
- Established in 1921, it coordinates the activities of national hydrographic offices and promotes uniformity in nautical charts and documents.
- The IHO enjoys observer status at the United Nations, where it is the recognised competent authority on hydrographic surveying and nautical charting.
- The Principality of Monaco was selected as the seat of the organization.

15. BHABHA Kavach has been indigenously developed by

- a) Ordnance Factory Board (OFB)
- b) Mishra Dhatu Nigam Limited (MIDHANI)
- c) Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC)
- d) All of the above

Answer: D

Explanation

- Bhabha Kavach bullet proof jackets will now be used by the **Central Industrial Security Force (CISF)**.
- India's **lightest and cheapest bullet proof jacket** 'Bhabha Kavach' has been developed indigenously by **Ordnance Factory Board** and **Mishra Dhatu Nigam Limited (MIDHANI)** with transfer of carbon-nanomaterial technology from **Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC)**.
- It is the lightest **level III plus** bullet proof jacket (**6.8 kgs nominal weight**) available in India.
- The jacket is based on **indigenous hot pressed boron carbide and carbon nanotube technologies** and is an **import substitute** and truly a 'Make in India' product.

16. Consider the following statements regarding BIMSTEC:

1. Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh are the members of this Organisation.
2. The sectors of cooperation, as envisaged by the objectives of BIMSTEC, does not include public health, poverty alleviation, counter-terrorism.

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

- a) 1 Only
- b) 2 Only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: A

Explanation

- The **second BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercise-2020** (BIMSTEC DMEEx-2020) was held in Bhubaneswar. First edition was held in 2017.
- **Theme of this exercise** - *A Cultural Heritage Site that suffers severe damage in the Earthquake and Flooding or Storm*
- The exercise is being organised by the **National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) in Odisha**, on behalf of the Government of India.
- BIMSTEC member countries from Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar and India participated in the exercise. **Bhutan and Thailand** did not participate this time.

About BIMSTEC

- The **Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)** is a regional organization **comprising seven Member States** lying in the littoral and adjacent areas of the Bay of Bengal constituting a contiguous regional unity.
- This sub-regional organization came into being on **6 June 1997 through the Bangkok Declaration**.
- It constitutes seven Member States: five deriving from South Asia, including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and two from Southeast Asia, including Myanmar and Thailand.
- BIMSTEC is a sector-driven cooperative organization. Starting with six sectors—including trade, technology, energy, transport, tourism and fisheries—for sectoral cooperation in the late 1997, it expanded to embrace nine more sectors—including agriculture, public health, poverty alleviation, counter-terrorism, environment, culture, people to people contact and climate change—in 2008.

17. Consider the following statements regarding the Financial Action Task Force (FATF):

1. It is an inter-governmental body founded on the initiative of the G7.
2. Its objectives do not include maintaining the integrity of the international financial system.
3. The FATF Secretariat is located at the OECD headquarters in Paris.

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

- a) 1 Only
- b) 1 and 2 Only
- c) 2 Only
- d) 1 and 3 Only

Answer: D

Explanation**Context**

- Pakistan will **remain on the grey** list of FATF till June 2020 as it failed to **comply with the 27-point action plan** to control funding to terrorist groups.
- Pakistan's allies **Turkey and Malaysia supported Pakistan** but that was not enough for Islamabad to move out Grey List.

Key Highlights

- Pakistan addressed **only 14 of 27 action items** given to it for controlling funding to terror groups like the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad, responsible for series of attacks in India.
- It has warned Pakistan of stern action for its failure in combating money laundering and terror financing.

Background

- Pakistan was **placed on the grey list by the FATF in June 2018** and was given a 27-point action plan to complete it.
- Since then, it has been in the same list as the Paris-based watchdog is not satisfied with the actions taken by the Pakistan to control terror financing.

How Will Being on the FATF Grey-List Actually Impact Pakistan?

- It is believed that the grey-listing will **squeeze Pakistan's economy** and make it harder for the country to meet its mounting foreign financing needs, including potential future borrowings from the International Monetary Fund.
- Grey-listing could lead to a **downgrade in Pakistan's debt ability** to float international bonds, borrow from multilateral bodies, receive or send remittances or conduct international trade.
- The status does little more than raising the compliance burden on counterparts, such as correspondent banks, dealing with entities within Pakistan's financial system, and therefore attaches an additional cost to many external sector transactions.
- Others believe that the FATF listing will **not miraculously change everything**. They claim that **Pakistan was on the FATF grey-list from 2012 to 2015**, a period during which it successfully completed an IMF program and raised over \$5 billion from the international bond markets.
- During this period Pakistan's imports and exports remained stable, evidence that the grey-listing did not raise any significant barriers to trade.
- However **grey listing has affected Pakistan this time** as gradually the US is coming up with more pressure. If the US "puts more pressure on the World Bank and IMF on future funding, that would be a real challenge.

Financial Action Task Force (FATF)

- FATF is an **inter-governmental** body set up in 1989, with an aim to "set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and **other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system**."
- It was established during the G7 Summit in Paris.
- It has **35 member (Including India)** jurisdictions and 2 regional organisations - the **European Commission and the Gulf Co-operation Council**.
- In addition, it has two observers and nine associate members, which are primarily regional organisations.
- There are also a number of observer organisations, which either have a related area of work that deals with enforcement like Europol, financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and UN bodies or groups linked with counter terrorism or money laundering.
- The FATF functions as an independent body guiding policy, with its president selected by the plenary for a one year period.
- The FATF **Secretariat is located at the OECD headquarters in Paris**.

18. Consider the following statements regarding the African Union (AU)

1. It is an intergovernmental organization consisting of the 55 member states.
2. It was officially launched in 2002 as a successor to the Organisation of African Unity.

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

- a) 1 Only
- b) 2 Only

- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: C

Explanation

African Union 2020 Summit

- The 33rd annual African Union Summit took place in Addis Ababa.
- The summit was held under the **African Union's theme for the year 2020** - "*Silencing the Guns: Creating Conducive Conditions For Africa's Development*"
- Silencing the Guns is a commitment to achieve the **Aspirations of Africa's Agenda 2063**, specifically Aspiration 4, which envisions a peaceful and secure Africa, thereby making peace a reality for African people.

Key Highlights:

The 2020 summit has adopted 8 resolutions. These are:

- Compromise with the United Nations over co-funding in peace operations
- To support elections in Ethiopia and to mediate events of disputes
- To deter leaders in Guinea to use Constitutional Amendments to hold on to power
- To help to calm Burkina Faso's insurgency
- To push Somali Government towards regional compromise
- To press East African heads to support South Sudan peace process
- To support Sudan transition by supporting deal between civilian leaders and security forces.

This year, **South Africa has been elected as the Chair of the AU**. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, took over as the African Union chair, from Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

About AU

- The African Union (AU) is **an intergovernmental organization** consisting of the 55 member states that make up the countries of the African Continent.
- It was officially launched in 2002 as a successor to the Organisation of African Unity (OAU, 1963-1999).
- The AU's headquarters are in **Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**.

19. Who among the following has been named as the new Prime Minister of Iraq

- a) **Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi**
- b) **Adel Abdul Mahdi**
- c) **Barham Salih**
- d) **None of the above**

Answer: A

Explanation

- **Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi**, a former communications minister, has been appointed as the New Prime Minister of Iraq by President Barham Salih.
- Mr Allawi has been given a month to form a new government, which he will lead until early elections.
- His **predecessor Adel Abdul Mahdi** resigned in November, amid mass anti-government demonstrations.

2019–20 Iraqi Protests

- The 2019–20 Iraqi protests, also named the **Tishreen Revolution (October Revolution) and Iraqi Intifada**, are an ongoing series of protests that consisted of demonstrations, marches, sit-ins and civil disobedience.
- It started in October 2019 to protest 16 years of corruption, unemployment and inefficient public services. Later, it escalated into calls to overthrow the administration and to stop Iranian intervention in Iraq.

20. Cruise missile Ra'ad-II, seen in news recently, belongs to -----

- a) Iran
- b) Pakistan
- c) Saudi Arab
- d) Israel

Answer: B

Explanation

- **Pakistan** has conducted a successful flight test of the **air launched cruise missile Ra'ad-II** with a **range of 600 km**.
- The missile has potential of enhancing the air delivered strategic standoff capability of the military on land and at sea.

21. Consider the following statements about the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA):

1. **CCPA is being constituted under The Consumer Protection Act, 1986.**
2. **CCPA will have suo motu powers to investigate into unfair trade practices.**
3. **CCPA will have the powers to recall goods that are dangerous.**

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3 only

Answer: B

Explanation:

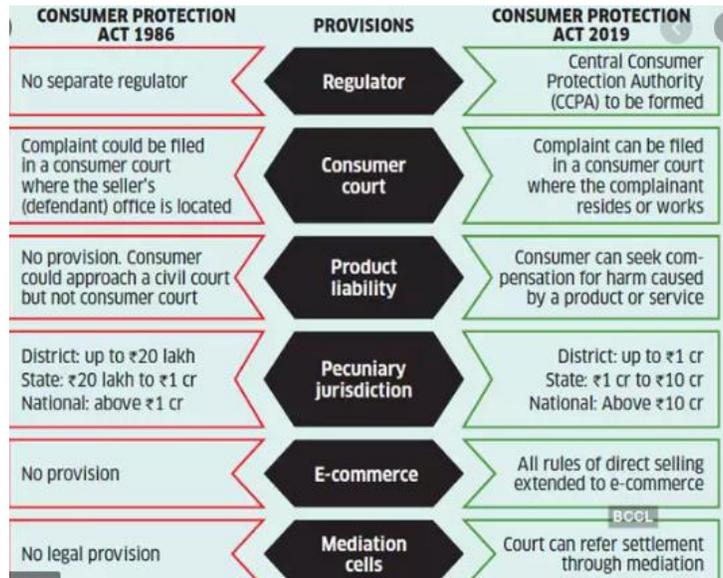
- The Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution has announced that a Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) will be established by the first week of April.
- The authority is being constituted under Section 10(1) of The Consumer Protection Act, 2019. The Act replaced The Consumer Protection Act, 1986, and seeks to widen its scope in addressing consumer concerns.
- The new Act recognises offences such as providing false information regarding the quality or quantity of a good or service. It also specifies action to be taken if goods and services are found dangerous, hazardous or unsafe.
- The CCPA, introduced in the new Act, aims to protect the rights of the consumer by cracking down on unfair trade practices, and false and misleading advertisements that are detrimental to the interests of the public and consumers.

Structure of CCPA

- The proposed authority will have a Chief Commissioner as head, and only two other commissioners as members — one of whom will deal with matters relating to goods while the other will look into cases relating to services.
- The CCPA will have an Investigation Wing that will be headed by a Director General.
- District Collectors too, will have the power to investigate complaints of violations of consumer rights, unfair trade practices, and false or misleading advertisements.

Powers of CCPA

- CCPA will have the powers to inquire or investigate into matters relating to violations of consumer rights or unfair trade practices suo motu, or on a complaint received, or on a direction from the central government.
- While conducting an investigation after preliminary inquiry, officers of the CCPA's Investigation Wing will have the powers to enter any premise and search for any document or article, and to seize these.
- For search and seizure, the CCPA will have similar powers given under the provisions of The Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973.
- CCPA can file complaints of violation of consumer rights or unfair trade practices before the District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, and the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission.
- CCPA will have the powers to recall goods or withdrawal of services that are dangerous, hazardous or unsafe.
- It can pass an order for refund of the prices of goods or services so recalled to purchasers of such goods or services; and discontinuation of practices which are unfair and prejudicial to consumer's interest.



Penalties

For manufacture, selling, storage, distribution, or import of adulterated products, the penalties are:

- If injury is not caused to a consumer, fine up to Rs 1 lakh with imprisonment up to six months;
- If injury is caused, fine up to Rs 3 lakh with imprisonment up to one year;
- If grievous hurt is caused, fine up to Rs 5 lakh with imprisonment up to 7 years;
- In case of death, fine of Rs 10 lakh or more with a minimum imprisonment of 7 years, extendable to imprisonment for life.

22. Consider the following statements about Yellow Rust Disease:

1. Yellow rust disease is a bacterial disease.
2. Yellow rust disease drains carbohydrates from plants.
3. Rain and Fog favour the development of Yellow rust disease.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3 only

Answer: B

Explanation:

- Recently the yellow rust disease was found in the wheat crop of Punjab and Haryana.
- Yellow rust is a fungal disease which turns the crop's leaves into a yellowish colour and stops photosynthesis activity.
- The disease can spread rapidly under congenial conditions and affects crop development, and eventually the yield by between 5 and 30 per cent.
- This occurs when the rust colonies in the leaves drain the carbohydrates from the plant and reduce the green leaf area.
- In India, it is a major disease in the Northern Hill Zone and the North-Western Plain Zone and spreads easily during the onset of cool weather and when wind conditions are favourable. Rain, dew and fog favour the disease's development.

23. With reference to Finance Commission, consider the following statements:

1. Finance Commission is a statutory body.
2. It is constituted by the Ministry of Finance.
3. The Chairman of the Finance Commission is a person with experience of public affairs.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) Only 2
- b) Only 3
- c) 1 and 2
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: B

Explanation:

The report of the Fifteenth FC (FFC), along with an Action Taken Report, was recently tabled in Parliament. The FFC, whose term was extended for 11 months, will submit its second and final report for 2021-22 to 2025-26 in October.

Recommendations

- The FFC has recommended keeping the tax devolution share “virtually unchanged” to states at 41 per cent for the year 2020-21, compared to 42 per cent at present. The 1 percentage point reduction has been done to account for the reorganisation of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir.
- FFC has considered the 2011 population along with forest cover, tax effort, area of the state, and demographic performance to arrive at the states' share in the divisible pool of taxes. As had been widely anticipated, shares of the southern states, except Tamil Nadu, have fallen — with Karnataka losing the most.
- The commission has also recommended Rs 90,000 crore as grants to local bodies for 2020-21, which is 4.31 per cent of the estimated divisible pool.

- The FFC also reintroduced performance-based incentives to states on two parameters — demographic performance and taxation efforts — and said it would recommend more incentives on further parameters, conditional upon states fulfilling certain criteria in the coming fiscal year.
- For determining state-wise allocations for disaster risk management, the panel has suggested a new methodology which combines capacity, risk exposure and proneness to hazard and vulnerability.
- The Commission has noted the tendency of the Union and state governments to borrow outside the Consolidated fund, leading to accumulation of extra-budgetary liabilities.
- It recommends that in the interest of transparency, both the centre and states need to make full disclosure of extra-budgetary borrowings and take steps to eliminate them in a time-bound manner.
- The Commission also suggested that the country needs an overarching fiscal framework for Centre as well as states, on the lines of the FRBM Act, which would lay down accounting, budgeting and auditing standards to be followed at all levels of the government.
- For which it recommends the constitution of an expert group to draft such a legislation which will be an important first step in establishing a statutory framework to implement the essential features of a sound Public Financial Management System.
- The FFC said that it would also form an expert group to study the feasibility of a separate defence and national security fund and the analysis will find space in the second report.

Criticism

- The population parameter used by the Commission has been criticised by the governments of the southern states. The previous FC used both the 1971 and the 2011 populations to calculate the states' shares, giving greater weight to the 1971 population (17.5%) as compared to the 2011 population (10%).
- The use of 2011 population figures has resulted in states with larger populations like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar getting larger shares, while smaller states with lower fertility rates (the number of children born to a woman in her life) have lost out.
- The FFC has reasoned that the terms of reference leave it with no choice but to use the 2011 population; it has also argued that in the interest of fiscal equalisation, it is necessary to use the latest Census figures.

Finance Commission

- The Finance Commission is a constitutionally mandated body established under Article 280 of the Indian Constitution. It was formed to define the financial relations between the central government of India and the individual state governments.
- As per the Constitution, the Commission is appointed every five years and consists of a chairman and four other members.
- The Finance Commission Act, 1951 additionally defines the terms of qualification, appointment and disqualification, the term, eligibility and powers of the Finance Commission.

Functions

- Distribution of net proceeds of taxes between Centre and the States, to be divided as per their respective contributions to the taxes.
- Determine factors governing Grants-in-Aid to the states and the magnitude of the same.
- To make recommendations to the president as to the measures needed to augment the Fund of a State to supplement the resources of the panchayats and municipalities in the state on the basis of the recommendations made by the finance commission of the state.
- Any other matter related to it by the president in the interest of sound finance.

Qualifications of Members

The Chairman of a finance commission is selected from people with experience of public affairs. The other four members are selected from people who:

- Are, or have been, or are qualified, as judges of a high court,
- Have knowledge of government finances or accounts, or
- Have had experience in administration and financial expertise or
- Have special knowledge of economics

24. Recently, Cha-Chai Artwork was inaugurated at national museum in New Delhi. Cha-Chai is a famous artwork of which of the following Country?

- a) India
- b) Portugal
- c) France
- d) England

Answer: B

Explanation

- Union Minister for Culture & Tourism Prahlad Singh Patel and President of the Portuguese Republic Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa jointly inaugurated the Cha-Chai, artwork at National Museum in New Delhi last week.
- This exhibition brings **Cha-Chai, a wrought-iron sculpture** shaped as a teapot, made by Joana Vasconcelos (Portuguese artist).
- The installation represents the **five o'clock tradition of serving tea in Portugal** that originated in the 17th century. The century old 5 pm tea is a family tradition in Portugal that strengthens family bonding.
- Hence, this exhibition will further strengthen the cultural bonds between India and Portugal. The **long-lasting connection between Portugal and India shines through tea or chai.**

25. Consider the following statements regarding International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD):

1. It is a specialized agency of the United Nations dedicated to eradicating poverty and hunger in rural areas of developing countries.
2. Its headquarters is in Rome, Italy.

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

- a) 1 Only
- b) 2 Only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: C

Explanation

- The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) 43rd Governing Council meeting took place in Rome.

- The meeting has highlighted that climate change would push **100 million people into the abyss of poverty by 2030**.
- Close to half of these would be due to climate change's impacts on agriculture.

Key Facts Highlighted By The Meeting

- In 2018, **90 per cent of 17.2 million people displaced by disasters** were due to weather and climate-related events.
- It highlighted that there is an urgent need to invest on rural development as it will help avoid the catastrophes arising due to climate change.

About IFAD

- IFAD is an **international financial institution and a specialized agency** of the United Nations dedicated to eradicating poverty and hunger in rural areas of developing countries.
- It was **established in 1977** through United Nations General Assembly Resolution.
- IFAD was one of the major outcomes of the **1974 World Food Conference**.
- Its **headquarters is in Rome, Italy**, and it is a **member of the United Nations Development Group**.

26. Consider the following statements regarding East Asia Summit (EAS):

1. **EAS was established in 2005 which comprises of the ten member states of the ASEAN countries along with 8 other members.**
2. **India and USA are members of EAS while Russia has got an observer status.**

Which of the above statements is/are Incorrect?

- a) **1 Only**
- b) **2 Only**
- c) **Both 1 and 2**
- d) **Neither 1 nor 2**

Answer: B

Explanation

- Fourth EAS Conference on Maritime Security Cooperation was organized in Chennai.
- **Organised by** - Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Government of India in partnership with the Governments of Australia and Indonesia
- **Knowledge Partner of the conference** - The National Maritime Foundation (NMF) and the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS)
- **The first Conference** was organized in New Delhi in November 2015, the second in Goa in November 2016 and the third in Bhubaneswar in June 2018.
- The summit is important as a guide for ASEAN's engagement in the Indian Ocean region and Asia Pacific.

About East Asia Summit:

- Established in 2005; A forum of 18 countries.
- It comprises the **ten member states of the ASEAN** countries along with 8 members **Australia, China, Japan, India, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Russia and the United States**.
- **The first summit was held in Kuala Lumpur**, Malaysia.
- India is a founding member of the East Asia Summit.

27. Consider the following statements regarding the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS):

1. It is an autonomous body under the Ministry of Science & Technology.
2. The organization is located in Chennai.

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

- a) 1 Only
- b) 2 Only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: D

Explanation

INCOIS has launched **three ocean-based advanced warning systems- Swell Surge Forecast System (SSFS), Algal Bloom Information Service (ABIS) and the Small Vessel Advisory and Forecast Services System (SVAS).**

A. Swell Surge Forecast System

- It has been designed to predict swell surges, which occur along the Indian coast, **especially on the western coast.**
- The waves are created due to distant weather systems and they take place without **any noticeable change in the local wind or the coastal environment.**
- The System will reduce the damage and losses incurred by the fishermen and alert them well in advance.
- The swell surges are **surface gravity waves** and not the normal wind waves. They are like **flash floods** and cause damage to the boats and nets of the fishermen. They are often **mistaken for tsunamis.**

B. Algal Bloom Information Service (ABIS)

- It aims to **prewarn regarding the harmful algal blooms.** It will help track the increasing frequency of algal blooms.
- The service aims to benefit fishermen, ecologists, marine fishery resource managers, researchers and environmentalists.
- It will also provide almost real-time information regarding the **spatio-temporal occurrence and spread of phytoplankton blooms** over the North Indian Ocean.

C. Small Vessel Advisory and Forecast Services System

- It has been designed to improve the operations of small marine vessels, especially fishing vessels.
- The system will warn the users regarding the potential zones where the small vessels are likely to overturn.

About INCOIS

- INCOIS was established as **an autonomous body in 1999 under the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES)** and is a unit of the Earth System Science Organization (ESSO).
- ESSO- INCOIS is mandated to provide the best possible ocean information and advisory services to society, industry, government agencies and the scientific community through sustained ocean observations and constant improvements through systematic and focussed research.
- It is located in Pragathi Nagar, **Hyderabad.**

28. Food Planet Prize has been constituted by

- a) Sweden
- b) Norway
- c) India
- d) FAO

Answer: A

Explanation

- Sweden has **created 1 million USD worth prizes to feed billion of people**. The prize is named as the “**Food Planet Prize**”.
- The main aim of the step is to address the climate change threats towards food supply all over the world.
- The prize is to be awarded annually. Sweden is to offer two Food Planet prizes.
- They are “**an existing scalable solution for sustainable foods**” and the other includes “**innovative initiatives to transform global food sector**”.

29. Consider the following statements about Dara Shikoh:

1. Dara Shikoh was the eldest son of Shahjahan.
2. Dara Shikoh translated Bhagavad Gita and Upanishads into Persian.
3. The policy of Sulh-i-kul was first introduced by Dara Shikoh.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3 only

Answer: A

Explanation:

- The Ministry of Culture recently set up a seven-member panel of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to locate the grave of the Mughal prince Dara Shikoh (1615-59).
- He is believed to be buried somewhere in the Humayun’s Tomb complex in Delhi, one of around 140 graves of the Mughal clan.
- The panel will use architectural evidence from that time, and also written history and any other information that can be used as evidence.

Dara Shikoh’s legacy

- Dara Shikoh, was the eldest son and heir-apparent of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan and was designated with the title Padshahzada-i-Buzurg Martaba (“Prince of High Rank”).
- In the war of succession which ensued after Shah Jahan’s illness in 1657, Dara was defeated by his younger brother Prince Muhiuddin (later, the Emperor Aurangzeb) and was executed in 1659 on Aurangzeb’s orders.
- Dara was a liberal-minded unorthodox Muslim as opposed to the orthodox Aurangzeb. A great patron of the arts, he was also more inclined towards philosophy and mysticism rather than military pursuits.
- Dara Shikoh realised the greatness of the Upanishads and translated 52 Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita into Persian, which were earlier known only to a few upper caste Hindus.

- **Note:** Sulh-i kul is an Arabic term literally meaning peace with all, universal peace, or absolute peace. The policy of Sulh-i-kul was first introduced by Akbar, for peaceful and harmonious relationship among different religions.

30. Consider the following statements about Brihadeeswarar Temple:

1. The Brihadeeswarar Temple was built by Raja Raja Chola I.
2. The Brihadeeswarar Temple is dedicated to Lord Vishnu.
3. The Brihadeeswarar Temple is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: C

Explanation

- The kumbhabhishegam (consecration) ceremony was recently performed at the Sri Brahadeeswarar Temple, after 23 years, after the Madras High Court settled an old argument over the ritual purification process.
- The judgment delivered by the Madurai Bench of the court addressed the struggle for supremacy between the Sanskrit and Tamil traditions that lies at the heart of several cultural battles in the state — and which also played out in the kumbhabhishegam ceremony.

Brihadeeshvara Temple

- Brihadeeshvara Temple, also called Rajarajesvaram or Peruvudaiyār Kōvil, is a Hindu temple dedicated to Lord Shiva located in South bank of Kaveri river in Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu.
- It is one of the largest South Indian temples and an exemplary example of a fully realized Dravidian architecture. Built by Tamil king Raja Raja Chola I between 1003 and 1010 AD, the temple is a part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site known as the "Great Living Chola Temples", along with the Chola dynasty era Gangaikonda Cholapuram temple and Airavatesvara temple.

31. Consider the following statements about Konark Sun Temple:

1. The Konark Sun Temple is in the State of Madhya Pradesh.
2. The Konark Sun Temple was built by Narasinga Deva I of the Eastern Ganga Dynasty.
3. The Konark Sun Temple is a UNESCO world heritage site.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3 only

Answer: B

Explanation:

A plan to restore and preserve the nearly 800-year-old Konark Sun Temple in Odisha is being drawn up.

Konark Sun Temple

- Konark Sun Temple is a 13th-century CE Sun temple at Konark on the coastline of Odisha, India. The temple is attributed to king Narasinga Deva I of the Eastern Ganga Dynasty about 1250 CE.
- Declared a UNESCO world heritage site in 1984, it remains a major pilgrimage site for Hindus, who gather here every year for the Chandrabhaga Mela around the month of February.
- Once over 200 feet (61 m) high, much of the temple is now in ruins, in particular the large shikara tower over the sanctuary; at one time this rose much higher than the mandapa that remains.
- The structures and elements that have survived are famed for their intricate artwork, iconography, and themes, including erotic kama and mithuna scenes.
- Also called the Surya Devalaya, it is a classic illustration of the Odisha style of Architecture or Kalinga Architecture.
- This temple was called the "Black Pagoda" in European sailor accounts as early as 1676 because its great tower appeared black. Similarly, the Jagannath Temple in Puri was called the "White Pagoda". Both temples served as important landmarks for sailors in the Bay of Bengal.

32. Lucknow Declaration, recently seen in news, is related to

- a) **India-Africa Defence Ministers' Conclave**
- b) **Defence Corridor Conclave**
- c) **The Third India-Africa Forum Summit**
- d) **None of the above**

Answer: A

Explanation

- The **first India-Africa Defence Ministers' Conclave** held in Lucknow, coinciding with DefExpo-2020 (11th edition of the biennial defence exhibition).
- The **conclave adopted the Lucknow Declaration.**

Key Highlights:

- Overall, **50 African nations signed** the declaration along with India at the conclave.
- The declaration highlighted the commitment to continue their collaboration in the fields of peace and security including conflict prevention, resolution, management and peacebuilding.
- It also aims to enhance the **role of women in peacekeeping.**
- The declaration urges the international community to envisage the **adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism** in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).
- It recalled India's contribution to defence and security in the African continent through **setting up of Defence Academies and Colleges as well as deployment of training teams in several African countries.**
- It appreciated initiation of **Africa India Field Training Exercises** with the first ever **AFINDEX** in March 2019.

33. Consider the following statement about Law Commission of India:

1. **Union Cabinet has approved the constitution of the 22nd Law Commission of India.**
2. **Prior to independence, the First Law Commission was established under the Chairmanship of Lord Macaulay.**

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: C

Explanation:

- The Union Cabinet has approved the constitution of the **22nd Law Commission of India ('LCI')**, for a period of three years.
- The **21st Law Commission of India** under Justice (Retd.) BS Chauhan was established in 2015 and its tenure was upto 31st August, 2018.
- The **22nd LCI will consist of** a full-time chairperson, four full-time members (including a member secretary), secretaries of the law and legislative departments and as ex-officio members and not more than five part-time Members.

Functions of the Commission:

- **Identify laws which are no longer needed** or relevant and can be immediately repealed.
- Examine the existing laws in the light of Directive Principles of State Policy **and suggest ways of improvement and reform** and also suggest such legislations as might be necessary to implement the Directive Principles and to attain the objectives set out in the Preamble of the Constitution;
- To **consider and convey to the Government its views on any subject relating to law and judicial administration** that may be specifically referred to it by the Government through Ministry of Law and Justice (Department of Legal Affairs);
- To consider the requests for **providing research to any foreign countries** as may be referred to it by the Government through Ministry of Law and Justice (Department of Legal Affairs);
- The Commission shall also, on a reference made to it by the Central Government or *suo-moto*, **undertake research in law and review of existing laws in India for making reforms therein** and enacting new legislations.
- It shall also undertake studies and **research for bringing reforms in the justice delivery systems for elimination of delay** in procedures, speedy disposal of cases, reduction in cost of litigation etc.
- Further, to take all such measures as may be necessary to harness law and the legal process in the **service of the poor.**
- To **revise the Central Acts of general importance** so as to simplify them and remove anomalies, ambiguities and inequities.

About Law Commission

- Prior to independence, the **First Law Commission** was established in 1834 by the British Government under the Chairmanship of **Lord Macaulay**.
- After independence, the **1st Law Commission of India** was constituted in 1955.
- The Commission is re-constituted **every three years** and are usually chaired by a retired Supreme Court judge or chief justice of a High court.
- LCI, so far, have submitted to the government about **277 reports**.

34. Consider the following statement about Central Vigilance Commission:

1. CVC was established on the recommendation of Kothari committee.

2. Central Vigilance Commissioner and the Vigilance Commissioners would be five years or till they attain the age of 65 years.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: D

Explanation:

Prime Minister led panel has named President's secretary Sanjay Kothari as the new Central Vigilance Commissioner ('CVC').

About Central Vigilance Commission

- The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) was **established in 1964** on the recommendations of **Santhanam committee**, through a government resolution as an apex body for exercising general superintendence and control over vigilance administration.
- Subsequent to the directions of Hon'ble Supreme Court in **Vineet Narain case**, the Government promulgated an Ordinance in **1998 conferring statutory status** to the CVC and the powers to exercise superintendence over functioning of the **Delhi Special Police Establishment** and also to review the progress of the investigations pertaining to alleged offences under the **Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988** conducted by them.
- Finally, **in 2003 it was formally granted statutory status** under the Parliamentary law. The provisions of the Act include inquiries into offences alleged to have been committed by certain categories of public servants of the Central Government; corporations established by or under any central Act; government companies; societies; and local authorities owned or controlled by the Central Government; and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

Important features of the CVC Act, 2003:

- The Commission shall consist of a **Central Vigilance Commissioner** (Chairperson) and **not more than two Vigilance Commissioners** (members).
- The Central Vigilance Commissioner and the Vigilance Commissioners shall be **appointed by the President on recommendation of a Committee consisting of** the Prime Minister (Chairperson), the Minister of Home Affairs (Member) and the Leader of the Opposition in the House of the People (Member).
- The term of office of the Central Vigilance Commissioner and the Vigilance Commissioners would be **four years** from the date on which they enter their office or till they **attain the age of 65 years**, whichever is earlier.
- The Commission, while conducting the inquiry, shall have all the **powers of a Civil Court** with respect to certain aspects.
- The Central Vigilance Commissioner or any Vigilance Commissioner can be removed from his office only by **order of the President** on the ground of proved **misbehaviour or incapacity** after the Supreme Court, on a reference made to it by the President reports that the CVC or VC as the case may be, ought to be removed.

International Day of Women and Girls in Science

- The International Day of Women and Girls in Science was recently celebrated on February 11. In December 2015, the UN General Assembly had decided to establish an annual International Day to promote equal access to and participation in science for women and girls.
- The Day is implemented by **UNESCO and UN-Women**, in collaboration with institutions and civil society partners that aim to promote women and girls in science.

Current Status Of Women In Science

- According to a 2018 fact sheet prepared by UNESCO on women in science, just 28.8% of researchers are women. In India, this drops to 13.9%.
- Between 1901 and 2019, 334 Nobel Prizes have been awarded to 616 Laureates in Physics, Chemistry and Medicine, of which just 20 have been won by 19 women.
- The double Laureate is Marie Curie, one of just three women who have won in Physics and one of just five in Chemistry, while 12 women have won the Medicine Nobel.
- UNESCO data from 2014-16 show that only around 30% of female students select STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics)-related fields in higher education. Female enrolment is particularly low in information technology (3%), natural science, mathematics and statistics (5%) and engineering and allied streams (8%).
- In India, a 2016-17 NITI Aayog report compared female enrolment in various disciplines over five years, until 2015-16.
- The report reflected that moving up from UG to higher degree and research programmes, the restricted presence of women in higher studies and research in science becomes evident for broader range of disciplines.
- The report also found that in over 620 institutes and universities, including IITs, NITs, ISRO, and DRDO, the presence of women was 20.0% among Scientific and Administrative Staff, 28.7% among Post-Doctoral Fellows, and 33.5% among PhD scholars.

Significance of the Day

- Gender equality is a global priority for UNESCO, and the support of young girls, their education and their full ability to make their ideas heard are levers for development and peace.
- Tackling some of the greatest challenges of the Agenda for Sustainable Development -- from improving health to combatting climate change -- will rely on harnessing all talent, which means getting more women working in these fields.
- Diversity in research expands the pool of talented researchers, bringing in fresh perspectives, talent and creativity. This Day is a reminder that women and girls play a critical role in science and technology communities and that their participation should be strengthened.

Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS)

- The U.S. Department of State has approved the potential sale of a \$1.867 billion Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS) to India.

- The potential sale, which is being processed via Foreign Military Sales (FMS) route, is now before U.S. Congress for consideration, with a 30-day window for Congress to raise any objections to the sale.
- India intends to use these defence articles and services to modernize its armed forces, and to expand its existing air defence architecture to counter threats posed by air attack. Further, it will also help in enhancing greater interoperability between India, the US, and other allies.
- The Integrated Air Defence Weapon System, also known as the National Advanced Surface to Air Missile System (**NASAMS**), provides integrated air missile defence and is currently deployed around Washington, DC.
- The IADWS system includes radar, launchers, targeting, and guidance systems, advanced medium-range air-to-air missile (AMRAAM) and Stinger missiles, and related equipment and support.
- Communications equipment, testing and training equipment and documentation and technical and logistics support are also part of the package.

Yongle Blue Hole

- Carbon, more than 8,000 years old, has been found inside the world's deepest blue hole — the Yongle Blue Hole (YBH) — which was recently discovered in the South China Sea.
- YBH has a depth of 300 metres, far deeper than the previously recorded deepest blue hole, Dean's Blue Hole in Bahamas, which had a depth of 202 metres.
- Blue holes are marine caverns filled with water and are formed following dissolution of carbonate rocks, usually under the influence of global sea level rise or fall. What distinguishes them from other aquatic caverns is that they are isolated from the ocean and don't receive fresh rainwater.
- Though a largely enclosed geomorphology, YBH is influenced with some oceanic exchange in the surface water. However, like most blue holes, it is anoxic i.e. depleted of dissolved oxygen below a certain depth. This anaerobic environment is unfavourable for most sea life.
- Researchers also found low levels of dissolved organic carbon and high levels of dissolved inorganic carbon in YBH, both with radiocarbon ages of more than 6,000 years.
- Such concentrations of carbon, usually found in deep marine holes like YBH, provide a natural laboratory to study carbon cycling and potential mechanisms controlling it in the marine ecosystem.
- It also offers a rare glimpse of unusual ocean conditions, which may help scientists to understand the extreme chemistry of past and future oceans.

Mini-moon

- Astronomers at the NASA-funded Catalina Sky Survey in Arizona have observed a small object orbiting Earth, which they have dubbed as 2020 CD3 or "mini-moon" or the planet's "second moon".
- Astronomers know little about this mini moon — so little, that they can't even say if it's an artificial object, such as a dead satellite. However, they say, it's most likely a small asteroid, about the size of a car. Its diameter is about 1.9-3.5 m.
- When an asteroid's orbit crosses Earth's orbit, it can sometimes be captured into the latter orbit. This is what happened with 2020 CD3. It is now orbiting at a distance farther from Earth. Such an asteroid is called a Temporarily Captured Object (TCO).

- Unlike Earth's permanent Moon, the mini-moon is temporary and will eventually break free of Earth's orbit and go off on its own way. The orbit of such objects is unstable as they have to contend with the gravitational influence of Earth's permanent Moon as well as that of the Sun. Once caught in Earth's orbit, such objects usually remain for a few years before they break free and go into independent orbit around the Sun.
- According to the researchers, 2020 CD3 was captured into Earth's orbit over three years ago. For CSS, it is only the second such discovery. It previously discovered 2006 RH120, which orbited Earth for some time that year, before it escaped in 2007

Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra

- The Union Cabinet has approved a scheme for the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya by setting up an autonomous trust, the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra.
- The UP government has allotted five acres of land to the Sunni Central Waqf Board in Dhannipur village in Sohawal tehsil of Ayodhya, around 25 km from the site where the Babri Masjid once stood.

Background

- In November 2019, Supreme Court allowed the construction of a Ram temple at the site of the demolished Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, and ordered handing over another 5-acre plot to the Uttar Pradesh Sunni Waqf Board for the mosque.
- One of the five suits before the court in the Babri Masjid case was in the name of the deity itself, Sri Ram Lalla Virajman, and of the birthplace, Asthan Shri Ram Janmabhoomi.
- This suit was founded on the claim that the law recognises both the idol and the birthplace as juridical entities. The court did not accept the Janmasthan as a juridical entity and awarded the title of the land to Ram Lalla, to be held by the Trust.
- The Court had also directed the Centre to formulate within three months a scheme to set up a "Trust with a Board of Trustees or any other appropriate body" under The Acquisition of Certain Area at Ayodhya Act, 1993, with powers "including the construction of a temple".

Details Of The Trust

- The Trust, which is called the Shri Ram Janmbhoomi Teerth Kshetra, will include 15 members, out of which one would always be from the Dalit society.
- All other members of the Trust, which includes an IAS officer to be nominated by the Central and State government each, will have to be practising Hindus. The trust will be headed by former Attorney General K. Parasaran.
- A scheme has been approved to make necessary provisions in regard to functioning of the trust including matters relating to management of the trust and powers of the trustees including construction of the temple.
- In compliance with the directions of the Supreme Court, possession of the inner and outer courtyards of the disputed site shall be handed over to the said Trust.
- Moreover, the central government is at liberty to make suitable provisions in respect to the rest of the acquired land by handing it over to the said Trust for management and development in terms of the Scheme framed by the Central government.
- The Trust deed says that the trustees may accept donations, grants, subscriptions, aids or contribution from any person, government, local authorities or any other institution in cash or in kind,

including immovable property/ properties without any conditions or terms inconsistent with this Trust or its objects.

SATHI

- The Department of Science & Technology has launched a unique scheme called Sophisticated Analytical & Technical Help Institutes (SATHI).
- The scheme will address the need for building shared, professionally managed and strong Science and Technology infrastructure in the country which is readily accessible to academia, start-ups, manufacturing, industry and R&D labs,
- These Centres are expected to house major analytical instruments to provide common services of high-end analytical testing, thus reducing dependency on foreign sources. The centres would be operated with a transparent, open access policy.
- DST has already set up three such centres in the country, one each at *IIT Kharagpur, IIT Delhi and BHU* at a total cost of Rs 375 Cores. The plan is to set up five SATHI Centres every year for the next four years.

Impact

- SATHI will address the problems of accessibility, maintenance, redundancy and duplication of expensive equipment in Institutions, while reaching out to the less endowed organizations in need, e.g., industry, MSMEs, startups and State Universities.
- It will also foster a strong culture of collaboration between institutions and across disciplines to take advantage of developments, innovations and expertise in diverse areas.

WHO Releases Report On Cancer

WHO and its specialized International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) have released two reports to mark World Cancer Day on 4th February. The reports aim to set the global agenda on cancer, mobilise stakeholders and help countries set priorities for investing in cancer control and universal health coverage and focus on research and prevention.

Findings Related To India

- According to the report, one in 10 Indians will develop cancer during their lifetime, and one in 15 Indians will die of cancer.
- In 2018, there were an estimated 1.16 million new cancer cases, 7,84,800 cancer deaths, and 2.26 million 5-year prevalent cases in India's population of 1.35 billion.
- The six most common cancer types in India are breast cancer, oral cancer, cervical cancer, lung cancer, stomach cancer and colorectal cancer, which together account for 49 per cent of all new cancer cases.
- The burden of cancer types, such as breast cancer and colorectal cancer, associated with overweight and obesity, lower levels of physical activity, and sedentary lifestyles is increasing and these cancer types are associated with higher socioeconomic status.

Tobacco Related Cancers

- Tobacco-related head and neck cancers account for 34-69 % of all cancers in men, and constitute 10-27 % of all cancers in women in most regions in India, which are further associated with lower socio economic status.

- An increasing trend in the incidence of oral cancer has been observed among men in the fourth to seventh decades of life, possibly as a result of increasing consumption of unregulated flavoured chewing products that contain areca nut, such as paan masala.
- The report said about 80% of the world's smokers live in low and middle-income countries. In addition, 64% of the world's daily smokers live in only 10 countries and more than 50 per cent of the world's male smokers live in three countries: China, India, and Indonesia.

Global Findings

- Cancer is the second most common cause of death worldwide, and the burden of cancer is increasing in all countries. This poses a rapidly growing threat to individuals, health systems, and economies globally.
- Globally in 2018, there were 9.6 million cancer deaths, out of which the most were due to lung cancer at 18.4%, followed by colorectum cancer, stomach cancer, liver cancer, breast cancer and cancer of the oesophagus.
- Cancer inequalities reflect the cultures and environments in which people are born, live, and work and the uneven application of preventive measures, both between and within countries.
- The global cancer burden is expected to reach 29 million new cancer cases per year by 2040, a 62% increase on the estimated 18.1 million cancers in 2018.
- If no additional action is taken, there will be millions of additional premature deaths and the world will fail to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals target (Target 3.4) to reduce the total premature mortality from non-communicable diseases, including cancer, by one third by 2030.
- At least 7 million lives could be saved over the next decade, by identifying the most appropriate science for each country situation, by basing strong cancer responses on universal health coverage, and by mobilizing different stakeholders to work together.

IARC

- The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) is the specialized cancer research agency of WHO, established in May 1965 by a resolution of the World Health Assembly.
- Its role is to conduct and coordinate research into the causes of cancer. It also collects and publishes surveillance data regarding the occurrence of cancer worldwide.
- It is governed by its own Governing Council and Scientific Council. The Governing Council comprises representatives from each participating state, plus the WHO Director-General.

International Mother Language Day

- International Mother Language Day 2020 was recently celebrated across the globe on February 21. It has been observed every year since February 2000 to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism.
- The theme for this year is 'Languages without borders'. The theme recognises that local and cross-border languages can promote peaceful dialogue and help to preserve indigenous heritage.

Background

- The Day was proclaimed by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in November 1999. Later, the UN General Assembly welcomed the proclamation of the day in a resolution in 2002.

- UNESCO declared the Day, to commemorate a 1952 protest against West Pakistan’s imposition of Urdu as the official language of East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh).
- In Bangladesh, since 1953, February 21 is observed as Ekushe Day, after the Bengali word for twenty-one.

Significance Of Languages

- Languages, with their implications for identity, communication, social integration, education and development, are of strategic importance for people and planet.
- They act as the most powerful instruments of preserving and developing the tangible and intangible heritage.
- Further, multilingual and multicultural societies exist through their languages which transmit and preserve traditional knowledge and cultures in a sustainable way.
- Moreover, promotion of mother tongues also helps to inspire solidarity based on understanding, tolerance and dialogue.

Status Of Languages Across The World

- Globally, English remains the most widely spoken language with 1.13 billion speakers in 2019, followed by Mandarin with 1.11 billion. Hindi is third with 615 million speakers, while Bengali is seventh with 265 million.
- Only 10 languages account for as many as 4.8 billion speakers — over 60% of the world population.
- According to the United Nations, around 43 per cent of the 6,000 languages spoken in the world are at the risk of being eliminated. The UN also says that a language disappears every two weeks, which destroys an entire cultural and intellectual heritage.
- Globally 40 per cent of the population does not have access to an education in a language they speak or understand. Only a few hundred languages have genuinely been given a place in education systems and the public domain, and less than a hundred are used in the digital world.
- Nevertheless, progress is being made in mother tongue-based multilingual education with growing understanding of its importance, particularly in early schooling, and more commitment to its development in public life.

WORLD TOP 10, 2019 (mn)

English	1,132
Mandarin	1,117
Hindi	615
Spanish	534
French	280
Standard Arabic	274
Bengali	265
Russian	258
Portuguese	234
Indonesian	199

Source: Ethnologue

INDIA TOP 12, 2011 (mn)

Hindi	528
Bengali	97
Marathi	83
Telugu	81
Tamil	69
Gujarati	55
Urdu	51
Kannada	44
Odia	37
Malayalam	35
Punjabi	33
Assamese	15

Source: Census 2011

Statistics Of Various Languages From India

- In India, Hindi is the most spoken language with over 528 million speakers in 2011, as per the Census. Bengali had 97.2 million speakers in 2011, followed by Marathi (83 million), while other languages with over 50 million speakers are Telugu (81 million), Tamil (69 million), Gujarati (55.5 million) and Urdu (50.8 million).
- Percentage trends from 1991 to 2011 underline the growth of the most widely spoken language, Hindi, which was spoken by 39.29% of the Indian population in 1991, and whose share grew to 43.63% in 2011.

INDIA TRENDS, 1991-2011
(Speakers of each as % of India population)

LANGUAGE	1991	2001	2011
Hindi	39.29	41.03	43.63
Bengali	8.30	8.11	8.03
Marathi	7.45	6.99	6.86
Telugu	7.87	7.19	6.70
Tamil	6.32	5.91	5.70
Gujarati	4.85	4.48	4.58
Urdu	5.18	5.01	4.19
Kannada	3.91	3.69	3.61
Odia	3.35	3.21	3.10
Malayalam	3.62	3.21	2.88
Punjabi	2.79	2.83	2.74
Assamese	1.56	1.28	1.26

Source: Census 2011

- For other languages in India's top 12, the 2011 percentage share has fallen when compared to that in 1991.

Worldwide Educating For The Future Index

- The Economist Intelligence Unit has released the Worldwide Educating for the Future Index 2019. The report and index were commissioned by the Yidan Prize Foundation.
- The index ranks countries based on their abilities to equip students with skill-based education and analyses education system from the perspective of skill-based education in areas such as critical thinking, problem-solving, leadership, collaboration, creativity and entrepreneurship, as well as digital and technical skills.

Findings Of The Report

- Among the world's largest economies, the US, UK, France and Russia all fell back in the index, while China, India and Indonesia took steps forward.
- India jumped five places and was ranked 35th on the overall index in 2019 with a total score of 53, based on three categories – *policy environment, teaching environment and overall socio-economic environment*.

Reasons For Improvement

- The report attributed India's growth to the new education policy introduced by the government, that explicitly mentions future-oriented skills such as critical thinking, communication and entrepreneurship.
- In the Union Budget 2020, India's Finance Minister had highlighted a New Education Policy to be announced under 'Aspirational India' that will focus on greater inflow of finance to attract talented teachers, innovate and build better labs.
- It has also been proposed to start degree level full-fledged online education programme along with apprenticeship embedded degree or diploma courses in 150 higher educational institutions which will begin by March 2021.

Shortcomings

- The report emphasized upon India's inability to utilise the opportunity of internationalising its higher education system. It noted that China, India & Malaysia, all have a great appetite to internationalise higher education systems but India has been unable to utilise the opportunity of internationalising its higher education system.
- A decentralised education system is another shortcoming of India's education policy. Well-intentioned policy goals relating to future skills development often do not get filtered downward, which is a hazard in economies such as the US and India that have large, decentralised education systems

Way Ahead

- India should look forward to develop its higher education in a manner so that it becomes a preferred destination for higher education.
- In order to do so, under its Study in India programme, Ind-SAT exam is proposed to be held in Asian and African countries. It shall be used for benchmarking foreign candidates who receive scholarships for studying in Indian higher education centres.

Sharp Rise In LPG Prices

- LPG prices, which are revised on a monthly basis, recently saw a price hike which has been the sharpest since January 2014.
- The rate for unsubsidised, 14.2 kg cylinders has risen by a steep ₹144.50 in Delhi, at ₹858.50, with a similar price hike in three other metros viz. Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai.

LPG Price Determination In India

- Domestic prices of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) are based on a formula — the import parity price (IPP), which is based on international LPG prices.
- Saudi Aramco's LPG price acts as the benchmark for the IPP and includes the free-on-board price, ocean freight, customs duties, port dues and the like.
- This dollar-denominated figure is converted into rupees before local costs — such as local freight, bottling charges, marketing costs, margins for oil marketing firms and dealer commissions and the Goods and Services Tax — are added.
- The government then resets the LPG price every month, which is influenced by international prices and how the rupee has behaved against the dollar in the immediately preceding weeks.

Impact Of The Price Hike

- The price increase will affect retail consumers who have given up the subsidy, while for those who avail subsidy, the increase would be mostly absorbed by the rise in subsidy. Of the 27.76 crore retail consumers, 26.12 crore consumers avail LPG subsidy.
- At a time when consumer demand, in general, for goods and services in the country has gone down, more cash in the hands of the retail consumer may have helped to boost demand. It is ironic that the government has had to raise LPG prices now.
- However, the current price rise will take away even more disposable income from those consumers who pay market rates for LPG. As a result, household budgets are bound to go up, especially for those not availing the subsidy.
- The consumer price index inflation has seen a rise over the past few months and had accelerated to 7.59% in January. The January inflation metric was the highest since May 2014, when the figure was at 8.33%. The current LPG price rise could also push up headline inflation even further.

Impact On Subsidy

- Prior to the latest round of the price increase, the government had raised LPG cylinder prices by ₹62, starting from August 2019.
- This, along with the increase of ₹82 that had taken place over five years to mid-2019, indicates an inclination towards increasingly lesser subsidy. In the latest round, though, the Centre has sought to absorb much of the increase for those availing subsidy.
- It looks like the most recent increase has been beyond its control and it is hence raising the subsidy levels to protect consumers, given that the economy is suffering from lack of consumer spending.
- With current price rise, the subsidy offered in Delhi, for example would go up from ₹153.86 to ₹291.48. Likewise, for Ujjwala consumers, the subsidy would go up from ₹174.86 to ₹312.48 per cylinder.

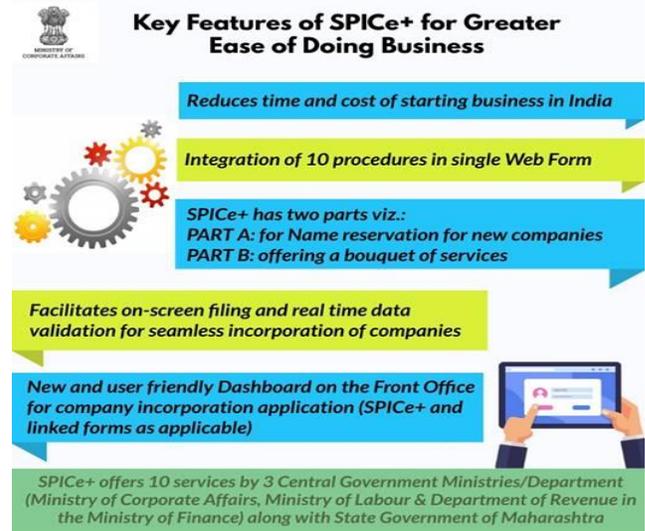
Future Outlook

- For most of December, the Brent crude price had been on an uptrend and had peaked at \$68.91 in early January, but with the coronavirus disease in the news, fears of a global slowdown have pushed oil prices down through January.

- With international crude prices on the downtrend, it is likely that the LPG prices too would come down, if the rupee-dollar exchange rate does not fluctuate significantly.

SPICe+

- The Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) has come out with the format of the new web form, SPICe+ for incorporation of companies. It would be applicable for incorporation of all new companies with effect from February 15.
- The web form issued as part of the Centre's Ease of Doing Business initiative, has replaced the existing SPICe form.
- The 22-page integrated web form will, among other things, offer 10 services by three Central Government Ministries and Departments (Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Ministry of Labour and Department of Revenue in the Finance Ministry) and one State Government (Maharashtra).
- SPICe+ has two parts — Part A for name reservation for new companies and Part B offering a bouquet of services including incorporation, DIN allotment, mandatory issue of PAN, mandatory issue of TAN, mandatory issue of EPFO and ESIC registration and mandatory opening of bank account for the company (through the AGILE PRO linked web form) besides allotment of GSTIN (if applied for).
- The new web form would facilitate On-screen filing and real time data validation for seamless incorporation of companies.
- The 10 services offered through the new form would help save many procedures, time and cost for starting a business in India.

**Anti-Dumping Duty On PTA Removed**

The government has announced that it is abolishing an anti-dumping duty that was levied on imports of a chemical called PTA. This comes after persistent demands from the domestic manufacturers of polyester for the past four and a half years to remove the said duty.

Purified Terephthalic Acid

- Purified Terephthalic Acid (PTA) is a crucial raw material used to make various products, including polyester fabrics. PTA makes up for around 70-80% of a polyester product and is, therefore, important to those involved in the manufacture of man-made fabrics or their components.
- This includes products like polyester staple fibre and spun yarn. Some sportswear, swimsuits, dresses, trousers, curtains, sofas, cushions, jackets, car seat covers and bed sheets have a certain proportion of polyester in them.

Background

- The anti-dumping duty on PTA was imposed after two domestic manufacturers had approached the Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR) in 2013.

- The companies, which submitted that they accounted for over 50% of the domestic PTA industry, had argued that some countries had been exporting the product to India at prices lower than its value in their own domestic markets.
- They argued that this dumping of PTA into the Indian market had a “significant” adverse impact on the domestic industry.
- Following an investigation, DGTR agreed with their claims, and imposed anti-dumping duties on PTA imported from South Korea and Thailand in 2014 and 2015, and from China, Indonesia, Taiwan, Iran and Malaysia in 2015 and 2016.

Opposition From PTA Consumers

- Companies using PTA to manufacture polyester products claimed that the move went against the government’s vision of making the textiles sector a globally competitive industry.
- According to them, the move left them with limited domestic suppliers of PTA. The companies had alleged that the product’s cost had become more expensive domestically, which made their own products pricier and less attractive for their domestic and international buyers.
- This had led to a drop in exports of some of these products during 2014-16, and an increase in imports of the products they had been producing, as there was no safeguard against imports of cheaper versions of these downstream polyester-based products.
- On top of this, the domestic industry had argued that domestic PTA producers had not only been unable to ramp up capacity to cater to demand for the product, shutdowns of their manufacturing facilities once a year for maintenance purposes had also led to shortages of the raw material.
- PTA users claim that they had not been manufacturing as much polyester as they were capable of, operating at 70% of their capacity at any given time.

Impact

- Removing the duty will allow PTA users to source from international markets and may make it as much as \$30 per 1,000 kg cheaper than now.
- Further, easy availability of this critical input at competitive prices can unlock immense potential in the textile sector, seen as a significant employment generator.

BharatNet: Free Wifi To All Villages By March 2020

- As per the government’s new proposal wifi will be provided through **BharatNet** in villages across India and will be free of charge till March 2020. Currently, **48,000 villages** connected under the BharatNet project have WiFi access.
- The government has already connected **1.3 lakh gram panchayats** through BharatNet optical fibre network and the target is to take this to **2.5 lakh gram panchayats**.

About DigiGaon or Digital Village

- It has been **conceptualized as a connected village** where citizens can avail various e-services of the central government, state governments and private players.
- These villages are also projected to be **change agents, promoting rural entrepreneurship and building rural capacities and livelihoods** through community participation and collective action.
- The scheme focuses on **empowering the entire village community** by providing access to education, health or financial services through the digital medium.

- Further, in a digital village, residents are encouraged to become **digitally literate**. Residents can avail quality healthcare through telemedicine consultations. Lastly, the digital village also promotes a **financially inclusive society** by providing banking, insurance and pension services at the doorstep of citizens.
- Lastly, such villages are also equipped with an **LED assembly unit, a sanitary napkin unit, a paper bag-making unit and a rural BPO** to promote employment among the youth.

Challenges to BharatNet Project

- Approximately, **77% of urban users and 97% of rural population** believe that the primary source to access internet is through mobile phone.
- Issues related to **data protection, cyber security etc.** pose a challenge to provide secure cyber space to users.
- **Affordability of internet** remains an issue which restricts rural population to adopt the services.
- **Internet knowledge and familiarity** with applications such as e-mail still remain a challenge.

Way forward

- There is a need to increase the **awareness regarding broadband usage** and improve computer knowledge among population.
- The option of low-priced laptops and personal computers should be developed to increase the usage.
- Further, efforts must be made to **improve cyber security** and address the **issues related to privacy**.

Supreme Court (SC) Directs States To Establish Gram Nyayalayas

- The SC bench has requested the Chief Justices of High Courts, where the constitution of **Gram Nyayalayas** and appointments of its members are pending to expedite the process of consultation with the respective state governments.
- A bench also took into account the fact that several states have issued notifications for establishing Gram Nyayalayas but all of them were not functioning except in **Kerala, Maharashtra and Rajasthan**.
- The plea in the SC also pointed out that Bhushan had said that only **208 Gram Nyayalayas** are functioning in the country as against **2,500 estimated to be required by the 12th five year plan**.

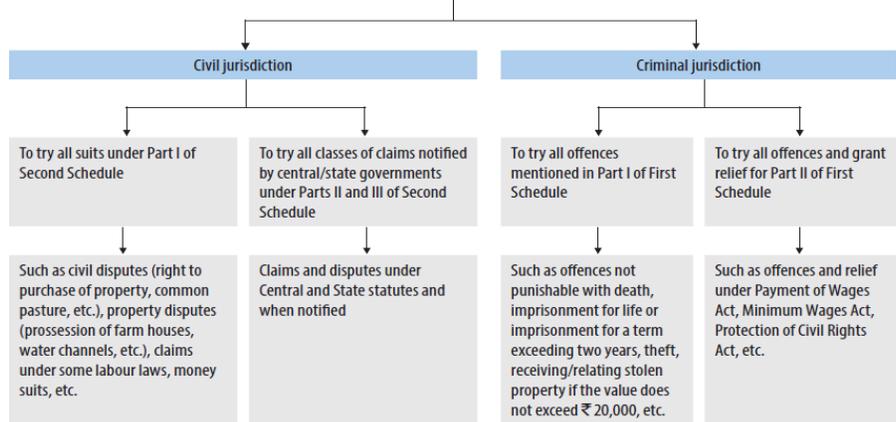
Gram Nyayalayas Act, 2008

- An Act passed by Parliament, which provided for setting up of **Gram Nyayalayas** at the grass roots level for **providing access to justice to citizens at the doorstep** and to ensure that **opportunities for securing justice are not denied** to anyone by reason of social, economic or other disabilities.
- Further, **Sections 5 and 6** of the 2008 Act provide that state government in consultation with the High court will appoint a **Nyayadhikari for each Gram Nyayalaya**, who will be a person eligible to be appointed as a **Judicial Magistrate of the First Class**.
- Gram Nyayalayas shall try those cases whose **maximum punishment is a year's imprisonment or fine or in which offence is compoundable**. They shall also settle civil suits dealing with land, water, etc. as listed in a Schedule.
- In Civil disputes, Gram Nyayalayas shall **not be bound by the rules of procedure like** in Code of Civil Procedure, 1908 or Indian Evidence Act, 1872. In criminal cases, the court shall follow procedures for **summary trials**.

- Appeals in civil and criminal cases shall be heard by the **Senior civil judge and the Assistant sessions judge**, respectively. **Further appeals are not permitted.**

Way forward

- To improve the efficiency of Gram Nyayalaya there is a need for **proper training of Gram Nyayadhikari**, providing these bodies with **sufficient infrastructure and security**.
- Further, the provision must also be made for **creation of awareness** among various stakeholders.



Supreme Court (SC) Panel On Prison Reforms

- The **Justice Amitava Roy (retd.) Committee** appointed by the SC on prison reforms has submitted its report.
- Besides Justice Roy, the members included an IG, Bureau of Police Research and Development and the DG (Prisons), Tihar Jail.
- The court had in **September 2018** appointed the Committee to examine the various problems plaguing prisons, from overcrowding to lack of legal advice to convicts to issues of remission and parole.
- The decision was in reaction to a letter written by **former Chief Justice of India R.C. Lahoti** highlighting the overcrowding of prisons, unnatural deaths of prisoners, gross inadequacy of staff and the lack of trained staff.

Challenges

- In India, as per the publication (Prison Statistics India), brought out by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) there has been an average **occupancy rate of 114%** in most of the prisons.
- The **ratio between the prison staff and the prison population is approximately 1:7**. In the absence of adequate prison staff, overcrowding of prisons leads to rampant violence and other criminal activities inside the jails.
- About **67% of total inmates were undertrials**, which has further complicated the problem.
- The **long incarceration of undertrial** in any form is uncivilized, especially when it is so long drawn out and when the objective of criminal punishment should be one of reform rather than wreaking vengeance on a perpetrator of crime.
- For poor and marginalized it is also **difficult to get bail**, which leaves them no option but to stay in jails and wait for courts final order.
- Over **60 per cent of arrests were unnecessary** and such arrests accounted for 3 percent of jail expenditure.
- **Legal aid lawyers** are poorly paid and often over-burdened with cases. Further, there is no monitoring mechanism to evaluate the quality of legal aid representation in most states.

- **Prison structures in India are in dilapidated condition.** Further, lack of space, poor ventilation, poor sanitation and hygiene make living conditions deplorable in Indian prisons.
- Another complaint against prisons is the **brutality and venality of prison officials**, again common across the world.
- In 2015, a total of **1,584 prisoners died in jails**. A large proportion of the deaths in custody were from natural and easily curable causes aggravated by poor prison conditions. Further, there have been allegations of custodial deaths due to torture.

Suggestion of Roy Committee

- At the outset, the Committee noted that the **Prison Department has a perennial average of 30%-40% vacancies**. Further, the Committee was of the opinion that both the prisoner and his guard equally suffer human rights violation. The undertrial prisoner, who is yet to get his day in court, suffers the most, languishing behind bars for years without a hearing.
- It noted that **most prisons are teeming with undertrial prisoners**, whose numbers are highly disproportionate to those of convicts.
- It said there should be at least **one lawyer for every 30 prisoners**. This is not the case now.
- It suggested that **speedy trial** remains one of the best ways to remedy the unwarranted phenomenon of overcrowding of prisons.
- Every new prisoner should be allowed a **free phone call a day to his family members** to see him through his first week in jail.
- Committee recommended that **modern cooking facilities, canteens to buy essential items and trial through video-conferencing** should be allowed to reform prisons.

Best Practices

- Norway's incarceration rate is only **75 per 100,000 people**.
- The criminal justice system in Norway focuses on the principle of **restorative justice and rehabilitating prisoners**.
- **30% of prisons** in Norway are open and all prisons ensure healthy living conditions, vocational training and recreational facilities.

Way forward:

- There is a belief that improving prison conditions, there is likely to be an attendant impact on the incidence of crime. This accounts for the reluctance of many criminal justice administrators to employ or enlarge non-prison alternatives such as community service.
- Moreover, there is a popular view that in order to reduce prison populations, proven nonviolent offenders could be dealt differently and white-collar crime are one of such kind of offences. Devising swift processes of attachment of properties and freezing of bank accounts are alternatives to a jail term.

India 5th Most Polluted Country In the World

According to the **World Air Quality Report, 2019** compiled by **IQAir Air Visual**, India was the **5th most polluted country** in 2019, with **Ghaziabad in the National Capital Region** ranked as the most polluted city in the world.

Other Noteworthy Points Of The Report

- On the whole, air pollution in India decreased in 2019 from 2018, though **about half of the 50 most polluted cities** were in India, the report notes.

- India launched a **National Clean Air Programme ('NCAP')** in 2019 that commits to reducing air pollution in 102 most polluted cities by a maximum of 30% by 2024. The report however notes that the reduction in pollution in 2019 couldn't be attributed to the NCAP but rather was due to a slowing economic growth.
- Whilst cities in India, on average, exceed the World Health Organisation ('WHO') target for annual PM2.5 exposure by 500%, national air pollution decreased by 20% from 2018 to 2019, with 98% of cities experiencing improvements.
- Moreover, as per the report, **Bangladesh was marked the most polluted country** in 2019 with an average PM 2.5 concentration of 83 µg/m³. **Pakistan came next** with 65 µg/m³ and India recorded an average of 58.1 µg/m³. In the 2018 version of the IQAir report, the top two countries were the same and India was the third most polluted in the world with an average of 72 µg/m³.
- In the 90 country/region-ranking, the **Bahamas ranked the cleanest** with an average of 3 µg/m³.
- The new dataset highlights elevated air pollution levels as a result of **climate change events**, such as sandstorms and wildfires and pollution gains from the rapid urbanization of cities, in regions such as Southeast Asia.
- Lastly, as per the report, while some achievements have been made in air quality monitoring infrastructure globally, there are still huge gaps in access to data around the world.

MOST POLLUTED CITIES IN 2019

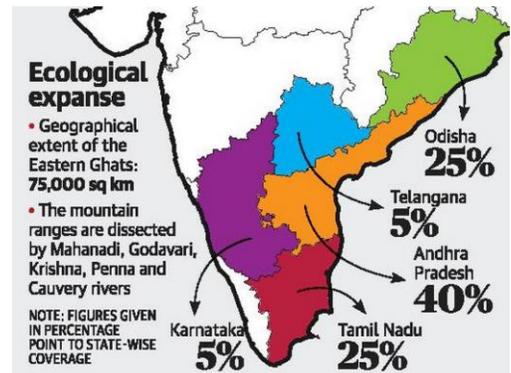
Rank	City	PM2.5 (micrograms/cu. m)
1	Ghaziabad (India)	110.2
2	Hotan (China)	110.1
3	Gujranwala (Pak)	105.3
4	Faisalabad (Pak)	104.6
5	Delhi (India)	98.6
6	Noida (India)	97.7
7	Gurgaon (India)	93.1
8	Raiwind (Pak)	92.2
9	Greater Noida (India)	91.3
10	Bandhwari (India)	90.5

Demand For Declaring Eastern Ghats As UNESCO Cultural Heritage Site

- The **Greens' Alliance for Conservation of Eastern Ghats (GRACE)** and the **Council for Green Revolution (CGR)** have demanded that all the historically and culturally significant mountains of the Eastern Ghats should be declared **UNESCO cultural heritage sites**.
- These groups in their report titled '**Eastern Ghats - Environment Outlook**' have also declared that five States encompassing Eastern Ghats viz. **Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and Odisha** should prepare an action plan to protect and conserve their ecology and natural resources.
- The report said the degradation of the Eastern Ghats, which began a century ago, had accelerated since the 1970s and the ecosystem of the hills had lost their natural species composition, forest structure, size, scale and character. According to the report, the situation was grave due to the **threats and challenges to floral and faunal elements** and the bio-geographic significance of the Eastern Ghats was declining fast.

Other Salient Feature Of The Report

- They have also demanded that the Central government form a **Regional Coordination Committee of States on Eastern Ghats** with a mandate for linking and coordinating activities relating to the Ghats, and have sought the appointment of a **Nature Ombudsman** for the Eastern Ghats and the publication of an Environmental Atlas of the Eastern Ghats, incorporating various ecological, social, cultural and heritage information, among others.



- Land of Eastern Ghats have become sites for clandestine **dumping of toxic waste, illegal mining, poaching and hunting, including human trafficking.**

Importance Of Eastern Ghats

- The Report further notes that the region hosts wildlife sanctuaries, biosphere reserves and Ramsar convention sites. However, a large part of the Eastern Ghats wilderness is **yet to be covered under the conservation umbrella.**
- The ecosystem of the region is fragile that is home to nearly **5 million tribal people** belonging to nearly **60 indigenous communities.**

Way forward

The biological integrity of the Eastern Ghats had to be protected on a war-footing and a **Marshall Plan** was needed for the revival of its natural glory and green cover and for ensuring that wildlife was free from the fear of extinction.

New Migratory Species Protected Under Global Wildlife Agreement

- During the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (**CMS COP13**) concluded in Gandhinagar, India, with resolutions and decisions adopted to help conserve migratory species globally.
- **Asian elephants, jaguars and great Indian bustards** are among 10 new species added to a global wildlife agreement.

Other Important Noteworthy Points

- In addition to Asian elephants, jaguars and great Indian bustards, all slated to receive the strictest protection under Appendix I, **Bengal floricans, little bustards, antipodean albatrosses and oceanic white-tip sharks** also made the cut.
- Meanwhile, **urials** along with **smooth hammerhead and tope sharks** were listed as migratory species that would benefit from enhanced international cooperation and conservation actions.

Gandhinagar Declaration

- Maintaining and restoring ecological connectivity is a top CMS priority, especially in managing migratory species and their habitats as evidenced by the newly adopted **Gandhinagar Declaration**, which was affirmed by 130 party countries.
- The Declaration calls for **migratory species and the concept of ecological connectivity** to be integrated and prioritized in the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, which is expected to be adopted at the UN Biodiversity Conference in October 2020.
- The declaration agreed on a number of **cross-cutting policy measures** to address threats to migratory species, such as integrating biodiversity and

GANDHINAGAR DECLARATION



10 MIGRATORY SPECIES ADDED TO GLOBAL WILDLIFE AGREEMENT: At CMS-COP13, which concluded at Gandhinagar on Saturday, saw 10 new species being added to the CMS Appendices. They include three Indian proposals – Asian elephant, Great Indian bustard and Bengal florican – besides species from other countries like Little bustard, Antipodean albatross and the Oceanic white-tip shark in Appendix 1, which provides the strictest protection



► The Urial, Smooth hammerhead shark and the Tope shark were listed for protection under Appendix II, which covers migratory species that have an unfavourable conservation status and would benefit from enhanced international cooperation and conservation actions. New actions with conservation plans were agreed for 14 species



INTEGRATED APPROACH: CMS-COP13 adopted the Gandhinagar Declaration, which aims to send a message to the first negotiating session of the Open-ended Working Group on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework convening in Rome next week. The Declaration calls for migratory species and the concept of 'ecological connectivity' to be integrated and prioritized

► CMS-COP13, inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was the largest ever in the history of the convention, with 2,550 people attending including 263 delegates representing 82 parties, 11 delegates from 5 non-party countries, 50 representatives from United Nations agencies, among others



migratory species considerations into national energy and climate policy and promote wildlife-friendly renewable energy.

- The declaration also pledged to focus on the conservation of migratory birds along the **Central Asian Flyway** and announced the establishment of an **institutional research facility** for the conservation of migratory birds and marine turtles, the reduction of pollution from micro-plastic and single-use plastic, and other things.

About the CMS Convention:

- The **Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)**, is an environment treaty under the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**.
- It is also referred to as the **Bonn Convention** that provides a global platform for the conservation and sustainable use of migratory animals and their habitats.
- It also lays the legal foundation for internationally coordinated conservation measures throughout a migratory range.
- There are **130 parties to the convention** and India has been a member since 1983.
- There are now **173 species** in the Appendix 1 of the Convention.

State of India’s Birds Report, 2020

- The State of India’s Birds report, 2020, the first comprehensive assessment of range, abundance and conservation status of birds in India, has underlined concerns about some bird species and good news about a few others.
- The report was released during CMS COP13, the international conference held recently in Gandhinagar.
- The report was prepared as a **partnership among 10 organisations** including the World Wildlife Fund, Wildlife Institute of India and Nature Biodiversity Authority-India. Much of its data is based on citizen science — information provided by birdwatchers through various platforms.

ABUNDANCETRENDS

Category	Species: Long-term	Species: Current
Data deficient	375	185
Uncertain	226	531
Strong decline	58	72
Moderate decline	77	44
Stable	114	9
Moderate increase	5	6
Strong increase	7	15
Total	862*	862*

About The Report

- About **867 number of bird species** whose status was assessed. This assessment was based on **three indices**: long-term trend in abundance (over 25+ years); current annual trend in abundance (last 5 years) and distribution range size.
- 261 was the number of species for which long-term trends could be determined. Of these, **52% species have declined since 2000** (with 22% declining strongly), 43% showed a long-term stable trend, and 5% showed an increasing trend.
- Further, 146 was the number of species for which current annual trends could be estimated. Nearly **80% are declining (almost 50% declining strongly), 6% are stable and 14% are increasing**.
- As per the Report, for all but 6 species, range size estimated *i.e.* moderate sizes for 46% species, large/very large for 33%, restricted/very restricted for 21%.
- While the **house sparrow** has been in the news due to concerns about declining populations, with many people reporting seeing fewer sparrows than before, the report cites new analysis to show that the house sparrow has been fairly stable overall during the past 25+ years. Due to lack of evidence for countrywide decline, it is classified as of low conservation concern.

- **Indian peafowl**, the species finds itself under the highest level of legal protection, placed in **Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972** and further amendments. Peafowl are spread across plains and hills of India, except in extremely dry or wet regions. The abundance trend is that of a general increase, both long term and currently.

Permanent Commission to Women Officers

The Supreme Court has granted women the **right to “permanent commission” (PC)**, and the **right to command**. This is being hailed as an important step towards granting women the right to serve in the military on equal terms with men.

Key Highlights

- SC ordered the government to **grant permanent commission to women** officers in the Army’s noncombat support units on par with their male counterparts *should they wish to continue with it after completing their short-service commission*.
- The **‘no women in combat’ rule was not challenged in the SC** as Delhi HC had upheld the policy decision to keep women out from the combat role.

Background

- The petition was filed by a group of 332 women army officers, who joined the army from 1993 onwards.
- The Delhi High Court had in 2010 ordered the government to grant permanent commission to all short-service commission officers **while upholding a policy decision to keep out women from the combat units**.
- The government challenged this ruling in SC.

Current Situation

- Women **already serve in combat roles in the air force**, which last year qualified its first women fighter pilots.
- Navy chief, Admiral Karambir Singh, pointed out in December that women naval officers already perform combat tasks. They are engaged in activities such as firing torpedoes and missiles at enemy warships while serving as observers and weapons systems officers on board maritime aircraft like the P-8I Poseidon.
- Women officers also serve on board naval warships in combat, albeit discharging non-combat roles.
- However, there remains **strong institutional resistance** to allowing women into **combat roles in the army**.

Prevailing Situation in Army

- Woman officers were **permitted PC in only two services** – the Judge Advocate General’s Branch and the Army Education Corps.
- Women officers in all other units were entitled only to a “Short Service Commission” (SSC), which allows them to serve five years, extendable to 10 years; and then a maximum of 14 years (earning a pension requires an officer to have served at least 20 years).
- However, on February 25, 2019, the **defence ministry permitted SSC women officers in another eight arms/services to be granted PC**.

Women officers in Armed Forces: Data

Just 3.8 per cent of the army's 42,253 officers, 6 per cent of the navy's 10,393 officers and 13.1 per cent of the air force's 12,404 officers are women.

Women in Combat Role: A Debate**Arguments Opposing The Combat Role**

- **Physical Ability** - The standards of physical fitness have been set to suit men, and women attempting to reach them will over-stretch themselves and will suffer high injury rates.
- **Additional Burden** - integration of women through regulatory and disciplinary costs associated may not make it a worthwhile move.
- **Military readiness** - Pregnancy can affect the deployability of a unit when the unit has a disproportionate number of women or is understaffed.
- **Abuse by Enemy** - Both male and female prisoners are at risk of torture and rape, but misogynistic societies may be more willing to abuse woman prisoners.
- **Possible insubordination** – In India, most of the jawans are from rural origin, may not be ready to accept a woman as their officer.

Arguments in Support

- **Ability vs Gender** - As long as an applicant is qualified for a position, one's gender is arbitrary.
- **Military Readiness** - Women, who choose to become active combat soldiers, are unlikely to shirk their duty by becoming pregnant after a call-up.
- **Changing Traditions** - Cultures change over time and the masculine subculture can evolve too. Many previously masculine professions have been successfully opened to women over the past century.
- **Wider base** - Having a wider personnel base allows militaries to have the best and most diplomatic soldiers working to end conflict quickly.

Conclusion

- Many countries including Germany, Australia, Canada, the US, Britain, Denmark, Finland, France, Norway, Sweden and Israel have allowed women in combat roles.
- India can certainly gain from their experience although there is a variance in the cultural milieu.
- There are a plethora of challenges that need to be tackled through a trial-and-error method to evolve a planned induction.

India's First Integrated Air Defence Command

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Bipin Rawat announced that **India's first integrated tri-services command** will be set up by June.

Key Highlights

- Integrated tri-services command will be headed by a **three-star Indian Air Force (IAF) officer**.
- It will have elements of Army and Air Force air defence assets under it.
- CDS is also working on the creation of the **joint Peninsula Command** and a **Logistics Command** apart from the theatre commands.

- A logistic support pool could be a **single depot and base workshop** that provides supplies and repair works to the services. This will lead to saving manpower and funds, and avoid wastage.
- CDS also emphasised upon the **need of having a collegiate system of functioning**.
- A collegiate system of functioning would require that **all three services and the Coast Guard must be consulted and their views obtained in a time bound manner**.

Need

- Each service has its individual air defence set-up. The air defence command would **integrate the air defence and assets** of the Army, Air Force and Navy and jointly provide air defence cover to the country.
- This could also lead to **regular training with ground forces** in simulated combat scenarios.
- Having such a command could **finetune the system of providing early warning** of incoming enemy aircraft and missiles. It could also involve using space assets.
- It could be on the similar lines of the **two tri-services command- the Strategic Forces Command and the Andaman and Nicobar Command**.

Integrated Theatre Command

- An integrated theatre command is a **unified command of the three Services** which remain under a single commander, for regions where security remains a prime concern.
- During wartime, the commander of such a force will have the power to bring all resources at his disposal, be it the IAF, the Army or the Navy seamlessly. The integrated theatre commander **will not be answerable to any individual Services**.
- India currently has **service-specific commands** where the Army, Air Force and Navy have their own commands across the country.
- While the Army and the Air Force have 14 commands, the Navy has 3 commands.

The Military Balance 2020

The International Institute of Strategic Studies has released its report titled “**Military Balance**”. The report highlights the **Defence Spending all over the world**. It provides an annual assessment of the military capabilities and defence economics of 171 countries worldwide.

Key Highlights

- According to the report, the **global spending rose by 4% in 2019** which is the largest growth in 10 years.
- The report highlights the **Military use of the electromagnetic spectrum**. It states that there is renewed focus on electronic warfare.
- It also highlights that the Defence race between China and US has increased alarmingly.
- Under the **Military Modernization Programme**, China is developing new hard to detect Hypersonic missiles. This has forced US to spend more towards its Defence Programmes (in 2018-19, US spent 53.4 billion USD).
- It concludes that **defence spending in Europe** reached levels not seen since before the financial crisis, **increasing by 4.2% when** compared with 2018.

NATO Pledge on Defence Spending: The member nation should contribute 2% of its GDP to Defence .
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World's Cheapest Gun Shot Locator

- World's cheapest gun shot locators has been named as "Parth". It has been developed by the Army's College of Military Engineering jointly with a private firm.
- The device costs around Rs 3 lakhs, and if inducted, would replace a similar imported item which costs around Rs 65 lakhs.
- The device can locate the exact location of a bullet from a distance of 400m and will help to locate and neutralize terrorist faster.
- The College of Military Engineering (CME) at Pune, a premier tactical & Technical training institution is the alma mater of the Corps of Engineers.
- CME is responsible for training of personnel of the Corps of Engineers besides imparting instructions in Combat Engineering, CBRN Protection, Works Services and GIS matters to the personnel of All Arms & Services.

India Attends Munich Security Conference

- Minister of External Affairs, S Jaishankar attended the Munich Security Conference held in Munich, Germany.
- The Munich Security Conference was **established in 1963** by Ewald-Heinrich von Kleist-Schmenzin, a former German army officer who participated in a failed attempt to assassinate Adolf Hitler.
- It was established with the aim of gathering leaders and diplomatic experts to discuss the state of NATO and relations between powers on either side of the Atlantic.
- Over the decades, **the annual meeting has grown to include global security concerns.**

Controversy:

- Many analysts allege that the conference is usually a **backdrop for heated clashes** over narratives **rather than provide a forum to actually solve security issues.**
- Last year, German Chancellor Angela Merkel clashed with US Vice President Mike Pence over the Iran nuclear deal, rejecting US pressure for Europe to pull out of the agreement.

Bandhan Ceremony

- Over 200 partnerships involving Signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs), Transfer of Technology (ToTs) , Product launches were concluded at DefExpo 2020.
- This was concluded at a **ceremony tilted "Bandhan"**.
- These pacts were aimed at forging and renewing partnerships for innovative collaboration, and transformation of the Defence manufacturing in the country.
- The signing of MoUs is a step in the direction to achieve Prime Minister's **\$5 billion defence exports target in next 5 years.**

Sharang Artillery Guns

- The Sharang Artillery Gun has been inducted into Indian Army. The artillery guns are currently **produced at the Kanpur ordnance** factory.
- It is an indigenously upgraded 155 mm/45 calibre artillery gun, with a range of 39 km.

- Sharang gun systems are equipped with night vision sensors to target the enemy and can be operated at night.
- Artillery is a heavy military ranged weapons built to launch munitions.

New Light Combat Helicopter Production Centre

- The new Light Combat Helicopter (LCH) Production Hangar has been inaugurated at Helicopter Division in **Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) Complex at Bengaluru, Karnataka.**
- LCH is a 5.5-tonne class combat helicopter designed and developed by HAL.
- It is powered by **two Shakti engines** and inherits many technical features of the Advanced Light Helicopter.
- LCH has the distinction of being the **first attack helicopter** to land in Forward Bases at Siachen, 4,700 mts above sea level with 500kg load.

VAJRA: Indian Coast Guard's Offshore Patrol Vessel

- VAJRA, the **sixth coast guard Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV-6)** was launched in Chennai to enhance coastal security.
- This OPV is to be utilized for patrolling, surveying, anti-smuggling and anti-terrorist operations.
- The vessel is expected to strengthen the Indian Coast Guard's efforts to secure the vast Indian coastline and the exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

Amendments in Arms Act, 1959 and Arms Rules, 2016

The Government has notified the amendments in Arms Act, 1959 and Arms Rules, 2016.

Key Highlights

- As per the new rules, now International Medallists/Renowned Shooters are allowed to keep additional **weapons up to a total of twelve** under the exempted category. Earlier, it **was seven**.
- If a shooter is **renowned in one event**, he can keep **maximum eight** (previously it was four), if a shooter is **renowned in two events** he can keep **maximum ten** (previously it was seven) and if a shooter is **renowned in more than two events**, he can keep **maximum twelve** (previously it was seven) firearms under exempted category.
- The junior target shooter/ aspiring shooter are now allowed to possess two weapons (previously one) of any category in which the person is junior target shooter/aspiring shooter.
- Similarly, the quantity of ammunition that can be purchased by the shooters during the year for the practice has also been increased considerably.
- Maximum number of firearms to be possessed by any person has been **reduced from three to two**.
- Those in possession of three firearms have been given facility to retain any two of such firearms and to deposit the remaining firearm by 13.12.2020.
- No licence is required for Indian citizens for acquisitions, possession of small arms falling under the category of curio. However, appropriate licence as prescribed would be required for use or to carry or transport such small arms.

Clause 6 of Assam Accord

- A high-level committee on Clause 6 of Assam Accord has submitted its report to Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal.
- The committee, **headed by retired Justice Biplab Sharma**, gave recommendations and measures to **implement the Clause 6 of the Assam Accord**.
- Assam Accord was signed between the All Assam Students Union (AASU), Union government and Assam government on August 15, 1985, in the presence of then prime minister Rajiv Gandhi.

Clause 6:

- Clause 6 of the Assam Accord pledges to provide constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate, to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.
- The Centre had constituted the high-level committee in July 2019, for recommending measures to implement the Clause 6 of the Assam Accord.

[For detailed discussion on Assam Accord, please refer Yellow Book on Internal Security]

NCRB Study on Women & Child Trafficking Cases

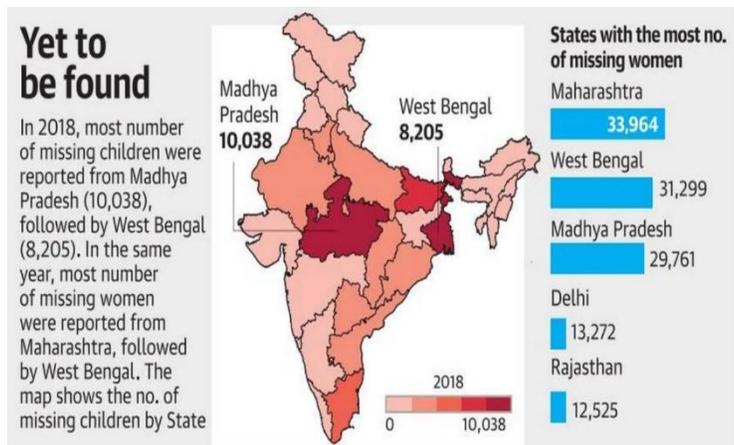
The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) has compiled the data on missing children and women. The NCRB study was based on the annual Crime in India Report compiled by the agency for the years 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Background

In 2011, SC constituted a panel which submitted its report in 2019. The panel has asked the apex court to direct **NCRB to compile data** on missing children and women to identify the areas prone to trafficking.

Key Highlights

- According to the study, the highest incidence of children and women being trafficked were observed from the **cities of Mumbai and Kolkata**.
- The study highlighted that the common causes of trafficking were **forced marriages, child labour, domestic help and sexual exploitation**, among others.
- **Maharashtra** reported the maximum number of missing women and **Madhya Pradesh** reported **maximum number of cases of missing children**.



UNODC Global Report 2018 On Trafficking

- The report indicates that the vast majority of detected victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation were females.
- About 35% of the victims trafficked for forced labour were also females, both women and girls.
- At the same time, more than half of the victims of trafficking for forced labour were men

Pakistan Court Sentences Hafiz Saeed to 11 Years in Jail

- Jamat-ud-Dawa (JuD) Chief, Hafiz Saeed, was sentenced to 11 years in jail by an anti-terrorism court in Pakistan in two terror financing cases.
- Saeed, a United Nations (UN) designated terrorist whom the US has placed a USD 10 million bounty on, was arrested on July 17 in the terror financing cases.
- The crackdown on Saeed's outfit last year followed a warning by the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force to **Pakistan to deliver on its commitments to curb terror financing and money laundering.**

UAE Discovers New Natural Gas Reserves

- The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has discovered a new natural gas field with **80 trillion standard cubic feet (tscf) of shallow gas resources.**
- Shallow gas resources are reserves found trapped **not too deep from the surface but they need advanced technology for production.**

Key Highlights

- The reservoir, named '**Jebel Ali**', is located between the emirates of Dubai and Abu Dhabi.
- The gas find is the **largest** since the discovery of the Galkynysh field in Turkmenistan in 2005.
- At 80 tscf, the new reservoir would now be **ranked the fourth largest by size** in the Middle East, *behind the North Field in Qatar, South Pars in Iran, and the Bab field in Abu Dhabi.*

- **Qatar** is the **world's largest** liquefied natural gas (LNG) producer.
- It produces and supplies the globe with **42 million metric tonnes of LNG annually.**
- Most of this gas is pumped from the North Field, which is part of the world's largest gas field that is shared between Qatar and Iran.

Significance

- The discovery is expected to reduce the **UAE's dependence on gas supplies for electricity from Qatar**, a nation with which the former has had a bitter standoff since 2017.
- Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt had cut ties with Qatar, and also shut their airspace to Qatari aircraft.

Malaysia's Prime Minister Resigned

- Malaysian **Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad** unexpectedly resigned. He, in coalition with his longtime rival Anwar Ibrahim, had won the 2018 general election.
- Later, Malaysia's former Interior Minister **Muhyiddun Yassin** was sworn in as the prime minister after being appointed by the Malaysian king.

Malaysian Electoral Process

- The Constitution of Malaysia requires a general election to be held in the **fifth calendar year unless it is dissolved earlier.**
- The elections are held at all 222 seats in the **Dewan Rakyat** (Parliament of Malaysia) and 505 seats in 12 out of 13 state legislative assemblies.
- Members are elected from single-member constituencies that each elects one representative to the Dewan Rakyat using the first-past-the-post voting system.

- Under the country's constitution, the **king is obliged to appoint a member of parliament whom he believes has the majority support from other lawmakers as prime minister.**
- **Malaysia practices a unique form of monarchy, where nine hereditary Malay sultans take turns to be the country's king for a term of five years.**
- Malaysia does not practice compulsory voting and automatic voter registration. The voting age is above 21 although the age of majority in the country is 18.

[For discussion on India-Malaysia Relation, please refer the January 2020 edition of the CA Magazine]

Sri Lanka Withdraws from UNHRC Resolution on War Crimes

Sri Lanka has formally notified the UN Human Right Council that it was **withdrawing from the UN resolution on post-war accountability and reconciliation.**

Background

- Sri Lanka and 11 other countries **co-sponsored the UNHRC resolution 40/1 in 2015** for the investigation of wartime violence by Tamil Tiger rebels and Government forces.
- The main aim was to **promote accountability, reconciliation and human rights.**
- The resolution also called for providing answers on the fate of thousands who reportedly went missing in the war and obtaining the support of international prosecutors and judges in trials against alleged perpetrators.

Controversy

- Many analysts have expressed concern over this move. They contend that **Sri Lanka has still not addressed** impunity for past violations, nor undertaken the security sector reforms needed to address their drivers and enablers.
- In such scenario, the decision risks setting back efforts for post-war reconciliation.
- Experts also claim that Sri Lanka cannot pull out of the resolution until 2021 as it is **co-sponsor till the end of the resolution, which is in 2021.**
- Only after 2021, Sri Lanka can decide whether you want to co-sponsor the next resolution or not.

About UNHRC

- The Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system made up of 47 States responsible for the promotion and protection of all human rights around the globe.
- The Human Rights Council replaced the former United Nations Commission on Human Rights.
- The Council was created by the United Nations General Assembly on 15 March 2006 by resolution.

Afghanistan's Taliban, US Sign Agreement Aimed at Ending War

US officials and Taliban representatives have signed an agreement after months of negotiations in Doha. The agreement is aimed at ending the United States' longest war, fought in Afghanistan since 2001.

Key Highlights

- The agreement was signed in the presence of leaders from Pakistan, Qatar, Turkey, **India**, Indonesia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.
- **The agreement has four points:**
 - a timeline of 14 months for the withdrawal of all US and NATO troops from Afghanistan;

- a Taliban guarantee that Afghan soil will not be used as a launchpad that would threaten the security of the US;
- the launch of intra-Afghan negotiations by March 10;
- and a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire.
- The Afghan government will engage with the United Nations Security Council "to remove Taliban members from sanctions list by May 29".
- The deal also provides for a **prisoner swap**. Some 5,000 Taliban prisoners and 1,000 Afghan security force prisoners would be exchanged by 10 March.

Background

- Since 2011, Qatar has hosted Taliban leaders who have moved there to discuss peace in Afghanistan. A Taliban office was opened in 2013, and closed the same year amid rows over flags.
- The **talks were launched in 2018** as part of a push by US President Donald Trump's administration to strike a deal with the Taliban.
- The two sides were on the verge of signing a peace agreement in September when Trump abruptly cancelled the talks after a Taliban attack killed an American soldier.

What's The Background To The Afghan War

- It began when the US launched air strikes one month following the 11 September 2001 attacks and after the Taliban had refused to hand over the man behind them, Osama bin Laden.
- The US was joined by an international coalition and the Taliban were quickly removed from power.
- However, they turned into an insurgent force and continued deadly attacks, destabilising subsequent Afghan governments.
- The international coalition ended its combat mission in 2014, staying only to train Afghan forces. But the US continued its own, scaled-back combat operation, including air strikes.

Why Has The War Lasted So Long

- Fierce Taliban resistance & the limitations of Afghan forces and governance
- Other countries' reluctance to keep their troops for longer in Afghanistan.
- A lack of political clarity since the invasion began and ineffectiveness of US' strategy
- An increase in violence by Islamic State militants in Afghanistan
- Role played by Afghanistan's neighbour, Pakistan.

Egypt's Former President Hosni Mubarak Dies

- Hosni Mubarak, **Egypt's president for almost 30 years** who stepped down after a popular revolution in 2011, has died.
- Mubarak served as **Egypt's fourth president** starting in 1981. He was removed in what became known as the **Arab Spring revolution**.

Reverse Osmosis

- The Union Environment Ministry has issued a draft notification that seeks to regulate **membrane-based water filtration systems** in areas where the source of water meets drinking water norms of the Bureau of Indian Standards.

- This primarily affects reverse osmosis (RO)-based water filtration systems and the rules, at least in letter, effectively prohibit homes from installing domestic RO systems.

About Reverse Osmosis (RO) Systems

- RO was originally a technology devised to **desalinate sea water**. The idea exploits the principle of osmosis. Further, RO desalination came about in the late 1950s and primarily in large industrial settings to **convert brackish sea water into potable drinking water**.
- However, it is possible to deploy **a wide array of membranes and multiple stages of filters to filter a wide variety of solutes** like arsenic, fluoride, hexavalent chromium, nitrates, bacteria that come mixed in water. This has led to an industry of home-RO systems that are installed in a multiplicity of ways to provide potable water.

THE FILTER YOU NEED

IF YOUR WATER HAS...	THEN USE THIS FILTER
1. Impurities larger than 0.0005 micron, dissolved salts and germs from water	 RO filtration
2. Suspended particles, including pathogenic organisms, and turbidity but not dissolved solids and salts	 UF (ultrafiltration) purification
3. Biological impurities such as all germs, bacteria, microbes, cysts, but no TDS or turbidity	 UV (ultra violet) purification
4. Chemicals like chlorine, pesticides and some impurities, but no microbes	 Activated carbon filter
5. Basic water with big impurity particles, but has no microbes or tiny impurities	 Candle filter purifier

Based on inputs from filter system companies. Consumers should do their own research before buying a purification device

Problem With RO System

- In making tap water pass through multiple stages of cleaning, RO systems end up **wasting a lot of water**.
- Anywhere between **three-five times more water is wasted** by them than they produce and given the challenges that cities and government face in providing potable water.
- Further, **environmentalist groups have convinced the National Green Tribunal (NGT)** to ban the use of RO systems in Delhi. It is as part of this legal dispute, which began in March 2019 that led the Environment Ministry to move to regulate RO systems.
- Another concern with RO is that it **filters out calcium, zinc, magnesium**, which are essential salts needed by the body; drinking such water over time could be harmful.
- Further, the National Institute of Virology (NIV) claimed that most filtration methods **did not eliminate Hepatitis E virus**.
- Lastly, opponents of RO systems also claim that this **increases costs** and **reduces the incentive** for public-funded water distribution systems to supply clean water to the vast majority of the country who can ill-afford such systems.

Additional Facts

- Bureau of Indian Standards, last year, ranked several cities on official water supply quality. Delhi was last and only Mumbai met all the standards.
- In the 28 test parameters, Delhi failed 19, Chennai 9, and Kolkata 10.
- The BIS norms are voluntary for public agencies which supply piped water but are mandatory for bottled water producers.
- The **Composite Water Management Index (CWMI) of NITI Aayog** says that 70% of water supply is contaminated.
- India is **ranked 120th among 122 countries** in an NGO, WaterAid’s quality index.

Way forward

- The aim should be to persuade authorities to upgrade and supply BIS-standard water at the consumer’s end. This should be done without additional costs, particularly on millions who now lack access to protected supply.
- The vision must also be to upscale the **Jal Jeevan Mission** that is committed to provide tap water to the entire country by 2024.

Vaccine for Classical Swine Fever

Indian scientists at ICAR's Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI), in Uttar Pradesh have developed a vaccine for the Classical Swine Fever (CSF).

Classical Swine Fever

- Classical swine fever (CSF) or hog cholera (also sometimes called pig plague), is a contagious viral disease of domestic and wild swine.
- It is caused by a virus which is closely related to the viruses that cause bovine viral diarrhoea in cattle and border disease in sheep.
- The CSF is one of the deadliest diseases of pigs, causing high mortality with annual loss of over Rs 400 crore. Though India has been able to prevent the disease to an extent, the classical swine fever is considered one of the reasons for causing decline in population of pigs in the country in 2019 compared to 2012 census.

Benefits Of The Vaccine

- The new vaccine is very economical as it costs around less than Rs 2 per dose as against Rs 15-25 per dose of lapinized CSF vaccine and Rs 30 per dose (approx) for an imported Korean vaccine which are currently being used in the country.
- The indigenously developed vaccine will also help in saving rabbits as the currently used vaccine (lapinized CSF vaccine) is produced by sacrificing large numbers of rabbits.
- Besides, the new vaccine gives immunity for two years as compared to 3 to 6 months' protection under the currently used vaccines.
- The new vaccine will be part of the government's 'One Health Initiative' and result in huge savings as it will nip the spread of the virus at animal stage so that it does not pass on to the human population.
- The country's total requirements is 22 million doses per year and hardly 1.2 million doses are produced per year by the lapinized vaccine, as only 50 doses are produced from a single rabbit spleen.
- But with the new vaccine, lakhs of doses can be produced very easily in cell culture and country's requirement can be easily fulfilled.

WHO Guidelines On Naming A Disease

- The UN health agency has announced that "COVID-19" will be the official name of the deadly coronavirus from China.
- "Co" stands for "corona", "vi" for "virus" and "d" for "disease", while "19" is for the year, as the outbreak was first identified on December 31.
- WHO had earlier given the virus the temporary name of "2019-nCoV acute respiratory disease" and China's National Health Commission was temporarily calling it "novel coronavirus pneumonia" or NCP.

WHO Guidlelines

- Concerned about the stigma that names of new diseases can cause to certain people and religion, the WHO came up with the new guidelines in May 2015.
- The WHO identified the best practices to name new human diseases in consultation and collaboration with the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

- The main aim behind this exercise was to minimise unnecessary negative impact of disease names on trade, travel, tourism or animal welfare, and avoid causing offence to any cultural, social, national, regional, professional or ethnic groups.

Nomenclature Allowed

- According to the guidelines, name of a new disease should consist of a combination of terms. These terms consist of a generic descriptive term based on clinical symptoms (respiratory), physiological processes (diarrhoea), and anatomical or pathological references (cardic).
- It can refer to specific descriptive terms such as those who are afflicted (infant, juvenile, and maternal), seasonality (summer, winter) and severity (mild, severe).
- The name can also include other factual elements such as the environment (ocean, river), causal pathogen (coronavirus) and the year the new disease is first detected with or without mentioning the month.
- The year is used when it becomes necessary to differentiate between similar events that happened in different years". In the case of COVID-19, coronavirus has caused other diseases such as the Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS).

Nomenclature Not Allowed

- Besides, the WHO has also listed out the terms that should be avoided while naming a new disease.
- WHO advises against using place names such as Ebola and Zika — where those diseases were first identified and which are now inevitably linked to them in the public mind.
- More general names such as "Middle East Respiratory Syndrome" or "Spanish flu" are also now avoided as they can stigmatise entire regions or ethnic groups.
- WHO also notes that using animal species in the name can create confusion, such as in 2009 when H1N1 was popularly referred to as "swine flu". This had a major impact on the pork industry even though the disease was being spread by people rather than pigs.
- People's names — usually the scientists who identified the disease — are also banned, as are "terms that incite undue fear" such as "unknown" or "fatal".

Handling Child Witnesses

- Police had recently charged a school in Bidar, Karnataka with sedition, for staging a play that was critical of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).
- Post which, the Karnataka State Commission for Protection of Child Rights has criticised the district police for violations, including repeated questioning of the children.
- Additionally, a public interest petition has been filed in the Karnataka High Court seeking a departmental inquiry against the policemen, for questioning children without the consent of their parents or guardians, and also video-recording them without consent.
- The PIL has asked for guidelines to be issued to police regarding interrogation of minors in criminal proceedings in accordance with the Juvenile Justice Act and United Nations resolutions.

International Conventions On Child Witnesses

- The Convention on the Rights of the Child, was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1989. India became a signatory to the Convention in 1992.

- As per the Convention, in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration.

United Nations: Justice in Matters Involving Child Victims and Witnesses in Crime: Model Law

- In 2009, the 'United Nations: Justice in Matters involving Child Victims and Witnesses in Crime: Model Law' provided a more specific set of guidelines in the context of child witnesses.
- These guidelines recommend that authorities treat children in a caring and sensitive manner, with interview techniques that "minimise distress or trauma to children".
- They recommend specifically that an investigator specially trained in dealing with children be appointed to guide the interview of the child, using a child-sensitive approach.
- As much as possible, the investigator should avoid repetition of the interview during the justice process in order to prevent secondary victimisation of the child.
- Secondary victimisation is defined as victimisation that occurs not as a direct result of a criminal act, but through the response of institutions and individuals to the victim.
- According to child rights activists, children repeatedly questioned by authorities while in police uniform, without the presence of their parents, can lead to such trauma.

Norms For Dealing With Child Witnesses In India

- Under Section 118 of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872, there is no minimum age for a witness. Children as young as three years old have been presented before trial courts in cases of sexual abuse.
- In 2016, the Delhi High Court said that while children can be pliable, their testimony can be considered after careful scrutiny.
- Trials involving children as witnesses have primarily been in cases of child sexual abuse. Other criminal cases where children are examined as witnesses have included those where a parent is the victim of violence at home, in the sole presence of the child.
- Usually during a trial, the court, before recording the testimony of a child witness, determines his or her competency on the basis of their ability to give rational answers.
- If the child is very young and does not understand the significance of taking an oath to speak the truth, the judge or the staff explain to the child that he or she should speak the truth, thinking of whichever God they believe in.

Delhi High Court Guidelines For Child Witnesses

- The Delhi High Court has come up with guidelines for recording of evidence of vulnerable witnesses in criminal matters. A vulnerable witness is defined as anyone who has not completed 18 years of age.
- The guidelines underline the importance of the criminal justice system to respond proactively, sensitively, and in an age-appropriate manner when dealing with children.
- As per the guidelines, the lengthy process of navigating the formal criminal justice system can affect the vulnerable witnesses' psychological development.
- The guidelines also allow for a facilitator, for a vulnerable witness to be appointed by a court for effective communication between various stakeholders including the police.

Laws Related To The Questioning Of Children In India**A. Juvenile Justice Act**

- The primary legislation in the country pertaining to children is The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015. The Act does not provide guidelines specifically relating to questioning or interviewing of children as witnesses.
- The Act's preamble, however, says that a child-friendly approach in the adjudication and disposal of matters in the best interest of children must be followed. This means following the general guidelines related to the juvenile justice system — for instance, the police should not be in their uniform while dealing with children.
- It also requires that interviews of children be done by specialised units of police who are trained to sensitively deal with them.
- The Act prescribes that a Special Juvenile Police Unit should be constituted by the state government in each district and city, headed by a police officer not below the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police.
- The unit should also include two social workers, at least one of whom must be a woman, and both of whom should be experienced in the field of child welfare. Their work includes coordinating with the police towards sensitive treatment of children.
- The Act also provides for a Child Welfare Committee in every district to keep track of any violations by the authorities in their handling of children.

B. POCSO Act

- Apart from the Juvenile Justice Act, The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 has specific guidelines regarding interviewing children as witnesses.
- Although, the guidelines are related to child sexual abuse victims, child rights activists say the guidelines are a framework for all children who are being interviewed by the police as witnesses.
- The Act states that interviews should be conducted in a safe, neutral, child-friendly environment, including allowing for them to be done at homes. It further says that a child should not be made to recount the incident in question multiple times.
- The Act also allows for a support person, who could be trained in counselling, to be present with the child to reduce stress and trauma.

Select Committee Recommendations On Surrogacy Regulation Bill

The Union Cabinet has approved the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill after incorporating recommendations of a Rajya Sabha Select Committee.

Background

- The Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill that aims to ban commercial surrogacy in the country and allow only altruistic surrogacy to protect vulnerable women from exploitation was passed by the Lok Sabha in August, 2019, but is pending with the Upper House.
- As per the Bill, the couple should have been legally married for at least five years and should be Indian citizens. They cannot have a surviving child, either biological or adopted, except when they have a child who is mentally or physically challenged or suffers from a life-threatening disorder with no permanent cure.
- The Bill was referred to select committee for re-assessment as several Rajya Sabha members raised concerns over various clauses.

Key Select Committee Recommendations

- The “close relatives” clause should be removed, and any “willing” woman should be allowed to become a surrogate mother provided all other requirements are met and the appropriate authority has cleared the surrogacy.
- While endorsing the ban on commercial surrogacy, the committee suggested keeping an option for compensating the surrogate mother beyond medical expenses and insurance coverage that includes taking care of her nutritional food requirements, maternity wear, etc. that is vital for the well-being and upkeep of the surrogate mother
- Moreover, the insurance cover for surrogate mothers should be increased from 16 months to 36 months.
- Divorced and widowed women aged between 35 and 45 years should be able to be a single commissioning parent, and the need for a five-year waiting period for childless married couples could be waived if there is a medical certificate that shows that they cannot possibly conceive.
- Further, persons of Indian origin should also be allowed to avail surrogacy services. The committee has not, however, recommended expanding the definition of commissioning parent to include singles, either men or women.
- The ART Bill (which deals with assisted reproductive technologies) should be brought before the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2019, so that all the highly technical and medical aspects could be properly addressed in the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2019.
- Appropriate authorities of the central and state governments should submit data on number of surrogacy procedures, surrogacy clinics and all related aspects to the National Board on Surrogacy to develop a proper database which helps in monitoring and regulation of surrogacy in the country.

Tribal Initiatives

- The Ministry of Tribal Affairs has launched the “Programme for Capacity Building of Scheduled Tribe Representatives in Local Self Governments”.
- The Ministry also launched the 1000 Spring Initiatives and an online portal on GIS-based Spring Atlas.

Capacity Building Initiative

- The Capacity Building initiative is aimed at empowering tribal PRI representatives by enhancing their decision making capabilities at local government level.
- Among other issues concerning tribal development, it also focusses on constitutional and legal provisions that protect and promote the rights and welfare of the tribal population.
- The programme will ensure greater participation of ST PRIs representatives in planning, execution and monitoring of government policies and programmes. Their better participation in the development process would ensure better prioritization of the tribal development agenda.
- The capacity building programme can be of great help in bridging the development gaps among communities and regions and will also help in effective and better implementation of various developmental and welfare programmes and substantially improve the expected outcomes.
- The module for capacity building programme has been developed in conjunction with United Nations Development Programme and will be translated to the local languages for imparting training.

1000 Springs Initiative

- The '1000 Springs Initiative' aims at improving access to safe and adequate water for the tribal communities living in difficult and inaccessible part of rural areas in the country. It is an integrated solution around natural springs.
- Springs are natural sources of groundwater discharge and have been used extensively in the mountainous regions across the world, including India.
- However, in the central and eastern Indian belt with more than 75% tribal population, it remains largely unrecognized and under-utilized. The initiative will help in harnessing the potential of perennial springs' water to address natural scarcity of water in tribal areas.
- It includes provision of infrastructure for piped water supply for drinking; provision of water for irrigation; community-led total sanitation initiatives; and provision for water for backyard nutrition gardens, generating sustainable livelihood opportunities for the tribal people.

Spring Atlas

- The online portal on GIS-based Spring Atlas has been launched with hydrological and chemical properties of the Springs on the occasion.
- It has been developed to make such data easily accessible from an online platform.
- Presently, data of more than 170 springs have been uploaded on the Spring Atlas.

System Risk Indicator

In a first anywhere in the world, a court in the Netherlands recently stopped a digital identification scheme for reasons of exclusion, data privacy and human rights concerns

Details Of The Scheme

- The Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs developed SyRI (System Risk Indicator), in 2014 to weed out those who are most likely to commit fraud and receive government benefits.
- Legislation passed by Dutch Parliament allowed government agencies to share 17 categories of data about welfare recipients such as taxes, land registries, employment records, and vehicle registrations with a private company.
- The company, called "The Intelligence Agency", used an algorithm to analyse data for four cities and calculate risk scores. The selective rollout was conducted in low-income and immigrant neighbourhoods, which have a higher number of beneficiaries.
- Elevated risk scores were sent to relevant government arms, which stores these on government databases for a maximum of two years. The government, in that time period, could open an investigation on the targeted person.

Arguments In The Court

- The Dutch government defended the programme in court, saying it prevented abuse and acted as only a starting point for further investigation instead of a final determination.
- The government also refused to disclose all information about how the system makes its decisions, stating that it would allow gaming of the system.
- The court found that opaque algorithmic decision-making puts citizens at a disadvantage to challenge the resulting risk scores.

- While the Hague district court found using new technology to control fraud was acceptable, it held SyRI was too invasive and violative of the privacy guarantees given by European Human Rights Law as well as the EU's General Data Protection Regulation.

Significance Of The Judgement

- Experts worldwide have been watching the Netherlands case throughout, and the decision sets a strong legal precedent for other courts to follow.
- The ruling is also an example of how a data protection regulation can be used against government surveillance and it demonstrates that parliaments ought to look very closely at the ways in which governments use technology in the social security system, to protect the rights of their citizens.

EU Data Strategy

- Recently the European Commission released a European strategy for data and a white paper on artificial intelligence, to ensure the human-centric development of Artificial Intelligence.
- The new documents present a timeline for various projects, legislative frameworks, and initiatives by the European Union.
- The release follows a series of meetings between Silicon Valley executives and Brussels regulators. Facebook even released its own proposal for content regulation after its CEO met with officials in Europe.
- However, the move was rejected by the European regulators, while criticising Facebook's proposed Internet rules as insufficient. It was further stated that Facebook has to adapt to Europe's standards and not the other way round.

Significance Of Data

- Data is at the core of digital transformation and shapes the way the world produces, consumes and lives. Access to ever-growing volume of data and the ability to use it are essential for innovation and growth.
- Data-driven innovation can bring major and concrete benefits to citizens through, personalised medicine, improved mobility, better policymaking and upgrading public services.

Purpose Behind EU Data Strategy

- The strategy states that, EU has the potential to be successful in the data economy and has the technology, the know-how and a highly skilled workforce.
- However, competitors such as China and the US are already innovating quickly and projecting their concepts of data access and use across the globe.
- With American and Chinese companies taking the lead on technological innovation, Europe is keen to improve its own competitiveness.

Objective Of The Strategy

- The objective of the European data strategy is to make sure the EU becomes a role model and a leader for a society empowered by data.
- For this, it aims at setting up a true European data space, a single market for data where
 - Data can flow within the EU and across sectors, for the benefit of all.
 - European rules, in particular privacy and data protection, as well as competition law, are fully respected.
 - The rules for access and use of data are fair, practical and clear

The Roadmap Of The Strategy

- The blueprint hopes to strengthen Europe’s local technology market by creating a “data single market” by 2030 to allow the free flow of data within the EU.
- To aid a “data-agile economy”, the Commission hopes to implement a legislative framework for the governance of common European data spaces by the second half of this year.
- By the beginning of 2021, the Commission will make high-value public sector data available free, through Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), which is a path for two different applications to speak to each other.
- Between 2021 and 2027, the Commission will invest in a High Impact Project to give further push to data infrastructure. Several other initiatives are laid out, including a cloud services marketplace.

Similar Moves In India

- In 2012, the Union Cabinet of India had approved the National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy (NDSAP). As part of the initiative, the government worked with the US government to release data.gov.in, a site of government data for public use.
- Just as the EU’s strategy discusses “data for public good”, there was a chapter in the Economic Survey of 2028 titled “Data ‘Of the People, By the People, For the People”, which advocated that the government should step in to sectors that private players ignore.
- Similar data integration efforts have been announced or implemented by NITI Aayog (the National Data & Analytics Platform), the Smart Cities Mission (India Urban Data Exchange), and the Ministry of Rural Development (DISHA dashboard).
- In 2018, the National Informatics Centre worked with PwC and other vendors to create a Centre of Excellence for Data Analytics aimed at providing data analysis help to government departments.
- The Personal Data Protection (PDP) Bill is also being discussed in a Joint Select Committee in the Parliament of India. Some of the movement around the PDP Bill comes from a desire to strengthen India’s own data economy, similar to the EU’s desire.
- The recent draft of the PDP introduced a clause on non-personal data, making it compulsory for entities to hand over such data to the government when asked for it.

Banking Regulation (Amendment) Bill, 2020

- The Banking Regulation (Amendment) Bill, 2020 has been introduced in the Lok Sabha, in order to provide more powers to the RBI for regulating cooperative banks.
- The Bill seeks to strengthen cooperative banks by increasing professionalism, enabling access to capital, improving governance and ensuring sound banking through the RBI.

Background

- The move is the fallout of a fraud unearthed at Punjab and Maharashtra Co-operative Bank affecting lakhs of customers who have been facing difficulty in withdrawing their money due to restrictions imposed by the RBI.
- The PMC Bank was found to have given over Rs 6,700 crore loan to a single realty company HDIL through alleged fraudulent means and also hid the stress from the RBI by creating separate books of accounts.
- According to a Press Trust of India report, Urban cooperative banks reported nearly 1,000 cases of fraud worth more than ₹220 crore in past five fiscal years.

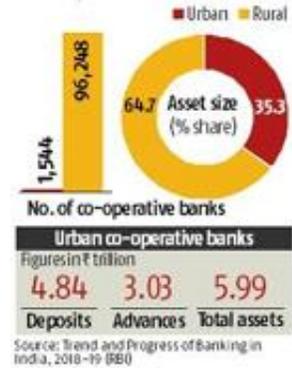
- The proposed amendment is aimed at protecting the interests of 86 million depositors who have put money totalling around ₹5 lakh crore in 1,540 cooperative banks in the country.

Changes In The Offing

- Once the amendment is cleared by Parliament, cooperative banks will be audited according to RBI’s norms and the central bank can supersede the board, in consultation with the state government, if any cooperative bank is under stress.
- At present, the managements of such banks are elected through co-operative bodies at present and the RBI has limited control over their appointments.
- As per the bill, the RBI will be allowed to set the minimum level of qualifications for the board members of such lenders which will need the consent of the RBI to appoint a chief executive officer, as is the case for commercial banks.
- Cooperative banks are currently under the dual control of the Registrar of Cooperative Societies and RBI.
- While the role of registrar of cooperative societies includes incorporation, registration, management, audit, supersession of board and liquidation, RBI is responsible for regulatory functions such as maintaining cash reserve and capital adequacy, among others.
- The administrative role will continue to be done by the Registrar of Cooperative Societies and the amendments will apply to all urban co-operative banks and multi-state cooperative banks.

MORE TEETH BUT...

Even after the changes in the legislation, the central bank will gain regulatory control over only a small fraction of co-operative banks



Impact

- All these measures will bring cooperative banks on par with developments in the banking sector through better management.
- Further it will ensure that affairs of cooperative banks are conducted in a manner that will give financial stability to the sector while protecting the interest of depositors.
- However, even after the recent proposed changes in legislation, the RBI will be gaining control over a small fraction of co-operative banks.
- As of March 2019, 1,544 urban co-operative banks accounted for merely 1.6 per cent out of the 97,792 co-operative banks.
- In fact, 96,248 rural co-operative banks accounted for around 65 per cent of the assets of co-operatives and were controlled by the respective state government legislation.

USTR Takes India Off Developing Country List

- The U.S. government has changed an administrative rule making it easier for it to impose countervailing duties (CVDs) on goods from India and certain other countries.
- In doing so, the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR), has reduced the threshold for beginning a US investigation against certain countries.
- The said investigations seek to find out whether certain nations are harming US industries with unfairly subsidized exports.
- As per USTR, the decision to revise its methodology for countervailing duty investigations was necessary because America’s previous guidance — which dates back to 1998 — is very outdated.

Significance Of Being A WTO Developing Country

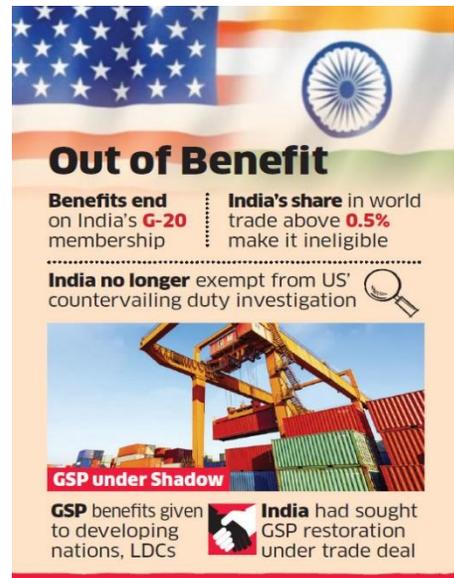
- The goal of the WTO’s special preferences for developing nations is to help poorer countries reduce poverty, generate employment and integrate themselves into the global trading system.
- Under WTO rules, governments are required to end their countervailing duty investigations if the amount of foreign subsidy is ‘de minimis’, which is normally defined as less than 1% ad valorem.
- But WTO rules provide a different standard for so-called developing nations that requires investigators to end duty investigation if the amount of subsidy is less than 2% ad valorem.

America’s List Of Countries For Exemption From Investigations

- To make U.S. law compatible with the World Trade Organization’s (WTO) Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (SCM) Agreement, the USTR had, in 1998, come up with lists of countries classified as per their level of development.
- These lists were used to determine whether they were potentially subject to U.S. countervailing duties. Countries not given special consideration have lower levels of protection against a CVD investigation.
- The USTR used the following criteria to determine whether a country was eligible for the 2% de minimis standard:
 - Per capita Gross National Income or GNI
 - Share of world trade
 - Other factors such as Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) membership or application for membership, EU membership, and Group of Twenty (G20) membership.

Reasons For Excluding India

- India, along with Brazil, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam were taken off the list since they each have at least a 0.5% share of the global trade, despite having less than \$12, 375 GNI (the World Bank threshold separating high income countries from others). India’s share in global exports was 1.67% in 2018 and in global imports, it was 2.57%.
- India was taken off the list also because — like Argentina, Brazil, Indonesia and South Africa — it is part of the G20.



Impact

- The development marks a significant change from two decades of American trade policy regarding developing nations that could result in stronger penalties for some of the world’s top exporters.
- India and U.S. are in the process of finalising a trade package, wherein India wants restoration of benefits under the Generalised System of Preference (GSP) and more access for its products in the US.
- The US seeks dropping of duty on American information and communication technology goods along with market access for its dairy products and duty cuts on Harley-Davidson motorcycles.
- The current move makes it doubtful for India to restore special benefits under the GSP as part of its trade talks with the US, as only developing countries are eligible for it.

Revamping of Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana

- The Union Cabinet, has approved revamping of Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) and Restructured Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme (RWBCIS) to address the existing challenges in implementation of Crop Insurance Schemes.
- At present, under PMFBY and RWBCIS, farmers pay a premium of 2% of the sum insured for all foodgrains and oilseeds crops of Kharif; 1.5% for all foodgrains and oilseeds crops of Rabi; and 5% for all horticultural crops.
- The difference between actuarial premium rate and the rate of insurance premium payable by farmers, which is called the Rate of Normal Premium Subsidy, is shared equally between the Centre and the states.
- However, states and Union Territories are free to extend additional subsidy over and above the normal subsidy from their budgets.
- PMFBY has been criticised by a wide variety of stakeholders. Farmers groups have claimed that private insurance companies have made windfall gains on the scheme.
- Several major insurers, have opted out of the scheme in 2019-20, reportedly due to losses because of high claims ratios. Further, several States, including Punjab and West Bengal, have refused to participate in the scheme as well.

Changes In The Schemes

- Enrolment in the two schemes has been made voluntary for all farmers, including those with existing crop loans. When the PMFBY was launched in 2016, it was made mandatory for all farmers with crop loans to enrol for insurance cover under the scheme.
- Until now, there was no upper limit for the central subsidy. However, the Cabinet has decided to cap the Centre's premium subsidy under these schemes for premium rates up to 30% for unirrigated areas/crops and 25% for irrigated areas/crops. Districts having 50 per cent or more irrigated area will be considered as irrigated area/district.
- Further, Central share in premium subsidy for north eastern states, will be increased to 90 per cent from the existing sharing pattern of 50:50.
- States have been given flexibility to implement the schemes with option to select any or many of additional risk covers/features like prevented sowing, localised calamity, mid-season adversity, and post-harvest losses. Earlier, these risk covers were mandatory.
- Further, States/UT can offer specific single peril risk/insurance covers, like hailstorm etc, under PMFBY even with or without opting for base cover.
- The allocation of business to insurance firms through tender process for both the schemes would be done for three years as against the current policy of one to three years.
- The Cabinet also approved provisioning of at least 3 per cent of the total allocation for the scheme to be made by the Centre and implementing state governments for administrative expenses.
- States can also choose how to calculate the sum insured for any crop in any district, opting either for the scale of finance or a value based on notional average yield multiplied by minimum support prices.
- For estimation of crop losses/admissible claims in the PMFBY, two-step process will be adopted based on defined deviation matrix using specific triggers like weather indicators, satellite indicators, etc, for each area along with normal ranges and deviation ranges. Only areas with deviations will be subject to crop cutting experiments (CCEs) for assessment of yield loss.

- Technology solutions like Smart Sampling Technique (SST) and optimization of number of CCEs would be adopted in conducting CCEs. In case of non-provision of yield data beyond cut-off date by the States to implementing insurance firms, claims will be settled based on yield arrived through use of technology solution.
- Also, a separate scheme is being developed to provide financial support and effective risk mitigation tools through crop insurance especially to 151 districts which are highly water stressed including 29 which are doubly stressed because of low income of farmers and drought.

Impact Of The Changes

- With these changes, it is expected that farmers would be able to manage risk in agriculture production in a better way and will succeed in stabilizing the farm income.
- Further, it will increase coverage in north eastern region enabling farmers of NER to manage their agricultural risk in a better way. These changes will also enable quick and accurate yield estimation leading to faster claims settlement.
- Currently, the Centre and States split the balance of the premium equally among themselves. However, the revamp now reduces the burden on the Centre and increases the share of States, as they will be left to take on 70-75% of the premium subsidy.
- In the north-eastern States, however, the balance will swing the other way, with the Centre agreeing to take on 90% of the premium subsidy.

A Future For The World's Children Report

- A report, titled 'A Future for the World's Children', commissioned by the World Health Organization (WHO), UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and The Lancet medical journal was recently released.
- The report assesses the threat to the health and future of every child and adolescent from ecological degradation, climate change and exploitative marketing practices by using a Sustainability Index and a Flourishing Index.
- Flourishing Index is the geometric mean of Surviving and Thriving. For Surviving, the authors selected maternal survival, survival in children younger than 5 years old, suicide, access to maternal and child health services, basic hygiene and sanitation, and lack of extreme poverty.
- For Thriving, the domains were educational achievement, growth and nutrition, reproductive freedom, and protection from violence.
- The Sustainability Index ranks countries on excess carbon emissions compared with the 2030 target. This provides a convenient and available proxy for a country's contribution to sustainability in future.

Findings On India

- India stands 77th on the sustainability index and is at 131st on a ranking that measures the best chance at survival and well-being for children. This is despite a steep rise in immunisation rates — one of the key contributors to child survival — in recent years and the infant mortality rate going down faster than the world average.
- India has an annual birth cohort of approximately 2.6 crore. The infant mortality rate in the country stands at 33 per 1,000 live births. This means nearly 8,00,000-8,50,000 infants die every year in India, bringing the average daily toll to 2,350.
- The report says India has improved in health and sanitation but has to increase its spending on health.

Global Findings

- Norway leads the table for survival, health, education and nutrition rates - followed by South Korea and the Netherlands. Central African Republic, Chad and Somalia come at the bottom.
- However, when taking into account per capita CO2 emissions, these top countries trail behind, with Norway 156th, the Republic of Korea 166th and the Netherlands 160th.
- Each of the three emits 210 per cent more CO2 per capita than their 2030 target, while the U.S., Australia, and Saudi Arabia are among the 10 worst emitters. The lowest emitters are Burundi, Chad and Somalia.
- According to the report, the only countries on track to beat CO2 emission per capita targets by 2030, while also performing fairly — within the top 70 — on child flourishing measures are: Albania, Armenia, Grenada, Jordan, Moldova, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Uruguay and Vietnam.
- The world's survival depended on children being able to flourish, but no country is doing enough to give them a sustainable future. They are under immediate threat especially from climate change and from commercial marketing, which has grown hugely in the last decade.
- If global warming exceeds 4 degree Celsius by the year 2100 (in line with current projections), it would lead to devastating health consequences for children due to rising ocean levels, heatwaves, proliferation of diseases like malaria and dengue, and malnutrition.

Way Ahead

- To protect children, the report calls for a new global movement driven by and for children. Specific recommendations include stopping CO2 emissions with the utmost urgency, and placing children and adolescents at the centre of global efforts to achieve sustainable development.
- Further, there is a need for new policies and investment in all sectors to work towards child health and rights; incorporating children's voices into policy decisions and tightening national regulation of harmful commercial marketing, supported by a new Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Countries need to overhaul their approach to child and adolescent health, to ensure that they don't only look after the children today but protect the world they will inherit in the future.

Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen)

The Union Government has approved the Phase II of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) [SBM (G)].

Details of Phase-II

- The second phase which will be implemented from 2020-21 to 2024-25, will focus on Open Defecation Free Plus (ODF Plus), which includes ODF sustainability and Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SLWM). It will also work towards ensuring that no one is left behind and everyone uses a toilet.
- The Phase-II will be implemented in a mission mode with a total outlay of Rs. 1,40,881 crores and will be a novel model of convergence between different verticals of financing.
- Of this Rs. 52,497 crore will be allocated from the budget of D/o Drinking Water and Sanitation while the remaining amount will be dovetailed from the funds being released under 15th Finance Commission, MGNREGS and revenue generation models particularly for solid and liquid waste management.
- Under the program, provision for incentive of Rs.12,000 for construction of Individual Household Toilet (IHHL) to the newly emerging eligible households as per the existing norms will continue.

- Funding norms for Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SLWM) have been rationalized and changed to per capita basis in place of no. of households.
- Additionally, financial assistance to the Gram Panchayats (GPs) for construction of Community Managed Sanitary Complex (CMSC) at village level has been increased from Rs 2 lakh to Rs 3 lakh per CMSC.
- The fund sharing pattern between Centre and States will be 90:10 for North-Eastern States and Himalayan States and UT of J&K; 60:40 for other States; and 100:0 for other Union Territories, for all the components.
- The programme will be implemented by the States/UTs as per the operational guidelines which will be issued to the States shortly.

Benefits

- The Phase II will continue to generate employment and provide impetus to the rural economy through construction of household toilets and community toilets, as well as infrastructure for SLWM such as compost pits, soak pits, waste stabilisation ponds, material recovery facilities etc.
- It will also help the rural India effectively handle the challenge of solid and liquid waste management and will help in substantial improvement in the health of the villagers in the country.

J&K Global Investors' Summit 2020

- Global Investors Summit is one of the prestigious events to be **held in J&K for the first time**. The Summit is scheduled to be **held in April 2020**.
- The three-day Summit will be held in the **twin cities of Srinagar and Jammu**.
- The **main focus of the event** is on driving investment in potential sectors like Agriculture, Horticulture, Food Processing, Film Industry, Tourism, handicrafts and healthcare in order to boost economy and trade as well as employment opportunities of J&K.
- Theme - '**Explore, Invest, Grow**'
- Organised by - **Jammu and Kashmir Trade Promotion Organization (JKTPO)**, a nodal agency under the Industries and Commerce Department Government of Jammu and Kashmir.

Ongoing Developmental Activities in J&K

- Currently, the Government of J&K is developing 2 IT parks, ICD in Samba and have identified industrial land bank of over 6000 acres across 20 districts to develop state-of-the-art industrial parks.
- Also, the J&K Government has removed the toll barrier to enable seamless inward and outward movement of raw materials and goods.
- In the Budget 2020-21, the Union Government allocated Rs 30,757 crores separately for the development of J&K.

Organic Food Festival for Women Entrepreneurs

- Ministry of Food Processing (MoFPI) and Ministry of Women and Child Development (M/o WCD) **jointly inaugurated the National Organic Food Festival** in New Delhi.
- This was aimed at providing an opportunity to women entrepreneurs for capacity building and economic empowerment

- The festival for women entrepreneurs is an outcome of the MoU signed between the MoFPI and M/o WCD.
- **Organized by - National Institute of Food Technology Entrepreneurship and Management with Confederation of Indian Industry**
- This was the **first such event** where women entrepreneurs and self-help groups from all over the country participated.

Opportunities in Organic Food Production:

- According to a report by APEDA, **India produced around 1.70 million tonne** (2017-18) of certified organic products which includes all varieties of food products.
- As per WFI report, this sector is expected to **grow at a CAGR of 10%** during the period 2016-21.
- On the demand side, increasing disposable incomes, increasing awareness around health and wellness and increasing acceptability are driving the growth in the organic food segment
- The demand for Indian organic food products is on **constant increase worldwide with India exporting organic products worth \$ 515 million in 2017-18**(based on APEDA report).

BIMSTEC Conference on Drug Trafficking

- India hosted the **first-ever BIMSTEC nations'** conference on "combating drug trafficking" in New Delhi.
- **Organised by** - The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB)
- The conference is the result of the commitment made in this context by Indian Prime Minister **during the 4th BIMSTEC summit** in Nepal's Kathmandu in 2018.

Need for Such Conference:

- In the changing drug-trafficking scenario, Asian countries are increasingly being affected by drug trafficking.
- A recent seizure of 1,527 kgs of methamphetamine in two tranches by the NCB established the fact that the **Bay of Bengal region was impregnated** with the drug-trafficking menace.
- While providing **unhindered maritime access**, security challenges at sea and coastlines are a threat. One of the most prominent of such **challenges is drug trafficking through sea**.
- BIMSTEC, being the key link between South Asian and South East Asian nations, is one of the most effective platforms to tackle this global threat.

First 'Jerusalem-Mumbai Festival'

- The first-ever '**Jerusalem-Mumbai Festival**' was held in Mumbai to promote **artistic and cultural ties between India and Israel**.
- The festival showcased the special links between the two cities of Mumbai and Jerusalem along with demonstrating their unique cultural traditions.
- This was the **first collaborative cultural event** for the Jerusalem municipality in Mumbai.
- The festival was **organised by** the Jerusalem municipality in collaboration with the Consulate General of Israel in Mumbai and the Federation of India-Israel Chamber of Commerce.

- The decision to hold a 'Jerusalem-Mumbai Festival' was taken during Prime Minister Modi's visit to Israel in July 2019.

International Seafood Show

- **22nd edition** of India International Seafood Show (IISS) 2020 was organised in Kochi.
- The is a **biennial show**. The 21st edition of IISS was held in Goa in January 2018. This show is one of the few trade fairs for the processing of seafood in the region.
- **Organised by** - The Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA), under Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India, in association with the Seafood Exporters Association of India (SEAI)
- Theme - "**Blue Revolution- Beyond Production to Value Addition**"
- The IISS is one of the oldest and largest seafood events in the world. It attracts seafood traders from the major markets like USA, EU, Japan, South East Asia and other countries.

Opportunity of Seafood in India:

- During 2018-19 India has exported over 14,37,000 tons of marine products worth USD 6.70 billion as per provisional figures.
- It is expected to achieve an export turnover of USD 15 billion in next five years.
- Sustainable fishing methods, value addition and increased aquaculture production through diversification will support this target set out for export of India's marine products.

International Judicial Conference

- International Judicial Conference 2020 was held in New Delhi. It was Organised by Supreme Court of India.
- Theme of the Conference - '**Judiciary and the Changing World**'

Key Highlights:

- **Discussion included important topics** such as - Gender Justice, Contemporary Perspectives on Protection of Constitutional Values, Dynamic Interpretations of the Constitution in a Changing World, Harmonisation of Environment Protection vis-à-vis Sustainable Development and Protection of Right to Privacy in the Internet Age.
- The conference appreciated Indian Judiciary for its **balance between development and environment** (For Example - Judgement on Sardar Sarovar Project).
- It was highlighted at the conference that issues like **data protection and cybercrimes pose new challenges for the judiciary**.
- **Use of ICT was highlighted** to deliver speedy justice. The establishment of **National Judicial Data Grid** will also make court procedures easier.
- The Chief Justice of India highlighted the fact that the **Supreme Court's judgments are cited by courts of other countries** and have served as a "beacon of hope" to independent and developing nations.
- A verdict of the South African court in 2001 cited the Indian case of **Narain Das Jain v Agra Nagar Mahapalika** (decided by the Supreme Court in 1991) to benchmark the compensation to be provided while acquiring land.

Largest Conference On Traditional Medicine

- The largest ever conference on traditional medicine was held in New Delhi.
- **Organised by** – Ministry of AYUSH
- **Aim** - Standardisation of Diagnosis and Terminologies of AYUSH
- **Theme** - “Challenges in Counting and Classification of Traditional Medicine Encounters”
- Attended by 16 countries - Serbia, Sri Lanka, Curacao, Mauritius, Iran, Japan, Qatar, Uzbekistan, Bhutan, Switzerland, Myanmar, Cuba, Ghana

Govt to Host Artificial Intelligence Summit ‘RAISE 2020’

- India will organize its **first Artificial Intelligence summit- “RAISE 2020: Responsible AI for Social Empowerment 2020”** between April 11-12, 2020 in New Delhi.
- **Organized by** - the union government in coordination with the Union Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.
- The two-day summit will be organized to spearhead social empowerment, inclusion and transformation.
- **Aim** - To outline India’s vision for using the power of AI responsibly to transform the social landscape for a better future.
- The summit will enable the smooth exchange of ideas to create mass awareness about the need to ethically develop and practice AI in the digital era.

Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety

- The **3rd Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety** was held in Stockholm (Sweden). India was represented by the Minister of Road Transport & Highways.
- **Organised by** - the World Health Organization (WHO) in association with the World Bank
- **Theme** of the conference - ‘Achieving Global Goals 2030’

Key Highlights:

- The conference adopted the “**Stockholm Declaration**”. The declaration calls for a **new global target for road safety for 2030** and a set of innovative solutions to save lives on the world’s roads.
- It also aims to share successes and lessons from the implementation of the **Global Plan for the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011–2020**.

Road Safety and India:

- Road accidents kill almost 1.5 lakh people annually in India. The road accident severity (the number of persons killed per 100 accidents) has increased by 0.6% in 2018 compared to 2017.

Steps taken:

- Time and again, India has **reaffirmed its commitment** to the **United Nations goal set under the UN Decade of Action of drastically reducing road accidents by the year 2030**.
- Ministry of Road Transport & Highways had formulated a **multi-pronged strategy based on 4 `E’s – Education, Engineering, Enforcement, Emergency Care**.
- Justice **Radhakrishnan panel** on road safety was constituted by SC in 2014.

- Provisions under **Motor Vehicles Amendment Act, 2019** made stringent.

The United Nations Decade of Action for Road Safety:

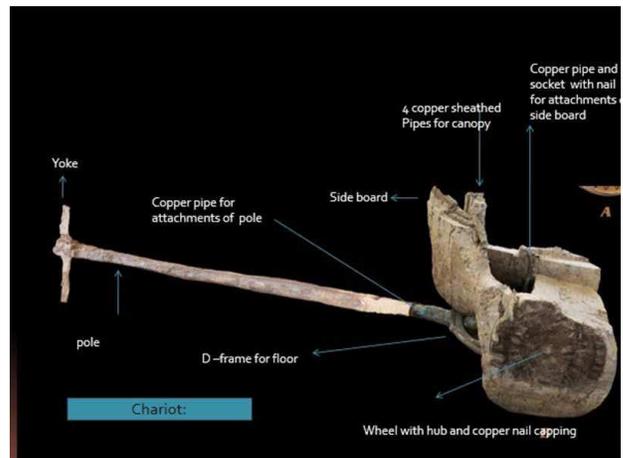
- Proclaimed in March 2010 for the decade 2011-20.
- It has four pillars:
 - To strengthen institutional Capacity
 - To improve road safety for pedestrians, motorcyclists and bicyclists.
 - To widely use crash avoidance technologies such as anti-lock braking system and electronic stability control.
 - To encourage and develop adoption of road safety such as seat-belt wearing, helmet wearing, speeding, drinking and driving, etc.

Other Global Initiatives on Road Safety:

- Brasilia Declaration on Road Safety – Signed in 2015 at the **second Global High-Level Conference on Road Safety held in Brazil.**
- **Sustainable Development Goal 3.6** - To half the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents by 2030.
- **UN Global Road Safety Week** to highlight the need for strong leadership for road safety.

Excavations At Sanauli

- Carbon dating tests have confirmed that India's largest known necropolis (burial ground) in UP's Sanauli — where 126 burials have been discovered until now — is 3,800 years old.
- Excavations in Sanauli in UP's Baghpat district, started first in 2005 and resumed in 2018. Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), has confirmed that the burials at Sanauli date back to 1900 BC.
- **DNA tests** of human remains were conducted along with **carbon dating** at various institutes in the country. Further, scientific techniques such as photogrammetry and ground penetrating radar survey were used along with drones and magnetometers.



Significance of Discoveries at Sanauli

- Materials found at Sanauli are contemporary to late-mature phase of Harappans, which will help in tracing the roots of early historic cultures.
- The various discoveries at Sanauli are horse-drawn chariots, burials, four-legged wooden coffins, pottery, a copper antenna sword and war shields.
- According to ASI, the elaborate burials, which also included underground chambers, decorated legged coffins and rice in pots buried with the bodies, belong to an indigenous warrior tribe which inhabited the region.

- As per a report submitted by the Birbal Sahni Institute of Paleosciences to the ASI, carbon dating marks this site as an earliest history of a warrior tribe in the Indian subcontinent.
- The size and shape of the chariots indicate they were pulled by horses and the axle, chassis and wheels show similarities to contemporary chariots.
- The burials also show similarity to Vedic rituals, as there were impressions of cloth found on bodies that suggests purification of bodies similar to what is practiced in Hindu religion.
- Furthermore, anthropomorphic (having human characteristics) figures on a coffin along with gold and copper anthropomorphic figures associated with Vedic gods indicate presence of religious beliefs.

Visit of Vice-President of Vietnam to India

- Vice-President of Vietnam, Mrs. Dang Thi Ngoc Thinh paid an official visit to India.
- India-Vietnam relations are built on the firm foundation of close cultural, historical, civilizational links and are marked by mutual trust and understanding as well as strong cooperation in regional and international fora.
- The visit of Vice-President of Vietnam is a step closer towards strengthening the **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership established in 2016** between the two countries.

Key Highlights:

- This visit assumes significance against the backdrop of Vietnam becoming **non-permanent member of United Nations Security Council (2020-21)** and Vietnam **assuming the ASEAN Chair in 2020**.
- During the visit, joint inauguration of the **launch of direct flights between India and Vietnam** was held at New Delhi.
- An agreement was also signed to open a resident office of Voice of Vietnam in New Delhi.

India-Vietnam Relation: in brief

- Both sides established **official diplomatic relations in 1972**. However, **extensive economic ties**, including oil exploration, agriculture and manufacturing between the two countries was **established in 1992**.
- Vietnam is an important country in India's "Act East Policy".

Trade & Investment Relation:

- According to Indian data in 2018-19, **bilateral trade reached US\$13.69 billion**. Total trade value between the two countries accounts for **1.62 percent of India's total foreign trade**.
- For India, **Vietnam is the 18th largest trading partner** and 14th largest export destination globally.
- **Within ASEAN**, Vietnam is the **third largest export destination** for Indian products after Singapore and Malaysia, and is the 4th largest trading partner after Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia.
- For Vietnam, India is now the 7th largest trading partner, 7th largest source of import and 9th largest export market globally.
- **India's investments in Vietnam** are estimated at around US\$ 1.9 billion, ranking **26th among countries** and territories investing in Vietnam.
- As of 2019, Vietnam has **six investment projects in India** with total estimated investment of US\$ 28.55 million, primarily in the areas of pharmaceuticals, information technology, chemicals and building materials.

Defence Cooperation:

- Defence Cooperation has emerged as a significant pillar of this partnership.
- India is planning to sell four large patrol vessels and BrahMos short-range cruise missile to Vietnam.

- It also provides training to Vietnam's armed forces in military equipment: Kilo-class submarines.& Sukhoi aircraft.
- India has announced a new line of credit US\$500 million for procurement of defence equipment.

Visit of President of Portugal to India

Context:

- The President of Portugal Mr Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, paid a State visit to India.
- This was President Marcelo's first visit to India; the last visit by a President of Portugal to India was in 2007.
- Recent high-level political exchanges include the visit of Prime Minister, Mr. Antonio Costa to India in Dec 2019 and that of Indian Prime Minister to Portugal in June 2017.

Key Highlights:

- List of MoUs signed/exchanged during the visit:
 - MoU for Cooperation for Setting Up a National Maritime Museum Heritage Complex in Lothal (Gujarat)
 - MOU in the field of industrial and intellectual property rights
 - MoU between Portuguese Diplomatic Institute and Foreign Service Institute for training
 - Co-operation Agreement on Maritime Transport and Port Development between India and Portugal
 - Joint Declaration on India and Portugal Mobility Partnership
 - MOU between Invest India and Start-Up Portugal
 - MOU between Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) and Institute of Social and Political Sciences of the University of Lisbon for co-operation in strategic and security areas
- It was decided that Portugal will be **India's Partner Country at the Technology Summit 2020** to be held in Delhi later this year.
- Also, India is looking forward to organizing a Youth Hackathon in September this year in Portugal.
- Both sides expressed keenness to establish new project partnerships in the fields of marine research, nano-technology and other cutting-edge scientific fields under the new **Portugal-India 4 Million Euro Joint Research Fund**.
- President Marcelo welcomed India's decision to apply for **Associate Observer membership of the Community of Portuguese Language Countries [CPLP]**.
- India looks forward to leveraging its shared lusophone ties in Africa and Latin America through the CPLP platform.

Visit of President of Myanmar to India

U Win Myint, President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar paid a State Visit to India.

Key Highlights:

- The visit reinforced the tradition of high-level interactions, symbolizing the strong friendly relations existing between the two neighbours.
- Both sides welcomed the synergies between Myanmar's independent, active and non-aligned foreign policy and India's 'Act East' and 'Neighbourhood First' policies.
- Both sides reiterated their **mutual respect for the already- demarcated portion of the boundary** between the two countries.
- At the same time, they affirmed their commitments to settle pending issues through the existing bilateral mechanisms, such as the **Joint Boundary Working Group Meeting**.

- Both sides welcomed the opening of the **two land border crossing points** at **Tamu-Moreh and Rihkhawdar-Zowkhawthar** as international border gates.
- The Indian side reiterated its commitment towards the **construction of the modern Integrated Check Post as Phase-I at Tamu, Myanmar**.
- Both sides welcomed the MoU between their respective private operators to launch a **Coordinated Bus Service between Imphal and Mandalay** by 7 April 2020.
- Myanmar appreciated **India's assistance in the area of capacity building and training**.
- Both sides agreed to jointly make flagship projects, such as Myanmar Institute of Information and Technology (MIIT) and Advanced Centre for Agricultural Research and Education (ACARE), sustainable on a long-term basis.
- Both sides agreed to expedite the implementation of a **set of 12 projects** under the second phase of the **Rakhine State Development Programme** and to further strengthen their development cooperation within the framework of High Impact Community Development Projects and Quick Impact Projects under the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation mechanism.
- In this regard, they welcomed the signing of the **Agreement on Indian Grant Assistance for Implementation of Quick Impact Projects (QIP)** during the State Visit.
- Both sides agreed to work together to enable the **launch of India's RuPay Card in Myanmar** at the earliest.
- The two sides also agreed to explore the creation of an **India-Myanmar digital payment gateway** which would help expand options for cross border remittance between the two countries.
- They also expressed interest in exploring a **bilateral mechanism for settlement in local currency** with the aim to boost cross border trade. In this regard, the two sides agreed to expeditiously convene the existing mechanism of **India-Myanmar Joint Trade Committee** meetings.
- India welcomed the decision by **Myanmar to extend Tourist Visa on Arrival for Indian citizens in Myanmar** till December 2020.
- The Myanmar side appreciated India's offer of providing medical radiation equipment "**Bhabhatron-2**" for treatment of cancer patients.

[For detailed discussion on India – Myanmar Relation, please refer the Yellow Book on IR]

India and Norway Strengthen Partnership on Blue Economy

- **India-Norway Task Force** on Blue Economy for Sustainable Development has been opened. The purpose of the task force is to develop and follow up joint initiatives between the two countries.
- Both the countries also launched a new collaboration of **Integrated Ocean Management and Research**.
- The **Norway-India cooperation** in the field of oceans is based on our shared interest in the blue economy and the sustainable use of marine resources, as well as a desire to advance scientific knowledge about our oceans.

Addu Tourism zone

- India and Maldives signed **five MoUs for establishing the Addu Tourism zone in five islands of Addu atoll** in the Maldives.
- Apart from this, **sixth MoU** was signed to establish a **water bottling plant in Hoarafushi**.
- All six projects are **grant projects** falling under India's **High Impact Community Development Scheme (HICDP)**.

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• An MoU on HICDPs was signed during the visit of Former External Affairs Minister late Sushma Swaraj to Male in March 2019.• A total grant of USD 5.6 million was announced for these projects. |
|--|

- Addu is also an important site for tourism because it **represents the southernmost point of South Asia**.
- India is expanding its tourism and infrastructure development limits through off-shore development works.

India-South Korea Meeting to Enhance Bilateral Security Cooperation

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh held a bilateral meeting with Minister of National Defence of Republic of Korea (RoK) Jeong Kyeongdoo in New Delhi.
- The purpose of the meeting was to **enhance the bilateral security cooperation and collaboration in defence industry and research & development**.
- A roadmap for Defence Industries Cooperation between India and RoK was also exchanged.
- The roadmap lists a **number of possible areas of cooperation**, including research and development.
- It also **promotes investment in Defence Industrial Corridors** in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.
- The Uttar Pradesh Defence Corridor aims to connect **six cities** - Kanpur, Lucknow, Agra, Chitrakoot, Jhansi and Aligarh.
- Tamil Nadu Defence Corridor **connects five cities** - Hosur, Salem, Chennai, Trichy and Coimbatore.

First Term Contract for Importing Russian Crude Oil

- State-owned Indian Oil Corp (IOC) has signed first term contract for importing Russian crude oil.
- It has signed the contract to **import up to 2 million tonne of Urals grade crude oil** from Rosneft of Russia.
- The crude oil, being sourced under the contract, will be loaded in Suezmax vessels at Novorossiysk port of Russia and will come to **India bypassing Straits of Hormuz**.

Significance:

- India is **83 per cent dependent on imports to meet its oil needs**. Two-thirds of the imports come from the Middle East, **Iraq being the biggest supplier** followed by Saudi Arabia.
- This deal is significant as the **world's third largest energy consumer** looks to **diversify its sources away from the volatile Middle East**.
- Sourcing of Russian crude oil is also **a part of the five-year roadmap for bilateral cooperation in the hydrocarbons sector** that was signed during Prime Minister Modi's visit to Vladivostok in September 2019.
- The new arrangement would also **usher in price stability and energy security** for India.

India-Central Asia Business Council

- The Indian government and Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) together launched **India-Central Asia Business Council**.
- The nominated chambers from **India, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan** came together to formally declare their association to collaborate and provide an industry view to the governments of the six countries.
- The Council will also share its recommendations on how to promote business in the region and with each other.

- Despite excellent bilateral relations, India's combined annual trade with the five Central Asian countries remains well **below two billion US dollars**. Hence, the launching of this council is being termed as a significant step.

Bhutan Ends Free Travel for Indian Passport Holders

Bhutan government has decided to **levy a daily ₹1,200 (\$17) fee** for “regional tourists” from **India, the Maldives and Bangladesh**, beginning July 2020.

Key Highlights:

- The decision was passed by the National Assembly as a ‘**Tourism Levy and Exemption Bill of Bhutan**’, 2020.
- The fee has been called a **Sustainable Development Fee (SDF)**. It is meant to help the government deal with burgeoning numbers in tourist traffic.
- The **SDF is considerably lower than the \$65 charged** to other foreign tourists, who are also charged a compulsory flat “cover charge” of \$250 per day.
- Children under the age of 5 will not have to pay the levy and those between 6 and 12 years will be required to pay only ₹600.
- Indians mainly travel to the more developed western region of Bhutan. In a move to **promote tourism in Bhutan’s eastern region** as well, the government has **decided to drop SDF charges** for tourists **visiting 11 of 20 total districts** that fall in the east from Trongsa to Trashigang.

Effect of Levying a SDF:

- The levying of the fee will surely reduce the number of tourists, but it will **help increase revenue from SDF** for the Bhutanese government.
- On the other hand, the move, which is also being seen as a measure to reduce the footfall of Indian tourists, will **reduce the business of budget hotels**, which have sprung up recently to accommodate an increasing number visitors from India.

BBIN Motor Vehicle Agreement (BBIN-MVA)

A meeting of the BBIN nations -- Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal -- was held in New Delhi to deliberate on a **proposed MoU for implementation** of the motor vehicle agreement.

Key Highlights

- The deliberation discussed the passenger and cargo protocols that are to give effect to the MVA for the regulation of passenger, personal and cargo vehicular traffic among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal.
- Representatives of Bhutan participated in the meeting in **an observer capacity**.

BBIN: Current Status

- So far, **Bhutan has not ratified BBIN-MVA**. In 2017, Bhutan has announced that it would not be able to ratify it for the time being and asked the other stakeholders to go ahead with the plan without it.
- The other three countries Nepal, Bangladesh and India are to go ahead on **implementing the agreement with Bhutan as an observer**.

India-Iceland Pact in Fisheries Sector

- Targeting sustainable fisheries development, the Union Cabinet approved a pact signed between India and Iceland. It was signed in **September, 2019**.

- The MoU will lead to the **creation of facilities for exchange of scientists** and technical experts and their proper placement, especially in areas of estimating total allowable Catches in off shore and deep sea areas.
- It also provides for **training to fisheries professionals** from key fisheries institutions in the various management aspects on areas of modern fisheries management and fish processing.
- The agreement **seeks to promote processing and marketing of products** from high seas fisheries for entrepreneurship development.

India, Norway Pledge to Address issue of Marine Plastic Litter

India and Norway have pledged to work together to address the issue of marine plastic litter and microplastics.

Key Highlights

- This decision was taken by the environment ministers of both the countries who met on the sidelines of **13th meeting of the Convention on Migratory Species** held in Gandhinagar.
- The two countries agreed to strengthen the “**mutually beneficial**” **cooperation on climate and environment, with a specific focus on oceans.**
- Norway and India will sign a Letter of Intent on **integrated ocean management** including **sustainable Blue Economy initiatives.**
- Taking forward the 2019 decision by Prime Minister Modi and Prime Minister Solberg to set up **India-Norway Ocean Dialogue** and establish the **Joint Task Force on Blue Economy for Sustainable Development**, the two ministers reviewed the progress made under this MoU, including the establishment of the **Marine Pollution Initiative.**

Curative Petitions

- With curative petitions being a new addition to the field of law in India and that being used by the convicts of one of India’s landmark case, the Nirbhaya case.
- In this light it is necessary to discern the legal provisions in relation to the same.

About Curative Petition

- A curative petition may be **filed after a review plea** against the final conviction is dismissed.
- It is meant to ensure there is **no miscarriage of justice**, and to prevent abuse of process. A curative petition is usually decided by judges in chamber, unless a specific request for an open-court hearing is allowed.
- Every curative petition is decided on the basis of principles laid down by the Supreme Court in **Rupa Ashok Hurra v. Ashok Hurra & another, 2002**. The judgment held that technical difficulties and apprehensions over the reopening of cases had to give way to a final forum for removing errors in a judgment where administration of justice may be affected.
- The court ruled that a curative petition can be entertained if the petitioner establishes there was a **violation of the principles of natural justice** and that he/ she was not heard by the court before passing an order. It will also be admitted where a **judge failed to disclose facts that raise the apprehension of bias.**

LAST REMEDY	
What is curative petition? A curative petition is the last option available after exhausting all the appeals and dismissal of review petition. It can be used by an aggrieved person who was not a party to the proceedings or was not heard. It can also be used where the judge failed to disclose his connection in any manner with the subject matter before him.	How effective it is? The dismissal rate of curative petitions is very high though there are no official figures available in this regard. Who hears curative petition? A curative petition is heard by the top three judges, including the Chief Justice of India plus the judges who dismissed the review petition.

- However, the SC has held that curative petitions must be **rare rather than regular**, and be **entertained with circumspection**.

Procedure For Filing Curative Petition

- The process of filing curative petition is that it must be accompanied by **certification by a senior advocate**, pointing out substantial grounds for entertaining it. It must be first circulated to a bench of the **three senior most judges** and the **judges who passed the concerned judgment**, if available. Only when a majority of the judges conclude that the matter needs hearing should it be listed as far as possible, before the same Bench.
- Further, it shall also be open to the Bench at any stage of consideration of the curative petition to ask a senior counsel to assist it as **amicus curiae**. In the event of the Bench holding at any stage that the petition is **without any merit and vexatious**, it may impose **exemplary costs** on the petitioner.

Legal provisions:

- The concept of the curative petition is indirectly contained under the provisions of **Article 137** of the Indian Constitution.
- Further, **Article 145** provides that in the matter of laws and rules made under, the SC has the power to review any judgement pronounced by it.
- The curative petition needs to be **filed within 30 days** from the date of judgement or order.

An Analysis Of Sedition Cases

- Recently, a 14-year girl stood up on a stage in Bangalore and began a speech with the words ‘Pakistan Zindabad’. She was promptly arrested. Further. earlier this month, in Kashmir, three students were arrested for raising pro-Pakistan slogans.
- In both these cases and other similar cases, the police have made arrests on the **grounds of sedition** and reignited the debate around India’s sedition law. Similarly, the latest data suggest that this law remains as relevant as ever with sedition arrests increasing in recent years.

About Sedition Law

- Sedition falls under **Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code** (‘IPC’), is defined as any action that brings or attempts to bring hatred or contempt towards the government of India and has been illegal in India since 1870.

Data In Relation To The Sedition Cases

- The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), though, has only been collecting separate data on sedition cases since 2014. **In 2014, there were 47 cases** of sedition but that number **increased to 70 in 2018**.
- Compared to other offences, **sedition remains a rare crime** (it accounts for **less than 0.01% of all IPC crimes**).
- But within India, some parts are emerging as **sedition hotspots**. **Assam and Jharkhand**, for instance, with 37 sedition cases each, account for 32% of all sedition cases between 2014-2018. In Jharkhand, the police have used sedition to charge different types of protesters. In January, more than 3,000 protesters against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)

WHAT IS IT?

- **Sedition law:** Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code, 1860
- **Definition:** Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards, the government established by law in India, shall be punished
- **Punishment:** Imprisonment for life, to which fine may be added, or imprisonment which may extend to three years, to which fine may be added, or just a fine

WHAT THE SUPREME COURT SAID:
LANDMARK JUDGEMENTS

1962
KEDAR NATH SINGH VS STATE OF BIHAR
The Supreme Court held that "a citizen has a right to say or write whatever he likes about the government, or its measures, by way of criticism or comment, so long as he does not incite people to violence"

1982
P. ALAVI VS STATE OF KERALA
Where the court held that sloganeering, criticising of Parliament or the judicial set-up did not amount to sedition

1995
BALWANT SINGH AND ANR VS STATE OF PUNJAB
The SC says: "Raising some slogan ("Khalistan Zindabad") a couple of times...which neither evoked any response nor any reaction from the public cannot attract such punishment"

were charged with sedition while in 2019, more than 3,300 farmers were charged with sedition for protesting about land disputes.

- Though police in these states and elsewhere are charging more people with sedition, **few cases actually result in a conviction. Since 2016, only four sedition cases** have seen a conviction in court. One reason for this could be that sedition as an offence has no solid legal grounding in India. The Indian Constitution lays out freedom of expression as a fundamental right which many legal scholars have argued prevents sedition from being an offence.

Analysis

- Sedition law is often criticised as a **colonial relic** and a broadly worded preventive provision that should only be read as an emergency measure. Partly to address this, in 1967, the government enacted the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)**. This was meant to be a more specific law **intended to impose more reasonable restrictions on freedom of speech** in the interests of sovereignty and integrity of India.
- Even, globally, sedition is increasingly viewed as a **draconian law** and **was revoked in the United Kingdom in 2010**. In India itself, there have been two attempts, via private member bills, in the last decade to revoke it - but both efforts were thwarted by governments.
- More recently in 2018, the **21st Law Commission of India** issued a consultation paper asking for views on revoking sedition as an offence but the commission's term ended before it could deliver its recommendations.
- Thus, considering the above-mentioned data and global trend, there is a serious need for reviewing the sedition law in its current form.

Delimitation of J&K

- Before Parliament passed the **Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act** in August 2019, the effective strength of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly was **87 including four seats falling in Ladakh region** which is now a separate UT without a legislature. **Twenty-four seats of the Assembly** continue to remain vacant as they fall under Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).
- Now, Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora has named Election Commissioner **Sushil Chandra** as his nominee for the proposed Delimitation Commission for Jammu and Kashmir.

The new proposal:

- The number of seats in the Legislative Assembly of Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir shall be **increased from 107 to 114** and delimitation of the constituencies may be determined by the Election Commission in the manner as provided under **J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019**.
- 2019 Act also laid that Lok Sabha will have **five seats from the UT of J&K**, while **Ladakh will have one seat** and the **First Schedule to the Representation of the People Act, 1950** shall be deemed to be amended accordingly.
- Earlier, delimitation of J&K's Lok Sabha seats is governed by the Indian Constitution, but delimitation of its Assembly seats (until special status was abrogated recently) was governed

Delimitation In The Past

- The **first delimitation exercise in 1950-51** was carried out by the President (with the help of the Election Commission) as the Constitution at that time was silent on who should undertake the division of states into Lok Sabha seats.
- This delimitation was temporary as the Constitution mandated **redrawing of boundaries after every Census**.
- This suggestion was accepted and the **Delimitation Commission Act was enacted in 1952**.
- Delimitation Commissions have been set up four times *i.e.* in **1952, 1963, 1973 and 2002**. There was no delimitation after the 1981 and 1991 Censuses.

separately by the **Jammu and Kashmir Constitution and Jammu and Kashmir Representation of the People Act, 1957.**

About Delimitation:

- Delimitation is the act of **redrawing boundaries of Lok Sabha and State Assembly** seats to represent changes in population. In this process, the number of seats allocated to different states in Lok Sabha and the total number seats in a Legislative Assembly may also change.
- The **main objective of delimitation** is to provide equal representation to equal segments of a population. It also aims at a fair division of geographical areas so that one political party doesn't have an advantage over others in an election.
- Delimitation is carried out by an **independent Delimitation Commission.**

About Delimitation Commission:

- The Constitution mandates that orders of Delimitation Commission are **final and cannot be questioned before any court** as it would hold up an election indefinitely.
- Further, under **Article 82**, the Parliament enacts a Delimitation Act after every Census. Once the Act is in force, the Union government sets up a **Delimitation Commission made up of a retired Supreme Court judge, the Chief Election Commissioner and the respective State Election Commissioners.**
- The **Commission is supposed to determine** the number and boundaries of constituencies in a way that the population of all seats, so far as practicable, is the same. The **Commission is also tasked with** identifying seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes; these are where their population is relatively large. All this is done on the basis of the latest Census and, in case of difference of opinion among members of the Commission, the **opinion of the majority prevails.**
- The **draft proposals of the Delimitation Commission** are published in the Gazette of India, official gazettes of the states concerned and at least two vernacular papers for public feedback. The Commission also holds public sittings. After hearing the public, it considers objections and suggestions, received in writing or orally during public sittings and carries out changes, if any, in the draft proposal. The **final order is published in the Gazette of India and the State Gazette** and comes into force on a date specified by the President.

Need For Course Correction On Speaker's Office

Recently, the Supreme Court of India while adjudicating upon the matter relating to the disqualification of MLAs in the Manipur Legislative Assembly under the **Tenth Schedule** in **Keisham Meghachandra Singh v. the Hon'ble Speaker Manipur Legislative Assembly & Ors.** made a significant suggestion.

Recommendation of SC

- It recommended that Parliament should rethink as to whether disqualification petitions **ought to be entrusted to a Speaker as a quasi-judicial authority** when such a Speaker continues to belong to a particular political party either de jure or de facto.
- The SC was also of the opinion that Parliament may seriously consider a Constitutional amendment to substitute the Speaker of the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies with a **Permanent Tribunal** headed by a retired Supreme Court judge or a retired Chief Justice of a High Court, or some other outside independent mechanism.
- This was suggested to ensure that such disputes are decided both swiftly and impartially, thus giving teeth to the provisions contained in the Tenth Schedule, which are so vital in the proper functioning of India's democracy.

Position of Speaker

- Considering the **nature of duties of the Speaker**, technically as an arbiter or a quasi-judicial body should not be limited exclusively to matters under the Tenth Schedule; rather, it extends to a range of its functions.
- While facilitating the business of the House and to maintain decorum in the House, the Speaker has extensive functions to perform in matters **regulatory, administrative and judicial**, falling under her domain.
- Speaker enjoys vast authority under the Constitution and the Rules, as well as inherently'. He is the **ultimate interpreter and arbiter of those provisions** which relate to the functioning of the House. Further, his decisions are final and binding and ordinarily cannot be easily challenged.
- Moreover, Speaker decides the duration of debates, can discipline members and even override decisions by committees. It also represents the **collective voice of the House and is the sole representative of the House** in the international arena. Jawaharlal Nehru, describes his position as: "The Speaker represents the House. She represents the dignity of the House, the freedom of the House and because the House represents the nation, in a particular way, the Speaker becomes a symbol of the nation's freedom and liberty. Therefore, that should be an honoured position, a free position and should be occupied always by persons of outstanding ability and impartiality."

Issues Faced By The Office Of Speaker

- However, on several occasions, the Speaker's role has been questioned on the **allegation of bias**.
- The office has been criticised for being an **agent of pernicious partisan politics**. Notably, the Supreme Court has observed in **Jagjit Singh v. State of Haryana** as "...Without meaning any disrespect for any particular Speaker in the country, but only going by some events of the recent past, certain questions have been raised about the confidence in the matter of impartiality on some issues having political overtones which are decided by the Speaker in his capacity as a Tribunal."
- Further, as a minority view, Justice J.S. Verma in **Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu and Others** observed that the Speaker being an authority within the House and his tenure being dependent on the will of the majority therein, likelihood of suspicion of bias could not be ruled out.
- Currently, the extent of the Speaker's political commitment often depends on the personality and character of the person holding the office. Howsoever desirable the proposition of neutrality may be, in the present circumstances, it would be **unrealistic to expect a Speaker to completely abjure all party considerations**.
- Moreover, there are **structural issues regarding the manner of appointment** of the Speaker and his tenure in office. Since the **electoral system and conventions in India have not developed to ensure protection to the office**, there are cogent reasons for Speakers to retain party membership.

Way forward

- Therefore, what is required is not merely incidental changes in the powers of the Speaker; rather a **major revamp in the structure of the office** itself is necessary.
- It is suggested that a scheme should be brought wherein Speaker should **renounce all political affiliations, membership and activity** once they have been elected, both within the Assembly and in the country as a whole.
- Reference can be sought from the **United Kingdom**, where the main characteristic of the Speaker of the House of Commons is neutrality. In practice, once elected, the **Speaker gives up all-partisan affiliation**, as in other Parliaments of British tradition, but remains in office until retirement, even though the majority may change. Further, Speaker **does not express any political views** during debates and is an **election candidate without any ticket**.

- Impartiality, fairness and autonomy in decision-making are the hallmarks of a robust institution. At a time when India's fall in ranks in the latest **Democracy Index** has evoked concern, it is expected that Parliament will pay heed to the reasoning given by the Hon'ble SC and take steps to strengthen the office of Speaker.

Important Dates

- **2 February** - World Wetlands Day (Theme 2020 - Wetlands and Biodiversity)
- **11 February** – International Day of Women and Girl in Science (Theme 2020 - Investment in Women and Girls in Science for Inclusive Green Growth)
- **13 February** - World Radio Day (Theme 2020 - Radio and Diversity)
- **21 February** - International Mother Language Day (Theme 2020 - Languages without borders)
- **28 February** - National Science Day (to celebrate the discovery of the 'Raman Effect', Theme 2020 - Women in Science)
- **Last day of February** - Rare Disease Day