CIVIL SERVICES MONTHLY

DECEMBER 2019

- AFSPA EXTENSION
- NEW ARMS AMENDMENT ACTS
- eBKRAY
- AMRUT MISSION
- SNOWEX
- TOTOK
- ODISHA- JAGA MISSION
- MADDEN–JULIAN OSCILLATION (MJO)
- HORNBILL FESTIVAL
- PAIKA REBELLION
- DIVORCE ON “IRRETRIEVABLE BREAKDOWN OF MARRIAGE”
## INDEX

### PRELIMS

#### POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BILL TO SCRAP POLL SPEND LIMIT</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL SERVICE CENTRE AUTHORITY BILL-2019</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEB PORTAL FOR LOST/STOLEN PHONES</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFSPA EXTENSION</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEW ARMS AMENDMENT ACTS</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OATH TAKEN BY A MINISTER</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPECIAL PROTECTION GROUP ACT,1988</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### ECONOMY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>eBKRAY</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECYCLING OF SHIPS BILL</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMRUT MISSION</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SILVER LINE PROJECT</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGRICULTURAL AND PROCESSED FOOD PRODUCTS EXPORT DEVELOPMENT</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUTHORITY (APEDA)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT FUND</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(FIDF)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSET RECONSTRUCTION COMPANIES (ARCS)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIRCRAFT (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2019</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAT RIGHT STATION</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SNOWEX</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASTEROID BENNU</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTOK</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BREAST MILK BANKS</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RISAT-2BR1</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRD MINISTRY LAUNCHES KARTAVYA PORTAL</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MENTAL DISORDER</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODISHA- JAGA MISSION</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRADHAN MANTRI MATRU VANDANA YOJANA</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### ENVIRONMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PROJECT DOLPHIN</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECHO NETWORK</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LARGE IGNEOUS PROVINCES (LIPs)</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TYRE PYROLYSIS</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MADDEN–JULIAN OSCILLATION (MJO)</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BROWN TO GREEN REPORT 2019</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FROG PHONE</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDIA’S FIRST HAM PROJECT IN SEWERAGE SECTOR</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### DEFENCE AND INTERNAL SECURITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MIG-27 JETS DECOMMISSIONED</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SURYA KIRAN – XIV</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXERCISE MITRA SHAKTI –VII</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIPRI</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INAS 314 - “RAPTORS”</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANDROID VULNERABLE TO CYBERATTACK</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRITHVI – II</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REPORT REGARDING LBA</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDIA AND FINLAND SIGN AN MOU</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAMBRIDGE FIVE</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDIA MALDIVES RELATIONS</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SANNA MIRELLA MARIN</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOUGAINVILLE: A NEW COUNTRY IN THE PACIFIC</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### ART AND CULTURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NEW PARLIAMENT BUILDING</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HANOI JOINS UNESCO CREATIVE CITIES NETWORK</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAORI</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HORNBILL FESTIVAL</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JALLIANWALA BAGH NATIONAL MEMORIAL (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2019</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55th JNANPITH AWARD</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### MAINS

#### GENERAL STUDIES – I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FOREST REPORT (ISFR) 2019</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAHARAJA SURAJMAL: ‘PANIPAT’ CONTROVERSY</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAIKA REBELLION</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## GENERAL STUDIES – II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INDIAN RAILWAY MANAGEMENT SERVICE (IRMS)</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDIA, AFGHANISTAN AND IRAN ON CHABAHAR PORT</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRUMP TO BE IMPEACHED</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTO’S DISPUTE SETTLEMENT MECHANISM</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DATA ON EXTENT AND PATTERN OF SUBSTANCE USE</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCREASING CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SALT AND TRANS-FAT IN JUNK FOOD</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISHA BILL, 2019 OR ANDHRA PRADESH CRIMINAL LAW (AMENDMENT) ACT 2019</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIVORCE ON “IRRETRIEVABLE BREAKDOWN OF MARRIAGE”</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXPANSION OF SEATS IN LS</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## GENERAL STUDIES – III

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE PIPELINE FOR 2019-2025</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERSONAL DATA PROTECTION BILL, 2019</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLOBAL CLIMATE RISK INDEX 2020</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEAVY METAL CONTAMINATION IN INDIAN RIVERS</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATAL BHUJAL YOJANA</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMISSION GAP REPORT BY UNEP</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOREST DIEBACK</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEASLES OUTBREAKS</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRUG PRICES CONTROL ORDER</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INEFFICIENT ANTI-VENOM THERAPY</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXTRA NEUTRAL ALCOHOL (ENA)</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KALIA SCHEME</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMGSY PHASE III</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BILL TO SCRAP POLL SPEND LIMIT

Why in news?
- The Rajya Sabha discussed two private members’ Bills to do away with the cap on election spending by candidates and to establish a committee on foreign investment to prevent threats to national security.
- A candidate contesting Lok Sabha polls can spend up to Rs 70 lakh and up to Rs 28 lakh in an assembly election depending on the state in which they are contesting polls.
- Several MPs, during the discussion on the amendment to the Representation of the People Act, 1951, raised concerns about doing away with the spending limit of ₹70 lakh per candidate.
- Ceiling, currently prescribed by the Election Commission, on election expenses ends up being counterproductive and encourages candidates to under-report their expenditure. A lot of money (in elections) is being spent for illegitimate purposes. Even if you increase the expenditure limit, people will continue illegitimate expenditure.

NAGPUR RESOLUTION

Why in news?
- The ‘Nagpur Resolution – A holistic approach for empowering citizens’ has been adopted at the end of the Regional Conference on ‘Improving Public Service Delivery – Role of Governments’, held recently in Nagpur, Maharashtra.

About
- The conference was organised by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG), Government of India, in collaboration with the Government of Maharashtra and the Maharashtra State Commission for Right to Public Services.
- Previously, the Shillong Declaration and the Jammu Resolution have been adopted for good governance.

INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL SERVICES CENTRE AUTHORITY BILL, 2019

Why in news?
- International Financial Services Centre Authority bill was passed by Rajya Sabha on 13 December 2019.

About
- It proposes to set up an authority to regulate financial services in the International Financial Services Centres in India.
- It will comprise of nine members along with the chairperson.
- Among the nine members, two will be from Ministry of Finance and one each from SEBI, RBI, IRDAI and PRFDA. Two other officials are to be appointed on the recommendation of search committee. The members will have a term of three years.
- All members will have a term of three years, subject to their reappointment.
- The International Financial Services Centres Authority Bill, 2019 has also proposed setting up of the International Financial Services Centres Authority Fund.
- All grants, fees, charges and sums received by the authority from different sources, as decided by the centre, will be credited to the fund.
- The fund will be utilized to give salaries, allowances and other remuneration to the members and employees of the Authority and for other expenses incurred by the Authority.

INDIAN RAILWAY MANAGEMENT SERVICE (IRMS)

Why in news?
- All new recruits in railways will be inducted through the UPSC civil services exams under five specialties, declared on 26 December 2019,
days after the Cabinet approved the merger of its eight services into one -- the Indian Railway Management Service (IRMS).

- Just like aspirants to the Union Public Service Commission, candidates aspiring to get into railways will have to appear for their prelims after which they will indicate their preference for IRMS under five specialities -- four of them engineering specialities for 'technical' operations comprising of civil, mechanical, telecom and electrical, and one 'non-technical' speciality which will recruit officers for accounts, personnel and traffic.
- The first batch will be recruited in 2021, while the new five-member board with merged officers will be in place by the middle of 2020.

WEB PORTAL FOR LOST/STOLEN PHONES

Why in news?

- Phones users in Delhi-NCR who lose their handsets will now have some respite, with the government launching a portal that will enable blocking and tracing of stolen or lost mobile phones.
- The initiative was launched in Mumbai in September 2019, and has been rolled out for Delhi-NCR on 30 December 2019. It will be extended to other parts of the country in 2020.
- The project is backed by the Central Equipment Identity Register (CEIR) system, which was undertaken by the telecom department for addressing security, theft and other concerns including reprogramming of mobile handsets.
- The latest initiative is expected to benefit 5 crore mobile subscribers in Delhi and adjoining areas.
- This will also reduce the market for stolen phones.

CERTAIN COMMUNITIES IN KARNATAKA’S ST LIST

Why in news?

- A bill to include certain tribal communities in Karnataka into Scheduled Tribe category was passed in the Rajya Sabha on 12 December 2019.

About

- The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Second Amendment) Bill, 2019 was passed in the Upper House with voice vote. The bill seeks to include Parivara and Talawara tribal communities in ST category to ensure they get the reservation and other benefits provided by the government.
- The amendments have been made in the list of STs in Karnataka.
- Siddi tribes of Belagavi, Dharwad would also be included in the ST category apart from those living in Uttar Kannada districts.
- The first specification of Scheduled Tribes in relation to a particular State or Union territory is by a notified Order of the President after consultation with the State Government / UT concerned.
- Any subsequent inclusion in or exclusion from and other modifications in the list of Scheduled Tribes can be made only through an amending Act of Parliament.

RUN THROUGH FILES

Why in news?

- To ensure that important government matters don’t get delayed owing to conflicting hierarchical and departmental priorities, the Haryana government has introduced a “Run Through Files” mechanism on 24 December 2019 in the Centralised File Movement and Tracking Information System (CFMS).
- It would be personally monitored by Chief Minister of Haryana.
- A file shall be marked as Run Through Files only by the CM in the CFMS.
- Every file marked as RTF has to be cleared on priority greater than that is currently being accorded to the files marked top priority.
- At whichever level any contribution other than mere signing on the file is made, the same will also be uploaded on CFMS portal.
- A system generated SMS and email will automatically be sent on each downward or upward movement of the file.

**AFSPA EXTENSION**

**Why in news?**

- The Centre declared the whole of Nagaland as a "disturbed" area under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, for a further period of six months.
- Earlier, the Union Cabinet Secretariat has notified rules reiterating that the Ministry of Home Affairs will be the authority on deciding the imposition of AFSPA in the UTs of J&K and Ladakh.

**About**

- Nagaland has been under AFSPA for almost six decades now and it was not withdrawn even after a framework agreement was signed on August 3, 2015, by Naga insurgent group National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak Muivah) General Secretary Thuingaleng Muivah and government interlocutor R.N. Ravi in the presence of Prime Minister.
- It also remains in force in Assam, most of Manipur, and three districts and areas falling under the jurisdiction of four police stations in Arunachal Pradesh.

**About AFSPA**

- The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act was enacted in 1958 to bring under control what the government of India considered ‘disturbed’ areas.
- The government (either the state or centre) considers those areas to be ‘disturbed’ “by reason of differences or disputes between members of different religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities”.
- The AFSPA gives the military sweeping powers to search and arrest, and to open fire if they deem it necessary for "the maintenance of public order", and to do so with a degree of immunity from prosecution.

**PRIVILEGE MOTION AGAINST SMRITI IRANI**

**Why in news?**

- Congress has moved a privilege motion against Union textile minister Smriti Irani for misleading Parliament with her comments after she petitioned the Election Commission of India to take action against Rahul Gandhi for his remarks "rape in India" at an election rally in Jharkhand on 16 December 2019.

**What is Privilege motion?**

- Members of Parliament (MPs) enjoy certain parliamentary privileges which are bestowed on them collectively and individually so that they can discharge their duties and functions effectively. In the case that any of these immunities or rights are disregarded by any MP, the act is regarded as a ‘breach of privilege’ and is a punishable offence under Laws of Parliament.
- When a breach of privilege is found, then an MP can move a privilege motion against those being held guilty of breach. Both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha reserve the right to punish...
any action of contempt (not necessarily breach of privilege) which is against its authority and dignity.

- The first level of scrutiny that a privilege motion has to go through is that of the Speaker, in case the motion is moved in the Lok Sabha, and that of the Chairperson when a motion is moved in the Rajya Sabha. The Speaker/Chairperson may decide on the privilege motion at their own discretion or they may refer it to a parliamentary committee. If the Speaker/Chairperson admits the motion, then the concerned member is given an opportunity to explain themselves by making a short statement.

HARYANA DEVICES SCHEME TO CLEAR FILES QUICKLY

Why in news?

- To ensure that important government matters don’t get delayed owing to conflicting hierarchical and departmental priorities, the Haryana government has introduced a “Run Through Files” mechanism in the Centralised File Movement and Tracking Information System (CFMS).

About

- It would be personally monitored by Chief Minister of Haryana.
- A file shall be marked as Run Through Files only by the CM in the CFMS.
- Every file marked as RTF has to be cleared on priority greater than that is currently being accorded to the files marked top priority.
- At whichever level any contribution other than mere signing on the file is made, the same will also be uploaded on CFMS portal.
- A system generated SMS and email will automatically be sent on each downward or upward movement of the file.

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEES

Why in news?

- Persistent absenteeism from meetings of department-related standing committees should cost MPs their spot on these parliamentary panels was a strong view that emerged during a meeting of chairpersons of the committees with Rajya Sabha chairman M Venkaiah Naidu recently.

Parliamentary standing committees

- Indian Constitution mentions two kinds of Parliamentary Committees – Standing Committees and Ad Hoc Committees. Any subject related to these committees is dealt with Article 118 (1) of the Indian Constitution.
- Parliamentary committees draw their authority from Article 105 (on privileges of Parliament members) and Article 118 (on Parliament’s authority to make rules for regulating its procedure and conduct of business).
- Most committees are ‘standing’ as their existence is uninterrupted and usually reconstituted on an annual basis.
- A Standing Committee is a committee consisting of Members of Parliament. It is a permanent and regular committee which is constituted from time to time according to the provisions of an Act of Parliament or Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business.
- The work done by the Indian Parliament is not only voluminous but also of a complex nature, hence a good deal of its work is carried out in these Parliamentary Committees.
- Some are ‘select’ committees formed for a specific purpose, for instance, to deliberate on a particular bill. Once the Bill is disposed of, that select committee ceases to exist. Some standing committees are departmentally related.
- Parliamentary Committee is appointed/elected by the speaker/chairman.
- Submits its reports to house or speaker/chairman.
- The three financial committees are the Public Accounts Committee, the Estimates Committee and the Committee on Public Undertakings.
Three categories of Financial Committees

- Public Accounts Committee – It examines the annual reports of the Government and scrutinizes the reports of Comptroller and Auditor General laid in the parliament by the President.
- Estimates Committee – It examines the estimates of the expenditure proposed by the government in the budget and suggests ‘economies’ in public expenditure.
- Committee on Public Undertakings- It examines the reports and accounts of public undertakings.

LAUNCH OF GOOD GOVERNANCE INDEX

Why in news?

- Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions has launched the Good Governance Index. Tamil Nadu topped in this index.

About

- GGI is a uniform tool to assess the Status of Governance and impact of various interventions taken up by the various State Government and UTs.
- It aims to provide quantifiable data to compare the state of governance in all states and UTs, enable states and UTs to formulate and implement suitable strategies for improving governance and shift to result oriented approaches and administration.
- Various principles have been kept in mind while selecting the indicators, i.e. it should be easy to understand & calculate, citizen-centric & result driven, leading to improved results and applicable to all states and UTs, among others.
- Various consultation meetings were held with the stakeholders, including consultations with sector experts, ministries, states & UTs.

Key Findings of the Index

- The States and Union Territories were divided into 3 groups namely Big states, North East and hill states and union territories.
- In the “Big States” category, Tamil Nadu topped followed by Maharashtra, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh. The poor performers in this category were Odisha, Bihar, Goa and Uttar Pradesh. Jharkhand was ranked the last in this index.
- Himachal Pradesh ranked first in the North East and hill states category followed by Uttarakhand, Tripura, Mizoram and Sikkim. The bad performers of this category include Jammu and Kashmir, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.
- In Agricultural and allied ranking, the best performing states were Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram and Daman and Diu.
- Delhi, Uttarakhand and Jharkhand were the top performers under the category of commerce and industries.

NEW ARMS AMENDMENT ACT

Why in news?

- New Arms (Amendment) Act has come into force with President Ram Nath Kovind gave his assent to a Bill on 15 December 2019 cleared by Parliament to help the government in controlling the proliferation of illegal arms and ammunition in the country.

About

- The Bill seeks to amend the Arms Act, 1959 by reducing the number of firearms allowed per person from the current three to one.
- It also proposes new categories of offences and an increase in the penalty for certain offences.

Protests against it

- Since the Bill was introduced, the Punjab government and groups in Rajasthan have opposed it.
- In Punjab, protesters include individuals who own more than one weapon (includes
businessmen, former Army personnel and farmers).

- The Punjab government’s position is that over 50% of the state’s farmers stay in remote villages and need arms to protect themselves.
- Villagers close to the Pakistan border are also insecure about infiltrators.
- Some Punjab residents still keep the guns they had acquired during the days of militancy in the 1980s and 1990s.
- Many residents inherited vintage weapons from their ancestors, which they do not want to part with.
- The members of the Rajput community have opposed the proposed amendments.
- They have antique guns as family heirlooms and worship weapons.
- So, they think that the new amendment bill if passed will rob them of their treasured possessions.

**Arguments in favour**

- It maintains the move will help reduce firearms-related crime.
- According to National Crime Record Bureau’s 2016 report,
  - In Punjab, 48 were murdered by use of firearms, out of which 22 were licensed firearms and 26 were illegal.
  - In Rajasthan, 23 victims were murdered by use of firearms and all murders were committed using illegal weapons.
  - The latest NCRB report for 2017 does not give a breakdown of murder using firearms.
- From 2020, people in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir will have a public holiday on October 26 for the first time. The day, which will be observed as Accession Day, marks the signing of the Instrument of Accession by the last Dogra ruler of J&K, Maharaja Hari Singh, with the then Governor-General of India, Lord Mountbatten.

**Instrument of Accession (IoA) of J&K**

- It is a legal document executed by Maharaja Hari Singh, the then ruler of the princely state of Jammu & Kashmir, on October 26, 1947. It declared that the state of Jammu and Kashmir accedes to India.
- The IoA gave India’s Parliament the power to legislate in respect of J&K only on the matters of defence, external affairs and communications.
- Apart from defence, communications and external affairs, the IoA mentions ancillary subjects that include elections to the dominion legislature and offences against laws with respect to any of the said matters.
- Using IoA, Article 370 was incorporated in the Constitution of India.

**POLITICAL PARTIES REGISTRATION TRACKING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (PPRTMS)**

**Why in news?**

- Election Commission of India (ECI) is set to implement “Political Parties Registration Tracking Management System” (PPRTMS) on 1 January 2020.
About

- ECI has reviewed the system and process of registration of political parties. Accordingly, the PPRTMS will be implemented through an online portal, to facilitate tracking of status of application.
- Under PPRTMS, the applicant (who is applying for party registration from 1st January, 2020 onwards) will be able to track the progress of his / her application and will get status update through SMS and email.
- An association seeking registration under the said Section has to submit an application to the Commission within a period of 30 days following the date of its formation, as per the guidelines prescribed by the Commission in exercise of the powers conferred by Article 324 of the Constitution of India and Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.
- The applicant is required to provide contact mobile number and email address of the party / applicant in his application if he/she wishes to track the progress of the application.

OATH TAKEN BY A MINISTER

Why in news?

- On the first day of the Assembly session in Maharashtra on 30 November 2019, former Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis alleged that the oath-taking ceremony of the new government had violated the Constitution.
- Fadnavis was referring to the invocation by Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and each Minister at the start of the oath, before reading out the text, which he alleged had altered the oath itself.
- Thackeray invoked Chattrapati Shivaji and “my parents”; Eknath Shinde named Bal Thackeray, Uddhav Thackeray, and Shivaji.

Constitutional Provisions

- Article 164(3) says: “Before a Minister enters upon his office, the Governor shall administer to him the oaths of office and of secrecy according to the forms set out for the purpose in the Third Schedule.”
- The Third Schedule requires the taker of the oath to either “swear in the name of God” or to “solemnly affirm” to “bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution...”.
- Article 164 makes it clear that the text of the oath is sacrosanct, and the person taking the oath has to read it out exactly as it is, in the given format.
- If a person wanders from the text, it is the responsibility of the person administering the oath — in this instance the Governor — to interrupt and ask the person being sworn in to read it out correctly. If the Governor approves the oath, the matter is closed and cannot be legally challenged.

NCT OF DELHI (RECOGNITION OF PROPERTY RIGHTS OF RESIDENTS IN UNAUTHORISED COLONIES) BILL, 2019

Why in news?

- The Parliament has passed the National Capital Territory of Delhi (Recognition of

Provisions of the Bill

- Recognizes the property rights of residents of certain unauthorised colonies in Delhi
- Central government may regularise transactions of immovable properties held by residents of certain unauthorised colonies, through notification.
- The residents will be required to pay certain charges to obtain such ownership. These charges may be notified by the central government.
- The bill provides for a legal framework to grant ownership rights to nearly 40 lakh people living in unauthorised colonies in Delhi.
- The bill will allow registration of properties and provide certain relief to the residents of 1731 unauthorised colonies in the city from registration charges and stamp duty.

- Defines a resident as a person with physical possession of property on the basis of a registered sale deed or certain other documents. The definition includes legal heirs of residents but does not include any tenant, licensee, or persons permitted to use the property.
- An unauthorised colony is defined as a colony or development comprising of an adjoining area, where no permission has been obtained for the approval of layout or building plans. Further, the Delhi Development Authority must have had notified the colony for regularisation.

ANGLO-INDIANS AND 126TH CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT BILL

Why in news?

- Parliament on 12 December 2019 passed the 126th Constitutional amendment bill to extend quota to SCs and STs in Lok Sabha and state assemblies by another 10 years and scrapping the reservation of Anglo-Indians.

About

- Reservation for members of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), given for the past 70 years in Lok Sabha and state assemblies, is due to end on January 25, 2020.
- The reservation for Anglo-Indians in the form of "nomination" is set to expire on January 25 as the bill does not extend the facility to the community.
- With approval of both Houses, the bill has been sent to the states for ratification by 50 per cent of the assemblies before it comes into force.
- On 31 December 2019, Uttar Pradesh Legislature has ratified this Bill.

SC/STs are backward and there is no need to further divide this class into "creamy layer". Recently, the government had urged the Supreme Court to reconsider its stand that socially, educationally and economically advanced cream of Scheduled Castes/ Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST) communities should be excluded from the benefits of reservation in government services.
SPECIAL PROTECTION GROUP ACT, 1988

Why in news?

- Parliament passed an amendment to the Special Protection Group (SPG) Act, 1988, that will allow SPG cover to the Prime Minister and former Prime Ministers for a period of 5 years after leaving office.

About

- The amendments will make two key changes: SPG will provide security only to Prime Minister of the day and immediate family members residing with him or her.
- The other key change is that former Prime Ministers will be guarded by SPG commandos only for a period of 5 years after demitting office.
- Immediate family members of former PMs will get SPG security as well as long as they are residing with the former PM at the allotted residence.
- The family will lose the security once the former PM loses it as well. This technically means if an ex-PM dies, his immediate family members would not be entitled to SPG cover.
- The SPG Act amendment bill comes days after the Centre removed SPG cover for the Gandhi family. Sonia Gandhi, son Rahul and daughter Priyanka Gandhi Vadra were up until now being protected by the SPG. Earlier, SPG cover was also removed for former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.
- Since then, Manmohan Singh as well as the Gandhi are being protected under the "Z plus" security cover of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF).

NATIONAL COMPANY LAW APPELLATE TRIBUNAL (NCLAT)

Why in news?

- The Government has decided to set up a bench of National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) at Chennai.
- Benches of National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) are set up in various States depending on the case load and other relevant factors.
- Considering the heavy case load at some existing benches, additional members have been appointed and additional courts have been operationalised from time to time.
- The Government is taking all steps to strengthen the NCLT and NCLAT in terms of number of benches, number of courts and number of members, to reduce the pendency.
- Apart from decision to set up NCLAT bench at Chennai, five new benches of NCLT have been set up during 2018-2019 at Jaipur, Cuttack, Kochi, Indore and Amravati.
- The Government has recently appointed 28 more members in NCLT and 4 more members in NCLAT. For capacity building of members, regular colloquiums are being held. E-Court project has also been implemented in a few benches with heavy case load.

MERGE OF UNION TERRITORIES DAMAN AND DIU AND DADRA AND NAGAR HAVELI

Why in news?
A bill to merge the Union Territories of Daman and Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli into one UT was passed by Parliament. This merger would lead to better delivery of services, reducing administrative expenditure and boosting development.

The merged UT will be named Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu.

The country has now 8 UTs.

**PARTIAL CREDIT GUARANTEE SCHEME**

**Why in news?**

- The Union Cabinet has given its approval to the Partial Credit Guarantee Scheme to Public Sector Pooled Banks (PSBs) for purchasing high-rated pooled assets from financially sound Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs)/Housing Finance Companies (HFCs).

- However, the amount of overall guarantee has been limited to the first loss of up to 10% of the fair value of assets (FAV) being purchased by banks under the scheme or Rs. 10,000 crore, whichever is lower.

- Finance Minister is given the power to extend the validity of the Scheme by up to three months taking into account its progress.

- It will help address NBFCs/HFCs resolve their temporary liquidity or cash flow mismatch issues and enable them to continue contributing to credit creation and providing last mile lending to borrowers, thereby spurring economic growth.

**TRIAL RUN OF DOUBLE-STACK FREIGHT TRAIN**

**Why in news?**

- A trial run of a double-stack freight train on the newly built 306-km-long Rewari-Madar section of the Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (WDFC) was conducted on 27 December 2019.

- Railways has already done a trial run of BOXNS cargo wagons at 110 Kmph, trial runs are being conducted on the Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India (DFCCIL) tracks.

- DFCCIL will run freight trains at the maximum speed of 100 Kmph hour as against the current maximum speed of 75 kmph on Indian Railway tracks whereas the average speed of freight trains will also be increased from existing speed of 26 kmph on Indian Railways lines to 70 kmph on Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFC).

- The opening of this stretch will benefit various industries in Rewari - Manesar, Narnaul, Phulera & Kishangarh areas of Rajasthan & Haryana.

**eBKRAY**

**Why in news?**

- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on 28 December 2019 launched eBkray, an online platform to increase the transparency in auctioning of assets attached by banks.

- The platform is equipped with property search features and navigational links to all PSB e-auction sites, provides single-window access to information on properties up for e-auction as well as facility for comparison of similar
properties, and also contains photographs and videos of uploaded properties.

- The e-auction platform is now linked on Indian Banks Auctions Mortgaged Properties Information (IBAPI) portal and guidelines have been made available which will help banks in the release of cash trapped in mortgaged assets. It will also bring transparency in the process.

**4TH ROUND OF REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY SCHEME-UDAN**

**Why in news?**

- The government has launched the 4th round of Regional Connectivity Scheme - UDAN (Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik) to further enhance the connectivity to remote and regional areas of the country. The focus in this round will be North East Region, Hilly States, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh and Islands.

- The scheme was launched in October 2016, which seeks to provide connectivity to unserved and under-served regions through revival of existing airstrips and airports.

- In the last three years government has successfully completed three rounds of bidding under the Scheme and awarded about 700 routes.

- The Ministry of Civil Aviation aims to operationalize one thousand routes and more than 100 airports in the next five years.

**HIGHEST ROAD LENGTH UNDER PMGSY IN 2019**

**Why in news?**

- In a significant accomplishment, Jammu and Kashmir has achieved the highest Pradhan Mantri Gram Saday Yojana (PMGSY) road length in the country during 2019 so far.

- During the 2019 fiscal, around 11,400 kilometers of different road projects have been sanctioned against the total length of 19,700 kilometers.

- Consequently, against the sanctioned 2,214 habitations, 1,838 habitations have been provided connectivity as on date which includes 101 habitations connected during 2019 fiscal.

- Similarly, under Central Road Fund, 88 schemes have been completed which include 22 bridges and 66 roads.

- PMGSY is Centre government’s mega flagship program with the main objective of providing good all-weather road connectivity to unconnected rural areas in the country. It is being implemented in J&amp;K by Public Works (Roads and Buildings) Department of the Union Territory.

**NATIONAL STARTUP AWARDS 2020**

**Why in news?**

- The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has announced the institution of the first ever National Startup Awards.
About

- The National Startup Awards seek to recognize outstanding startups and ecosystem enablers that are building innovative solutions and scalable enterprises, with high potential of employment generation or wealth creation, demonstrating measurable social impact.
- The awards for startups will be given in 35 areas, classified into 12 broad sectors like agriculture, education, enterprise technology, energy, finance, food, health, Industry 4.0, space, security, tourism, and urban services. In addition, there are three special awards for startups from educational institutions, making an impact in rural areas and women entrepreneurs.
- A cash prize of Rs 5 lakh each will be awarded to the winning startup in each area. A cash prize of Rs 15 lakh each will be awarded to one winning Incubator and one winning Accelerator as well.
- The applications for the awards are open till 31st December 2019.

NATIONAL FARMERS DAY
Why in news?
- National farmers Day or the Kisan Divas observed every year in India on the 23rd of December to commemorate the birth anniversary of the 5th Prime Minister of India, Choudhary Charan Singh.

About
- It was decided by the government of India to celebrate Farmers Day in 2001.
- It is believed that ‘Zamindari Abolition Bill-1952’ was passed due to Chaudhary Charan Singh’s hard work.
- The government organizes many programs and debates, seminars on agriculture on this day.
- The day seeks to promote awareness among the citizens to understand the importance of the contributions of the farmers to the society.
- Farmers are considered to be the backbone of India’s economic development as more than 40% of the total employment in India, is employed in the Agricultural sector.
- The day is widely celebrated in states such as Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab and Madhya Pradesh.

RECYCLING OF SHIPS BILL
Why in news?
- The Parliament has passed the Recycling of Ships Bill, 2019 has become an Act, after it received the assent of the President of India on 13th December 2019.
- This Act aims to provide for the regulation of recycling of ships by setting certain international standards and laying down the statutory mechanism for enforcement of such standards.
- The Government has also decided to accede to the Hong Kong International Convention for Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships, 2009.
- Accordingly, India has acceded to Hong Kong International Convention for Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships, 2009 on 28th November, 2019.

NATIONAL ELECTRONIC FUND TRANSFER (NEFT)
Why in news?
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) operationalised round-the-clock (24 X 7 basis) availability of the NEFT to give a big boost to digital funds movement.
● RBI also asked banks not to levy any charges on NEFT transfer from savings bank account holders.

About
● It is an electronic funds transfer system maintained by RBI.
● Started in November 2005, the setup was established and maintained by the Institute for Development and Research in Banking Technology (IDRBT).
● NEFT enabled bank customers in India to transfer funds between any two NEFT-enabled bank accounts on a one-to-one basis via electronic messages.
● Unlike RTGS, fund transfers through the NEFT system do not occur in real-time basis.

Benefits of this step
● If RBI makes NEFT 24×7, it will not only ease the fund transfer for customers round the clock but will also take some load-off the bank branches for executing such transactions.
● It will also help in promoting a highly-digital and cashless society.

ADB, INDIA SIGN $250 MILLION LOAN TO EXPAND ENERGY EFFICIENCY INVESTMENTS IN INDIA

Why in news?
● The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Government of India on 16th December 2019 signed a $250 million loan to Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) to expand energy efficiency investments in India that will benefit agricultural, residential and institutional consumers. In addition, $46 million financing will be provided from the Clean Technology Fund (CTF), to be administered by ADB.

About
● ADB previously approved a $200 million loan to EESL, a public sector energy service company, in 2016 for Demand Side Energy Efficiency Sector Project that focused on efficient lighting and appliances.
● EESL will also explore business models to generate greater public demand for e-vehicles to support India’s current push for electric vehicles.
● Promoting awareness of the benefits of using energy efficient technologies is another feature of the project. Awareness campaigns will engage local organisations in knowledge-sharing and training, with a focus on women electricity consumers.
● Accompanying the loan will be a technical assistance (TA) of $2 million to support EESL in implementing the project, including a gender action plan, mobilising private sector participation in energy efficiency services, identifying new business opportunities, and transferring knowledge about successful models.
● The TA will also support the identification and development of new subprojects and pilot test some technologies. The grant comes from the Clean Technology Fund, to be administered by ADB.
● ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while
Sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty.

- In 2018, it made commitments of new loans and grants amounting to $21.6 billion.
- Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members — 49 from the region.

**ADB**

- It is a regional development bank that was established in 1966. It is headquartered in Manila, Philippines and is owned by 68 members- 49 from the region.
- It is committed towards achieving inclusive, resilient, prosperous and sustainable Asia and Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty.
- In 2018, ADB made commitments of new loans and grants amounting to $21.6 billion.

**AMRUT MISSION**

**Why in news?**

- Unable to meet set targets for urban renewal in 500 cities, the Centre has decided to extend the mission period of its flagship initiative Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) by two more years.

**About**

- Launched on June 25, 2015 by Prime Minister, AMRUT completes its mission period in March 2020.
- The government’s flagship initiative promises 139 lakh water connections by March 2020, 145 lakh sewer connections, storm water drainage projects, parks and green spaces and LED streetlights with a total outlay of Rs 77,640 crore (including central assistance of Rs 35,990).
- According to the Ministry of housing and urban affairs, over the last five years, only 2,316 projects worth Rs 7,195 crore — 9.2% of the total outlay – have been completed. Contracts for a big chunk of 2,962 projects worth Rs 64,541 crore have been awarded and work is in progress. About 46% of water connection and 28.3% of sewer connection targets have been achieved between June 2015 and December 2019.
- Thus, ministry has now decided to extend the mission by two more years till March 2022.

**TRIPURA AS A NEW SEZ**

**Why in news?**

- The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has notified the setting up of the first ever Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Tripura.

**About**

- The SEZ is being set-up at Paschim Jalefa, Sabroom, South Tripura District, which is 130 km away from Agartala.
- It will be a Sector Specific Economic Zone for Agro-Based Food Processing.
- The estimated investment in the project will be around 1550 Crore. The developer of the SEZ will be Tripura Industrial Development Corporation (TIDC) Ltd.
- The SEZ is estimated to generate 12,000 skilled jobs. Rubber based industries, textile and Apparel Industries, bamboo and Agri-food Processing Industries will be set-up in the SEZ.
- Setting up of the SEZ in Sabroom will open up new avenues to attract private investment considering the proximity of the Chittagong Port and construction of the

CHAHAL ACADEMY
bridge across Feni River in South Tripura which is underway.

- After it is set up, 100 percent Income Tax exemption will be provided on export income for SEZ units under Section 10AA of the Income Tax Act for the first 5 years.
- Also 50 percent exemption will be provided for the next 5 years and 50 percent of the ploughed back export profit for another 5 years.

GOODS AND SERVICES TAX (GST) COUNCIL

Why in news?
- The 38th meeting of the GST Council was chaired by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in New Delhi.

About Meeting
- It has voted for uniform rate of 28% on lotteries across the country, effective March 1, 2020.
- To facilitate the setting up industrial parks, the Council has decided that all entities with 20% ownership by central or state governments will be exempt from GST payable for long-term land leases from January 1, 2020. Earlier, only entities with a 50% government stake were exempt.

GST and its Council
- GST is a comprehensive, destination-based indirect tax that has replaced various indirect taxes that were implemented by the State and Centre such as VAT, excise duty, and others. GST is governed by the GST Council.
- GST Council is a constitutional body for making recommendations to the Union and State Government on issues related to GST. Article 279 (1) of the amended Indian Constitution states that the GST Council has to be constituted by the President within 60 days of the commencement of the Article 279A.
- The GST Council is chaired by the Union Finance Minister and other members are the Union State Minister of Revenue or Finance and Ministers in-charge of Finance or Taxation of all the States.
- It is the key decision-making body that will take all important decisions regarding the GST.
- It aims to ensure to have one uniform tax rate for goods and services across the nation.
- It dictates tax rate, tax exemption, the due date of forms, tax laws, and tax deadlines, keeping in mind special rates and provisions for some states.

SILVER LINE PROJECT

Why in news?
- The Ministry of Railways has granted in-principle approval for the ‘Silver Line’ project.

About
- The Silver Line Project is a proposal of the Kerala government that involves laying the third and fourth railway lines from Kasaragod in the north to Kochuveli (Thiruvananthapuram) in the south for the movement of semi high-speed trains.
The project aims to cut the travel time between the two corners from 12 hours to less than four hours.

The Silver Line project aims to connect major districts and towns with semi high-speed trains that will run on their own tracks.

It will traverse through 11 of the state’s 14 districts, Alappuzha, Wayanad, and Idukki being the exceptions.

Meanwhile, the prices of vegetables in the country have jumped sharply. The sharp rise in onion prices and consequent rise in food inflation has disturbed the mathematics for policy makers and the budget of millions of middle and lower class households.

**INSURANCE SECTOR**

**Why in news?**

- The annual report of the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) for 2018-19 was released recently.

**Key highlights of report**

- The insurance density of the life insurance sector in 2018 was $55, unchanged from the life insurance density of the previous year.

- Life insurance penetration for 2018 was 2.74%, slightly lower than the 2.76% of 2017. Life insurance penetration increased from 2.15% in 2001 to 4.60% in 2009, and has thereafter showed a generally decreasing trend.

- The insurance density of the non-life insurance sector has risen from $2.4 in 2001 to $18 in 2017 and to $19 in 2018. The non-life insurance penetration has risen from 0.56% in 2001 to 0.97% in 2018, shows the report.

- This growth in industry numbers not only comes as a good news for the industry but also highlights growing life cover and security for Indian citizens.

**AGRICULTURAL AND PROCESSED FOOD PRODUCTS EXPORT DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (APEDA)**

**Why in news?**

- A trail shipment of vegetables was sent to Dubai from Varanasi on 20 December 2019 by Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), under the government’s scheme to promote exports from agriculture produce rich regions of India.

**About**

- The container with 14 metric tonnes of fresh vegetables was exported from Mumbai after being sourced from Ghazipur and Varanasi.

- To fast-track the activities taken up for the Export Hub at Varanasi, a project office of APEDA is being set up at Varanasi for coordination and facilitation of all activities.

- A committee has also been formed under the chairmanship of the Commissioner, Varanasi Division, with all the stakeholders, the statement said.
INDEPENDENT DIRECTOR’S DATABANK
Why in news?
- The Ministry of Corporate Affairs launched the Independent Director’s Databank in accordance with the provisions of the Companies Act, 2013 and the rules made thereunder.

About
- The Databank portal will be maintained by the Indian Institute for Corporate Affairs (IICA).
- All existing Independent Directors are required to register themselves in the databank within 3 months from 01 December 2019.
- It aims to provide an easy platform for the registration of existing Independent Directors as well as individuals aspiring to become independent directors.
- It also provides a wide array of e-learning courses on various topics including the Companies Act, Securities laws, basic accountancy, board practices, board ethics and board effectiveness for capacity building of Independent Directors.

FIFTEENTH FINANCE COMMISSION
Why in news?
- The chairman of the Fifteenth Finance Commission, N.K. Singh, has submitted the interim report of the Commission to President Ram Nath Kovind on devolution formula for the financial year 2020-21 for further necessary action.

About
- The devolution formula spells out how the Centre plans to share the taxes collected by it with the States. Since, the formula is to be applied in the new Budget, the award has not been made public.
- Now, the report will first be studied and then a final view will be taken by the Cabinet following which it will be tabled in Parliament just before the Union Budget 2020. Only after that will the contents be made public.
- Normally, the government is free to accept or reject other suggestions in the report.

15th Finance Commission
- It was constituted by the President under Article 280 of the Constitution on 27th of November 2017 to make recommendations for a period of five years from 1st April 2020 to 31 March 2025.
- Last month after a Cabinet decision, the Gazette Notification dated 27 November 2019 mandated the Commission to submit the report for the financial year 2020-21 by 30 November 2019 and then the final report for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2026 by 30 October 2020.
- This has been necessitated after Article 370 of the Constitution was amended. Following this the State of Jammu & Kashmir was bifurcated into two Union Territories, Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh. Thus, there was a need to change the terms of reference and extension of the term.
- The last time an interim report was submitted was during the term of 11th Finance Commission (2000-05), when the new States of Jharkhand, Uttarakhand and Chhattisgarh were created.

FIFTH BI-MONTHLY MONETARY POLICY STATEMENT, 2019-20
Why in news?
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in its fifth bi-monthly Monetary Policy has kept the policy repo rate unchanged at 5.15 per cent.

About
- The six-member Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) headed by Governor
Shaktikanta Das unanimously voted for a status quo policy.

- The reverse credit policy has also maintained the reverse repo rate at 4.90 per cent and the marginal standing facility rate and Bank Rate at 5.40 per cent.
- The real GDP growth for 2019-20 has been revised downwards from 6.1 per cent in the October policy to 5.0 per cent.
- According to the RBI Governor, the decisions are in consonance with the objective of achieving the medium-term target for consumer price index inflation of 4 per cent while supporting growth.
- This move was prompted by a spike in headline inflation above the 4% medium-term target in October 2019, while growth fell to a six-year low of 4.5% in the September quarter.

**Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)**

- It was constituted by the RBI to determine the policy interest rate required to achieve the inflation target. It comprises of 6 members - three officials of the RBI and three external members nominated by the Government of India. The Governor of RBI is the chairperson ex officio of the committee.

**ALLOCATION OF 5 COAL MINES APPROVED**

**Why in news?**

- The Ministry of Coal, after a long gap of 4 years, has approved the allocation of five Coal Mines. This was the result of the electronic auction conducted by Ministry of Coal in November 2019.

**About**

- The five Coal Mines allocated are: Bikram and Brahampuri (Madhya Pradesh), Bhaskarpara (Chhattisgarh), Jagannathpur (West Bengal), Jamkhani (Odisha).
- Two were allocated to Birla Corporation Ltd and one each to Vedanta Ltd, Prakash Industries Ltd and Powerplus Traders Pvt Ltd.

**Significance of this step**

- For the first time, the successful bidders shall have the flexibility to sell 25% coal produced in the open market.
- This will boost the coal production in the country and reduce the dependence of industries on imported coal.

**FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT FUND (FIDF)**

**Why in news?**

- The First tripartite Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) was signed under Fisheries and Aquaculture Development Fund (FIDF) between the department of Fisheries Government of India, NABARD and the Government of Tamil Nadu for the implementation of FIDF.

**About**

- A dedicated fund has been created namely the Fisheries and Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund with a total of Rs. 7522.48 crore to address the infrastructure requirement for fisheries sector.
- Coastal states need to pay attention to deep sea fishing, post harvesting, cage culture and export promotion.
- FIDF provides concessional finance to the eligible entities, cooperatives, individuals
and entrepreneurs for development of identified fisheries infrastructure.

- The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NARBARD), National Cooperatives Development Corporation (NCDC) and all scheduled banks are Nodal Loaning entities (NLEs) to provide concessional finance under the (FIDF).
- The Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying under the FIDF provides interest subvention up to 3% per annum for providing the concessional finance by the NLEs at the interest rate not lower than 5% per annum.
- The Government of Tamil Nadu has signed the first Tripartite MoA for availing the initial concessional finance of Rs 420 crore from NARBARD for development of three fishing harbours in the State namely, (i) Tharangampadi in Nagapattinam District, (ii) Thiruvottiyur Kuppam in Tiruvallur District and (iii) Mudhunagar in Cuddalore District.
- These will create safe landing and berthing facilities for a large number of fishing vessels plying in the area, augment fish production in the regions, facilitate hygienic post–harvest handling of fish, stimulate growth of fisheries related economic activities and employment opportunities.
- NABARD as one of the Nodal Loaning Entities (NLEs) provides concessional finance for development of fisheries infrastructure facilities through State Governments/State Entities under the FIDF, after execution of the Tripartite MoA.

**About**

- The licensing window will be open on-tap.
- SFBs will be given scheduled bank status immediately upon commencement of operations.
- For Primary (Urban) Co-operative Banks (UCBs), desirous of voluntarily transiting into Small Finance Banks (SFBs) initial requirement of net worth shall be at Rs.100 crore, which will have to be increased to Rs. 200 crore within five years.
- Payments Banks can apply for conversion into SFB after five years of operations, if they are otherwise eligible as per these guidelines.
- Minimum paid-up voting equity capital / net worth requirement shall be Rs. 200 crore.

**Background**

- RBI had last issued guidelines for licensing of Small Finance Banks in the private sector in 2014.
- Consequently, the RBI issued in-principle approval to ten applicants and they have since established the banks.
- It was mentioned in the guidelines that after gaining experience in dealing with these banks, RBI would consider receiving the applications on a continuous basis.

**SMALL FINANCE BANKS (SFBS)**

**Why in news?**

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) released, “Guidelines for ‘on tap’ Licensing of Small Finance Banks in the Private Sector”.

**ASSET RECONSTRUCTION COMPANIES (ARCS)**

**Why in news?**

- Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has barred Asset reconstruction companies (ARCs) from bilaterally buying assets from entities sponsoring them.
About

RBI has decided that ARCs shall not acquire financial assets from the following on a bilateral basis:
1. a bank/financial institution which is the sponsor of the ARC;
2. a bank/financial institution which is either a lender to the ARC or a subscriber to the fund, if any, raised by the ARC for its operations;
3. an entity in the group to which the ARC belongs.

However, they may participate in auctions of the financial assets and it is provided that such auctions are conducted in a transparent manner.

The firm most likely to be affected by the central bank directive is Asset Reconstruction Company (India), or ARCIL, which is sponsored by State Bank of India, ICICI Bank, Punjab National Bank and IDBI Bank.

Asset Reconstruction Company (ARC)

- An ARC is a special type of financial institution that buys the debtors of the bank at a mutually agreed value and attempts to recover the debts or associated securities by itself.
- The ARCs take over a portion of the debts of the bank that qualify to be recognised as Non-Performing Assets.
- ARCs are registered under the RBI and regulated under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Securities Interest Act, 2002 (SARFAESI Act, 2002).

JEWAR AIRPORT

Why in news?

The Swiss company Zurich International Airport AG has won the bid for a new airport in Jewar in Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh, near Delhi.

About

- Jewar Airport will be about 72 km from IGI Airport, 40 km from Noida and Ghaziabad, 28 km from Greater Noida, and 65 km from Gurgaon.
- The Jewar Airport primarily aims to reduce the load on Delhi’s Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport. It will be an alternative not only for passengers within NCR but also for several cities in western Uttar Pradesh such as Agra, Bulandshahr or Aligarh.
- It will be the third airport in the National Capital Region (NCR), after IGI Airport and the newly opened Hindon Airport (in Ghaziabad).
- The airport is being planned as India’s largest, with a proposed six to eight runways once it is fully operational.

FIRST PASHU KISAN CREDIT CARDS

Why in news?

The First Pashu Kisan credit cards in India were distributed to 101 animal farmers in Bhiwani, Haryana on 6 December at the Animal Farmers Credit Card Scheme launching ceremony.

About

Under the Scheme, banks give Rs 40783 for a cow and Rs 60249 for a buffalo. The credit amount for goat and sheep each is Rs 4063.
In the case of a pig, it is Rs 16337 per pig. For Hens, it is Rs 720 per layer and Rs 161 per broiler hen.

- Haryana is the first state to implement this scheme. As many as 101 livestock owners have been handed over cards and can use these to pay for animal feed, etc. They can repay within a stipulated period.
- The card is along the lines of the Kisan credit card scheme and will allot credit according to the animal you own.
- Using the cards, one can buy cow-buffalo and other animals.
- TVs, mobile phones and fridges can also be purchased.
- For Hens, it is to give Rs.720 per layer and Rs.161 per broiler hen.

**AIRCRAFT (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2019**

**Why in news?**
- The Union Cabinet has given its approval to introduce the Aircraft (Amendment) Bill, 2019 for carrying out the amendments to the Aircraft Act, 1934 (XXII of 1934).
- The Bill will now be introduced in the Parliament.

**About**
- It aims to enhance the maximum limit of fine from the existing Rs. 10 lakhs to Rs. One Crore.
- It also enlarges the scope of the existing Act to include regulation of all areas of Air Navigation.
- The amendments would fulfil the requirements of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO).
- This will enable the three regulatory bodies in the Civil Aviation sector in India, namely Directorate General of Civil Aviation, Bureau of Civil Aviation Security and Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau to become more effective, which will lead to enhancement in the level of safety and security of aircraft operations in the country.

**INDEX NUMBERS OF THE WHOLESALE PRICE IN INDIA**

**Why in news?**
- The official Wholesale Price Index for 'All Commodities' (Base: 2011-12=100) for the month of November, 2019 rose by 0.10% to 122.3 (provisional) from 122.2 (provisional) for the previous month.
- The annual rate of inflation, based on monthly WPI, stood at 0.58% (provisional) for the month of November, 2019.
- The rate of inflation based on WPI Food Index consisting of ‘Food Articles’ from Primary Articles group and ‘Food Product’ from Manufactured Products group increased from 7.65% in October, 2019 to 9.02% in November, 2019.

**BHIM UPI GOES INTERNATIONAL**

**Why in news?**
- BHIM app has gone international with a pilot demo of BHIM UPI QR- based payments beginning at the ongoing Singapore FinTech Festival 2019.

**About**
- This QR code-based system would allow anyone with a BHIM app to scan the SGQR at NETS terminals for payments in Singapore.
- The project is being jointly developed by NPCI and NETS of Singapore. It is targeted to go live by Feb 2020.
AADHAAR ENABLED FERTILIZERS DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM (AEFDS)

Why in news?

- A study conducted by NITI Aayog through M/s Microsave revealed that AeFDS has increased accountability of stakeholders including fertilizer manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers.
- The NITI Aayog study revealed that the diversion of fertilizers has reduced. However, the extent of diversion of fertilizers for non-agriculture activities has not been quantified.

About

- Under the fertilizer DBT system, 100% subsidy on various fertilizer grades is released to the fertilizer companies, on the basis of actual sales made by the retailers to the beneficiaries.
- Under Aadhaar enabled Fertilizers Distribution System (AeFDS), it is mandatory for the retailers to sell subsidized fertilizers through Point of Sale (PoS) devices installed at each retailer shop and the beneficiaries are identified through Aadhaar Card, KCC, Voter Identity Card, etc.
- The Fertilizer sales are monitored online through a web-based Integrated Fertilizer Management System (iFMS).

BOND EXCHANGE TRADED FUND (ETF)

Why in news?

- The government approved the launch of India’s first corporate bond ETF-Bharat Bond ETF. It will allow retail investors to participate in India’s bond market.

About Bond

- The Bharat Bond ETF aims to provide funds to central public sector undertakings and other government organisation through bond issues.
- They will have two maturity periods of three and ten years. The ETF will track an underlying index on risk-replication basis.
- The government had earlier come up with equity ETFs twice; the first one in 2014 and the second in 2017.
- Bharat ETF will track an underlying index on risk replication basis, matching credit quality and average maturity of the index. The index will be constructed by an independent index provider, National Stock Exchange.
- Bond ETF will provide safety (underlying bonds are issued by CPSEs and other government owned entities), liquidity (tradability on exchange) and predictable tax efficient returns, the government said in a statement.
- Bond ETFs will provide tax efficiency as compared to bonds, as coupons (interest) from the bonds are taxed depending on the investor's tax slab, the govt said. Bond ETFs are taxed with the
benefit of indexation which significantly reduces the tax on capital gains for investor.

- Long-term capital gains (holding period of over 3 years) on bond funds are taxed at 20% after indexation. Indexation is the process of adjusting the purchase price of an investment for inflation, which helps bring down the quantum of capital gains.

EAT RIGHT STATION

Why in news?

- Indian Railways has launched a movement “Eat Right Station”, a part of the “Eat Right Movement” (launched in 2018 by the FSSAI), to help passengers to make a healthy and right food choice.

About

- Under this movement, Mumbai Central Railway Station is the country’s first “Eat Right Station” as certified by Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) on the basis of compliance of food safety and hygiene, availability of healthy diet, food handling at preparation, tran-shipment & retail/serving point, food waste management, promotion of local & seasonal food and creating awareness on food safety and healthy diet.

- The food quality regulator (FSSAI) along with Western Railways (WR) and Indian Railways Catering Tourism Corporation (IRCTC), trained food handlers, both in canteens and base kitchens. They inspected catering establishments at the station and certified & rated the standard of food.

- The focus of the movement is on improving the health and well-being of people by ensuring they eat healthy. ‘Eat Right India’ movement is built on two broad pillars of ‘Eat Healthy’ and ‘Eat Safe’.

TAXATION LAWS (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2019

Why in news?

- Recently, both the LokSabha and the RajyaSabha cleared the Taxation Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2019, which will amend the Income Tax Act 1961 and the Finance (No 2) Act 2019.

- It seeks to replace the Ordinance which was promulgated by the President in September 2019.

- Currently, domestic companies with annual turnover of up to Rs 400 crore pay income tax at the rate of 25%. For other domestic companies, the tax rate is 30%. The Bill provides domestic companies with an option to pay tax at the rate of 22%, provided they do not claim certain deductions under the Income Tax Act.

- The Bill provides new domestic manufacturing companies with an option to pay income tax at the rate of 15%, provided they do not claim certain deductions. These new domestic manufacturing companies must be set up and registered after September 30, 2019, and start manufacturing before April 1, 2023.

Features of the bill

- A company can choose to opt for the new tax rates in the financial year 2019-20 (i.e. assessment year 2020-21) or in any other financial year in the future. Once a company exercises this option, the chosen provision will apply for all subsequent years.

- Provisions regarding payment of Minimum Alternate Tax (MAT) will not apply to companies opting for the new tax rates. MAT is the minimum amount of tax required to be paid by a company, in case its normal tax liability after claiming deductions falls below a certain limit.
The Ordinance reduces the MAT rate (applicable for companies not opting for the new tax rates) from 18.5% to 15% with effect from the financial year 2019-20. The Bill amends this provision by making it effective from the financial year 2020-21.

The Bill clarifies that certain businesses will not be considered as manufacturing businesses. These include businesses engaged in: (i) development of computer software, (ii) printing of books, (iii) production of cinematograph film, (iv) mining, and (v) any other business notified by the Central Government.

2ND EDITION OF STARTUP INDIA GLOBAL VENTURE CAPITAL SUMMIT 2019

Why in news?

The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), in partnership with Government of Goa, organized the 2nd edition of the Startup India Global Venture Capital Summit, on 6th and 7th of December, 2019 for Fund Managers and Limited Partners of Top Global Venture Capital Firms.

About

The theme for Startup India Global Venture Capital Summit 2019 was India Opportunity – Investing in tomorrow together.

This year the Summit focus of the Summit is to mobilize global capital for innovation in India. The Summit brought together a series of engagements involving over 350 representatives of leading Global Venture Capital Firms, Limited Partners, Family Offices, High-Network Individuals, Government of India officials, top Corporates, and select innovative Startups.

It showcased the India Advantage, diversity and scale of Indian market opportunity, and the cutting-edge innovations originating in India.

INDIA’S FOREX RESERVES

Why in news?

The country’s foreign exchange reserves recently crossed the $450-billion mark for the first time because of the strong inflows which enabled the Central Bank to buy dollars from the market to check any sharp appreciation of the rupee.

It is the country’s import cover for 11 months. Since the beginning of the current financial year, the forex reserve has gained by $38.8 billion. This rise will give RBI the firepower to act against any sharp depreciation of the rupee.

It has been a steady rise for the reserves since then, with $175 billion added in the last six years.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

SNOWEX

Why in news?

NASA has launched a seasonal campaign — part of a five-year programme called SnowEx, initiated in 2016-17.

While the geographical focus of SnowEx is North America, NASA’s overall target is optimal strategies for mapping global snow water equivalent (SWE) with remote sensing and models leading to a Decadal Survey “Earth System Explorer” mission.
• Within its geographic range, SnowEx assesses where snow has fallen, how much there is and how its characteristics change as it melts. It uses airborne measurements, ground measurements and computer modelling.
• The airborne campaign will fly radar and lidar (light detection and ranging) to measure snow depth, microwave radar and radiometers to measure SWE, optical cameras to photograph the surface, infrared radiometers to measure surface temperature, and hyperspectral imagers for snow cover and composition.

GIMS OR GOVERNMENT INSTANT MESSAGING SYSTEM

Why in news?

• The government is testing a prototype of an Indian equivalent of popular messaging platforms, such as WhatsApp and Telegram, for secure internal use known as GIMS or Government Instant Messaging System. It is in the pilot testing stage across some states, including Odisha — and is learnt to have been released to the Indian Navy to be tried out on trial basis.

Features of GIMS

• GIMS is designed and developed by the Kerala unit of National Informatics Centre (NIC).
• It is being developed as a secure Indian alternative without the security concerns attached with apps hosted abroad or those owned by foreign entities. Like WhatsApp, GIMS provides end-to-end encryption for one-to-one messaging.
• The server hosting it is installed within the country and the information stored would be in government-based cloud — NIC-operated data centres that are only meant for captive use by the government and its departments.
• It is being packaged for employees of Central and state government departments and organisations for intra and inter organisation communications.
• The trial started with NIC employees using it internally, before expanding it to some central government agencies, including the finance department of Odisha and the Navy.
• A GIMS Portal is also being simultaneously developed for administration and monitoring of the platform.
• The platform is adaptable to both central and state government organisations, with an iOS version of GIMS released for trial in the first week of September 2019, compatible with iOS Version 11 and above, and an Android version that works with Kitkat (Android 4.4.4) and above.
• Besides one-to-one messaging and group messaging, there are specific provisions in GIMS for documents and media sharing in keeping with the hierarchies in the government system.

ASTEROID BENNU

Why in news?

• NASA’s OSIRIS-REx (Origins, Spectral Interpretation, Resource Identification, Security-Regolith Explorer) spacecraft has discovered traces of hydrogen and oxygen molecules — part of water and thus the potential for life — embedded in the asteroid Bennu’s rocky surface.
• OSIRIS-REx is the third mission in NASA’s New Frontiers program, which previously sent the New Horizons spacecraft zooming by Pluto and the Juno spacecraft into orbit around Jupiter.
About Bennu
- The asteroid was discovered by the Lincoln Near-Earth Asteroid Research (LINEAR) survey on September 11, 1999.
- It was originally named as 1999 RQ36.
- The name Bennu comes from an Egyptian deity related to the Sun, often depicted as a gray heron.
- Bennu is a 500-meter wide asteroid in an elliptical orbit around the sun. It is a carbonaceous asteroid composition including a large amount of carbon.

Why Bennu?
- Bennu’s orbit is close in proximity to Earth’s, even crossing it. The asteroid makes its closest approach to Earth every 6 years.
- It also circles the Sun nearly in the same plane as Earth, which makes it simple to launch the spacecraft out of Earth’s plane and into Bennu's plane.
- Small asteroids, with diameters of 200 meters or less, spin very fast. This rapid spinning makes it difficult for a spacecraft to match an asteroid’s velocity and collect samples.
- Bennu's size makes it approachable and makes landing possible.

INDIAN PHARMACOPOEIA (IP)
Why in news?
- The Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP) has been recognised formally by the National Department of Regulation of Medicines and Health Products of the Ministry of Public Health of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.
- It is based on the requirement as reputable IP in the laboratory of medicines and health products quality.
- With this, a new beginning has been made and Afghanistan has become the first country to recognize IP pursuant to the
efforts of Department of Commerce and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

About
- IP is an officially recognized book of standards as per the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and Rules 1945 thereunder.
- The IP specifies the standards of drugs manufactured and marketed in India in terms of their identity, purity and strength.
- The quality, efficacy and safety of the medicines are important from healthcare perspective. In order to ensure the quality of medicinal products, the legal and scientific standards are provided by Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC) in the form of IP.
- As per, the Second Schedule of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, IP is designated as the official book of standards for drugs imported and/or manufactured for sale, stock or exhibition for sale or distribution in India.
- The IP Commission’s mission is to promote public and animal health in India by bringing out authoritative and officially accepted standards for quality of drugs including active pharmaceutical ingredients, excipients and dosage forms, used by health professionals, patients and consumers.
- This is achieved by developing the standards for medicines and supporting their implementation.
- In addition, IPC also develops IP Reference Substances (IPRS) that act as fingerprint for identification of an article under test and its purity as prescribed in the IP monographs.
- Standards prescribed in the IP are authoritative in nature and are enforced by the regulatory authorities for quality control of medicines in India.

WDJ0914+1914
Why in news?
- A study published in the journal Nature has for the first time provided evidence of a planet surviving a white dwarf event.

About
- Some 4.5 billion years from today, our Sun will run out of fuel and shed its outer layers. What will remain of the Sun is called a “white dwarf”.
- In the process, it will destroy Mercury, Venus and probably Earth, and is expected to radiate enough high energy photons to evaporate Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune.
- Astronomers from the University of Warwick and the University of Valparaíso have reported the first indirect evidence of a giant planet orbiting a white dwarf star (WDJ0914+1914). It is the first time any such planet has been found.
- The discovery is significant, because while there was growing evidence accumulated in the past two decades that planetary systems can survive into white dwarf stars, only smaller objects such as asteroids had been detected so far. This is the first evidence of an actual planet in such a system.

TOTOK
Why in news?
- According to a United States intelligence assessment, ToTok, a chat and voice calling app, is actually a spying tool.

About
- ToTok is used by the government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to try to track
every conversation, movement, relationship, appointment, sound and image of those who install it on their phones.

- The UAE has restricted popular messaging services like WhatsApp and Skype, and ToTok was billed as a “fast, free, and secure” way to chat by video or text message. While the majority of its users are in the Emirates, the app has been downloaded throughout the Middle East, and in Europe, Asia, Africa, and North America.
- In the US, ToTok surged to become one of the most downloaded social apps.
- It was among the top 50 free apps in Saudi Arabia, the UK, India, Sweden, and other countries. However, not many people in India actually use ToTok.

END-TO-END ENCRYPTION

Why in news?

- Globally, intelligence and law enforcement agencies are arguing that end-to-end encryption makes it much harder to track terrorists, pedophiles and human traffickers as it makes it nearly impossible for them to get access to people’s digital communications.

About

- End-to-end encryption takes place on either end of a communication. A message is encrypted on a sender’s device, sent to the recipient’s device in an unreadable format, then decoded for the recipient.
- For doing this, a program on your device mathematically generates two cryptographic keys — a public key and a private key.
- The public key can be shared with anyone who wants to encrypt a message to you.
- The private key, or secret key, decrypts messages sent to you and never leaves your device.
- End-to-end encryption ensures that no one can eavesdrop on the contents of a message while it is in transit. It forces spies or snoops to go directly to the sender or recipient to read the content of the encrypted message.

JEHOLBAATAR KIELANAE

Why in news?

- Researchers have unearthed well-preserved middle ear bones from a new species of an extinct rodent that lived 145-66 million years ago in what is now northeastern China.

About

- The study, published in the journal Nature, looked at fossils of the extinct rodent-like mammal — Jeholbaatarkielanae — at Jehol Biota of China, and noted that these animals had a middle ear that is distinct from those of its relatives.
- The fossil clues provide solid evidence of the morphology and formation of the inner ear bones, which are fully detached from the lower jaw. The new fossil reveals a transitional stage in the evolution of the surangular — a “reptilian” jawbone.
- In these extinct mammals, the evolution of the middle ear may have probably been triggered by functional constraints on the bones and muscles involved in feeding.
- This advance may lead to better understanding of the evolution of hearing.
BREAST MILK BANKS

Why in News?

● The first human milk bank in the country, it was started on November 27, 1989. Thirty years later, the milk bank is a zonal centre, which helps in assessing and mentoring upcoming milk banks in the western region.

About

● Mother’s milk contains nutrients that are essential for a baby’s survival and growth. It protects babies from infections, common diseases and helps in reducing neonatal mortality.
● But when it is not available, pasteurised human milk is the next best option.
● Every day, the milk bank collects an average of three to four litres. A woman can express about 50 to 300 ml of milk at a time. According to doctors, the more a mother expresses milk, the more milk is produced. They rubbished the common belief that donating milk reduces the supply for one’s baby.

Why donate breast milk?

● Mother’s milk provides nutrition, helps babies grow and protects them from infection and diseases
● Breast milk is even more important for sick babies and those born prematurely. It gives them a better chance of survival
● A large number of vulnerable babies are not able to access mothers’ own milk for short or long term due to unavoidable reasons like mother’s sickness, death, and delay in milk production. In such cases, donor human milk from a milk bank can be life saving

Who can donate?

● Any lactating woman voluntarily willing to donate her surplus expressed breast milk can be a part of the initiative
● To donate, the mother must be in good health

How does donating help mother and baby?

● Donating milk helps prevent breast engorgement
● Since engorgement makes the breasts firm and swollen, it makes it difficult for the baby to breastfeed
● Engorgement happens when a mother produces more milk than her baby drinks
● In such cases, donating excess milk not only gives relief from pain but also helps save lives of many needy babies in the hospital

SEXED SEMEN

Why in news?

● During the recently held 14th Progressive Dairy Farmers Association (PDFA) International Dairy and Agri Expo 2019 at Jagraon, Union Minister for animal husbandry said that the plan is to provide dairy farmers with ‘sexed semen’ for cattle for as cheap as Rs 100 per straw by 2020.

What is sexed semen?

● It is processed semen of bulls from which ‘Y’ chromosomes in sperm cells, which lead to the birth of a male calf, are either removed through a ‘sorting’ process or killed.
● Semen which has only ‘X’ chromosomes can ensure that a female calf is born.
● Considered a financial burden, male calves are either killed or abandoned on the roads by farmers as they do not give milk. This had led to an increasing number of cattle roaming the streets, which has caused fatal road accidents as well.
The guarantee of a female calf being born is never 100 percent. It can be up to 90 percent. In 10 percent cases, a male calf might be born despite using sexed semen because even after sorting/killing, some Y chromosomes may pass.

**Two techniques to produce sexed semen**
- One is the ‘sorting process’ in which ‘X’ and ‘Y’ chromosomes are separated. ‘X’ are retained and ‘Y’ discarded.
- The other is in which ‘Y’ chromosomes are altogether killed.
- Both technologies use an instrument called ‘Flow Cytometer’

**RISAT-2BR1**

**Why in News?**
- PSLV-C48 successfully launches RISAT-2BR1 and nine commercial satellites from Satish Dhawan Space Centre SHAR, Sriharikota in Low Earth Orbit.

**About**
- India’s Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle, in its fiftieth flight (PSLV-C48), successfully launched RISAT-2BR1, an earth observation satellite, along with nine commercial satellites of Israel, Italy, Japan and the USA.
- PSLV-C48 lifted-off on December 11, 2019 from the First Launch Pad of SDSC SHAR, Sriharikota. PSLV-C48 was the 75th launch vehicle mission from SDSC SHAR, Sriharikota. This is the 2nd flight of PSLV in 'QL' configuration (with 4 solid strap-on motors).
- The PSLV had helped take payloads into almost all the orbits in space, including the Geo-stationary Transfer (GTO), the moon and Mars, and would soon be launching a mission to the Sun.
- RISAT-2BR1 is a radar imaging earth observation satellite weighing about 628 kg. The satellite will provide services in the field of Agriculture, Forestry and Disaster Management. The mission life of RISAT-2BR1 is 5 years.
- The satellite has resolution of 0.35 meters by which two objects separated by distance of 0.35 metres can be distinctly identified.
- 9 Commercial satellites were also successfully injected into designated orbit. These satellites were launched under commercial arrangement with NewSpace India Limited (NSIL), the commercial arm of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

**GAGANYAAN AND CHANDRAYAAN-3**

**Why in news?**
- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) will be working on more than 25 missions in 2020, with the ambitious Gaganyan mission being the most prominent among them and Chandrayaan-3, which will once again attempt to achieve soft landing on the lunar surface, declared by ISRO chief on 31 December 2019.

**Gaganyaan**
- It was announced by the Prime Minister in August 2018. The total cost of this mission is Rs. 10,000-crore.
- ISRO has already constituted an advisory committee for the Gaganyaan. It has also identified four astronauts whose training will commence in Russia from January in 2020.
- It is Indian human space flight scheduled for 2022. It is designed to have 3-7 crew members spend 3-7 days in space in a 400-km orbit.
The first of the two pre-Gaganyaan flights with a humanoid will be launched in 2020-end along with some of the six shortlisted microgravity experiments.

Chandrayaan - 3

- It is the successor to the Chandrayaan-2 mission and it will be almost a repetition of this July 2019 mission in the configuration of spacecraft, the landing spot on the moon and the experiments to be conducted on the lunar surface.
- The total cost of this mission will be over Rs 600 crores as compared to the total cost of the Chandrayaan-2 mission, which was Rs 960 crores.
- Although scores of landers sent by Russia, the U.S. and the Chinese have explored the moon’s surface, so far, no other agency has landed in the southern hemisphere of the moon. ISRO hopes to be the first to do so.

Barcode, which would describe a product and its price in a code readable by a machine.

- Initially, Woodland took inspiration from the Morse Code, the well-known character-encoding scheme in telecommunications defined by dots and dashes.
- Woodland’s idea was unable to develop the system as the cost of laser and computing technology was extremely high in the 1950s. Two decades later, in the 1970s, Laurer, who was then working for IBM, put Woodland’s idea to work, armed with less expensive laser and computing technology.
- Laurer found that a rectangle system, which we see on most barcodes today, would be more workable than Bull’s-Eye, which used a series of concentric circles that looked complicated.
- He developed a scanner with strips instead of circles. The very first barcode transaction was on a pack of Wrigley’s Juicy Fruit chewing gum.

After Barcode

- They also allow for easy check-outs and fewer pricing errors, and let retailers keep better account of their inventory.
- The barcode also changed the balance of power in the retail industry.
- For a small, family-run convenience store, the barcode scanner was an expensive solution to problems they did not really have. But big supermarkets could spread the cost of the scanners across many more sales. They valued shorter queues, and also needed to keep track of inventory.

Barcode was the brainchild of Woodland; Laurer is credited with bringing the idea to fruition. It was in the 1950s that Woodland thought about developing a system based on barcode symbology, called Bulls-Eye
• Department of Rural Development, Ministry of Rural Development is implementing a programme exclusively for women farmers namely, Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) in line with the provisions of National Policy for Farmers (NPF) (2007).

**About**

• It is a sub component of the Deendayal Antodaya Yojana-NRLM (DAY-NRLM). It seeks to improve the present status of women in Agriculture, and to enhance the opportunities available to empower her.

• MKSP recognizes the identity of “Mahila” as “Kisan” and strives to build the capacity of women in the domain of agro-ecologically sustainable practices.

• Funding support to the tune of up to 60% (90% for North Eastern States) for such projects is provided by the Government of India.

**Why it is required?**

• More than 80% of rural women are engaged in agriculture activities for their livelihoods.

• About 20 per cent of farm livelihoods are female headed due to widowhood, desertion, or male emigration.

• Agriculture support system in India strengthens the exclusion of women from their entitlements as agriculture workers and cultivators.

• Most of the women-headed households are not able to access extension services, farmers support institutions and production assets like seed, water, credit, subsidy etc.

As agricultural workers, women are paid lower wage than men.

**HRD MINISTER LAUNCHES FIVE DOCUMENTS DEVELOPED BY UGC**

**Why in news?**

• Human Resource Development Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank launched the five documents developed by University Grants Commission, UGC covering the 5 verticals of Quality Mandate in New Delhi on 26 December 2019.

**About**

• These five documents cover evaluation reforms, eco-friendly and sustainable university campuses, human values and professional ethics, faculty induction and academic research integrity.

• To improve the quality in Higher Educational Institutions, UGC has adopted the Higher Education Quality Improvement Programme Mandate. The quality mandate aims at evolving higher education system to equip country’s next-generation with vital skills, knowledge and ethics for leading a rewarding life.

• SATAT- Framework for Eco-Friendly and Sustainable Campus development in Higher Educational Institutions framework encourages universities to adopt reflective policies and practices to enhance the environmental quality of the campus and to adopt sustainable green and sustainable methods in its future.

• Recognizing the need to discuss and streamline the process that helps to infuse the culture of human values and ethics in educational institutions, UGC has also
developed a policy framework—
“MulyaPravah - Guidelines for Inculcation of Human values and Professionals Ethics in Higher Educational Institutions”.

HRD MINISTRY LAUNCHES KARTAVYA PORTAL
Why in news?
- Union Human Resource Development (HRD) Minister launched the kartavya portal for holding monthly essay competitions for students on 26 November 2019. The portal was launched as part of year-long ‘Nagrik Kartavya Paalan Abhiyan’ being observed throughout the country.
- The portal will be used primarily for holding monthly essay competitions for students as well as other activities including quizzes, poster making, debates pertaining to Nagrik Kartavya Paalan Abhiyan.
- The Department of Higher Education under HRD Ministry will be holding 11 rounds of National Essay Competitions during the year. The topics of the essay will be based on one Fundamental Duty every month.

BHARATIYA POSHAN ANTHEM
Why in news?
- Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu on 3 December 2019 launched the Bharatiya Poshan Anthem; which aims at taking the message of making India malnutrition free to all corners of the country.
- The anthem has been penned by noted lyricist Prasoon Joshi and sung by Shankar Mahadevan.
- Poshan Abhiyan was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in March 2018 with an objective to make India malnutrition free by 2022.

CROWN ACT
Why in news?
- In July this year, California became the first state in the US to make discrimination over natural hair illegal. New York followed suit and now New Jersey has become the latest US state to pass such a legislation, called Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair (CROWN) Act.

About
- CROWN aims to protect people of colour from being discriminated against for their natural hair, especially at the workplace.
- The legislation takes into account discrimination because of traits that are historically associated with a particular race, “based on hair texture and style”. It also takes into account the historical norms and societal norms that equated “blackness” and its associated physical traits such as dark skin, kinky and curly hair “to a badge of inferiority, sometimes subject to separate and unequal treatment”, the California version of the law states.
- One of the reasons for such legislation is to separate “professionalism” from features and mannerisms, thereby getting rid of workplace grooming or dress code policies that would deter black people from applying.
- A study conducted recently by Unilever-owned brand Dove concluded that black women were 80% more likely to change their natural hair in order to meet social norms or expectations at work.
● It also said that black women are 50% more likely to be sent home or to know of another black woman who has been sent home from the workplace because of her hair.

GAY ‘CONVERSION THERAPY’ (GERMANY)
● The German Cabinet approved a draft Bill banning “conversion therapies” designed to force heterosexuality on homosexuals.

About
● The so-called Gay Conversion “therapy”, employs psychotherapeutic methods, including giving electric shocks, to force homosexual people to turn heterosexual.
● These practices have often caused “severe physical and psychological damage”.
● The idea of conversion therapies is linked to the one that sees homosexuality as a mental disorder. This is a view that mental health professionals reject. Since Homosexuality is not an illness, so the word ‘therapy’ is misleading.

AYUSH82
Why in news?
● Minister for AYUSH informed Lok Sabha about the AYUSH82 formulation.

About
● CCRAS had developed the AYUSH82 formulation for diabetes through scientific process of drug development and commercialized through National Research Development Corporation (NRDC) for wider public utility.
● The Central of Research in Ayurveda Sciences (CCRAS), and autonomous body under the Ministry of AYUSH has been engaged in extending research oriented Ayurveda based on integrative health care services for the management of Madhumeha which is Diabetes Mellitus.

MENTAL DISORDER
Why in news?
● The first comprehensive estimates of disease burden attributable to mental health from 1990 prepared by the India State-Level Disease Burden Initiative was recently published in the Lancet Psychiatry.

Highlights of the Findings
● The study finds that roughly one in seven Indians, or 197 million people, suffered from mental disorders of varying severity in 2017.
● These include depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, bipolar disorders, idiopathic developmental intellectual disability, conduct disorders, and autism.
● The contribution of mental disorders to the disability-adjusted life year (DALY) — the sum of total years of life lost and years lived with a disability — has doubled between 1990 and 2017 increasing from 2.5% to 4.7%.
● Mental disorders were the second leading cause of disease burden in terms of years lived with disability (YLDs) and the sixth leading cause of disability-adjusted life-years (DALYs) in the world in 2017.
● In total, 45.7 million people had depressive disorders, as one in three years lost due to a mental disorder was due to depression. This was followed by anxiety — a total of 44.9 million people suffered from it and it accounted for the loss of 1 in 5 years.
● In its State-wise analysis, the study divides different States into three categories on the basis of their socio-demographic index (SDI), i.e low, medium and the high SDI States.
● Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Telangana, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh account for a higher prevalence of mental disorders that
manifest primarily during adulthood in depression and anxiety.

- The study also found that more women than men suffered from depression (3.9% women vs 2.7% men), anxiety (3.9% of women vs 2.7% men) and eating disorders (0.3% in women vs 0.1% in men).
- The prevalence of conduct disorder (1% men vs 0.6% women), autism spectrum disorders (0.5% in men vs 0.2 in women), and Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (0.6% in men and 0.2% in women) were substantially higher in males than in females.

Way Ahead

- strengthen mental health services
- attention through wider efforts in the community and health system
- integration of mental health services with other aspects of healthcare
- accurate accounting of how depression, anxiety and other mental disorders are distributed across the country.

HAJ

Why in news?

- India has become the first country to make the entire process for pilgrims going on Haj completely digital.

About

- Minority Affairs Minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi said this after signing the bilateral annual Haj 2020 agreement between India and Saudi Arabia for next year's pilgrimage with the Saudi Haj Minister in Jeddah.
- An online application, e-visa, Haj mobile app, 'e-MASIHA' health facility, "e-luggage pre-tagging" providing all information in India itself regarding accommodation and transportation in Mecca and Madina will be provided to 2 lakh Indian Muslims going for Haj in 2020.
- For the first time facilities were provided for digital pre-tagging of pilgrims' baggage.
- E-MASIHA (E-Medical Assistance System for Indian Pilgrims Abroad), an online system to maintain the health database of Indian pilgrims has been developed to deal with any emergency in Mecca and Madina.
- A portal of Haj Group Organisers (HGOs) – http://haj.nic.in/pto/ – has been developed which contains all the details of HGOs and their packages.

MISSION INDRADHANUSH 2.0

Why in news?

- Government of India launched a nationwide vaccination drive to prevent eight diseases under Intensified Mission Indradhanush 2.0.

About

- The scheme is aimed at immunizing children under the age of 2 years and pregnant women against eight vaccine preventable diseases.
- The IMI covers vaccines for diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, poliomyelitis, tuberculosis, measles, meningitis and Hepatitis B. Vaccines for Japanese encephalitis and hemophilus influenza are also being provided in selected areas.
- The IMI 2.0 aims to achieve targets of full immunization coverage in 272 districts spread over 27 States.
- The Immunization activity under IMI 2.0 will be carried out in 4 rounds between December 2019 and March 2020.
• Under this campaign, vaccination services will be provided free of cost to the drop out and left out children and pregnant women.

ANAEMIA

Why in news?

• Government informed Lok Sabha about the prevalence of Anaemia among women and children in urban and rural India.

About

• The data, based on the findings of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) IV (2015-16), divide the incidence of anaemia into ‘Mild’, ‘Moderate’ and ‘Severe’ kinds for both rural and urban India.
• As many as 58.5% of children between the ages of 6 months and 59 months, and 53.1% of women between the ages of 15 and 49 years are anaemic in the country.
• As per the details, 29.8% of children in rural India suffer from moderate anaemia, and 40.3% of women in the villages are mildly anaemic.

Anaemia Mukt Bharat (AMB) Strategy

• In 2018, the union government launched the Anaemia Mukt Bharat (AMB) Strategy under POSHAN Abhiyaan to reduce anaemia prevalence by three percentage points every year till 2022.
• AMB is a 6x6x6 strategy that is targeting six age groups, with six interventions and six institutional mechanisms.
• The six age groups include pre-school children (6-59 months), children (5-9 years), adolescent girls (10-19 years), adolescent boys (10-19 years), women of reproductive age group (15-49), and pregnant women and lactating mothers.

• Among the six interventions are prophylactic iron folic acid supplementation, periodic deworming, and addressing non-nutritional causes of anaemia in endemic pockets, with special focus on malaria, haemoglobinopathies and fluorosis, the Minister said.
• Institutional mechanisms include a National Anaemia Mukt Bharat Unit, and a National Centre of Excellence and Advanced Research on Anaemia Control.

ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE

Why in news?

• According to a new study by researchers at the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI), antibiotic prescription rate high in the private sector.

About

• The study is the first ever estimate of outpatient antibiotic prescription rates and patterns in the private sector.
• It has been published this in PLOS One titled — “Outpatient antibiotic prescription rate and pattern in the private sector in India”.
• The authors used the 12-month period (May 2013-April 2014) medical audit data set.

Key Findings

• The private sector clocked high levels of antibiotic prescription rates (412 per 1,000 persons per year).
• The highest rate was seen among children aged 0–4 years (636 per 1,000 persons) and the lowest in the age group 10–19 years (280 per 1,000 persons).
• Percentage of prescriptions for wide-spectrum antibiotics like cephalosporins
and quinolones (38.2% and 16.3%) was significantly higher than the U.S. (14.0% and 12.7%) and Greece (32.9% and 0.5%).

- India is considered to be one of the top users of antibiotics and there is a growing problem of antimicrobial resistance. Per capita antibiotic consumption in the retail sector has increased by around 22% in five years from 2012 to 2016.
- Of the 519 million antibiotic prescriptions, the majority were dispensed for the diseases of the respiratory system (55%).

**ODISHA- JAGA MISSION**

**Why in News?**

- The state government’s initiative granting land rights to thousands of slum dwellers under the Odisha Liveable Habitat Mission (OLHM) or Jaga Mission won the bronze at this years' World Habitat Awards.
- The annual award is given by World Habitat, a UK based organization, in partnership with UN Habitat, in recognition of innovative, outstanding and revolutionary ideas, projects and programmes from across the world.

**About**

- Under the Mission, Odisha’s Housing and Urban Development Department, in collaboration with Tata Trusts, is “transforming slums into livable habitat with all necessary civic infrastructure and services at par with the better off areas within the same urban local body (ULB)”. Odisha enacted a Land Rights for Slum Dwellers Act in 2017. This is not just a statute, but a lifeline for slum dwellers, who have been historically considered as encroachers. Slum dwellers have been considered lawbreakers and treated as culprits (by the state and society).
- This attitude has led to conspicuous differences between slum and non-slum localities in urban spaces. Slums are characterised by their lack of hygiene and a general air of being a un-liveable environment. In Bhubaneswar, 30 percent of the area is covered by slums and inhabited by 25 percent of the population. This cannot be successful urban governance.
- Odisha has surveyed 109 ULBs in 30 districts — in the process, surveying over one lakh households. Of these, around 30,000 households have received land rights certificates (LRCs) in Puri and Ganjam districts.

**Why land rights for slums matter**

- More often than not, slums are seen as encroachments and slum dwellers, even if they stay in slums for decades, are not provided with any legal rights over the land. This illegality further condemns slums — which are an urban reality in Indian cities — to unsanitary conditions. Formal recognition of land rights allows for cleaner cities and better living conditions for slum dwellers.

**INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION DAY**

**Why in news?**

- International Migrants Day 2019 is being celebrated on December 18 with the theme #WeTogether.

**About**

- The United Nations (UN) International Migrants Day is annually held on December 18 to recognize the efforts, contributions, and rights of migrants worldwide.
- It is celebrated through the UN-related agency International Organization for Migration (UN Migration).
This date was chosen because it was on 18 December 1990 that the UN adopted the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

**Migration in India**

- According to the International Migrant Stock 2019 report (released by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs), India with 17.5 million international migrants has emerged as the top source of international migrants, constituting 6.4% of the world’s total migrant population.
- The Constitution of India (Article 19) gives the right to all citizens “to move freely throughout the territory of India and to reside and settle in any part of the territory of India.
- As per Census 2011, 45 million Indians moved outside their district of birth for economic opportunities (be it employment or business).
- In India, internal migration (fueled by an increasing rate of urbanization and rural-urban wage difference) is far greater than an external migration.
- India's urban population is expected to grow from 410 million in 2014 to 814 million by 2050.
- Instead of long term migration, there is a huge flow of short term migrants in the country.

**RASHTRIYA VAYOSHRIYOJANA**

**Why in news?**

- A Central Sector Scheme namely ‘RashtriyaVayoshriYojana’ (RVY) is being implemented by the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment (under Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment).

**About**

- It aims to provide physical aids and assisted living devices to senior citizens, belonging to BPL category and suffering from age-related disabilities/ infirmities, which can restore near normalcy in their bodily functions.
- Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) is implementing ‘Assistance to Disabled Persons for Purchase/Fitting of Aids and Appliances (ADIP)’ Scheme under which aids and assistive devices are distributed to eligible Divyangjan for their physical, social, psychological and economic empowerment.

**Persons with disabilities fulfilling following conditions would be eligible for assistance under ADIP Scheme**

- An Indian citizen of any age.
- Holds a 40% Disablement Certificate.
- Has monthly income from all sources not exceeding Rs. 20,000/- per month.
- In case of dependents, the income of parents/guardians should not exceed Rs. 20,000/- per month.
- Who have not received assistance during the last 3 years for the same purpose from any source. However, for children below 12 years of age, this limit would be one year.
HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

Why in News?

- Human Rights Day is observed every year on 10 December.

About

- According to the official website of the United Nations, this year’s theme is – ‘Youth Standing Up for Human Rights’.
- UN believes that the participation of youth is an essential element to achieve sustainable development for everyone. Also, young people are always taken as major drivers of social, economic and political transformation.
- It is the day the United Nations General Assembly adopted, in 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR): a milestone document proclaiming the inalienable rights which everyone is inherently entitled to as a human being regardless of race, colour, religion, sex, language, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.
- Human rights are at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as in the absence of human dignity, sustainable development cannot be achieved.
- Human Rights are driven by progress on all SDGs, and the SDGs are driven by advancements on human rights.

ONE STOP CENTRE (OSC) SCHEME

Why in news?

- The Government of India is implementing One Stop Centre (OSC) scheme for setting up One Stop Centre since 1st April 2015 to support women affected by violence.

About

- One Stop Centres (OSCs) are intended to support women affected by violence, in private and public spaces, within the family, community and at the workplace.
- Women facing physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and economic abuse, irrespective of age, class, caste, education status, marital status, race and culture will be facilitated with support and redressal.
- Aggrieved women facing any kind of violence due to attempted sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, trafficking, honour related crimes, acid attacks or witch-hunting who have reached out or been referred to the OSC will be provided with specialized services.
- The Centres established across the country would provide integrated support and assistance under one roof to women including girls below the age of 18 years affected by violence irrespective of caste, class, religion, sexual orientation or marital status. For girls below 18 years, institutions and authorities established under Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection Act) 2000 and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 will be linked with the OSCs.

Objectives of the Scheme

- To provide integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces under one roof.
- To facilitate immediate, emergency and non-emergency access to a range of services including medical, legal, psychological and counselling support under one roof to fight against any forms of violence against women.
PRADHAN MANTRI MATRU VANDANA YOJANA

Why in news?
- As per a survey, the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) has been able to reach less than a third of the eligible beneficiaries.

About
- It was announced by Prime Minister on 31 December 2016. It aims to give a benefit of Rs. 5,000 to pregnant and lactating mothers for the birth of the first child.
- This would be disbursed in three installments upon meeting several conditionalities- registration of pregnancy, at least one ante-natal check up, registration of child birth and vaccinations.
- The remaining cash incentive of up to Rs. 1,000 is to be given under a separate scheme called JananiSurakshaYojana so that on an “average” women get a total sum of Rs. 6,000.
- The objective is to compensate women for wage loss due to childbirth.
- Since the scheme came into effect on January 2017, it has benefited a total of 128 lakh women. This is 80% of the total target the government has set out for itself- 53 lakh women per year.
- It has been estimated that the government’s target itself is 43% of the total 123 lakh first births in the country in a year as derived from the population size of 13.39 crore in 2017 and the birth rate and the birth rate of 20.2 per thousand.
- Registration for this scheme requires an applicant to provide her husband’s Aadhaar details along with her own, affecting single women which include unwed mothers, deserted wives and widows.
- Moreover, a mother seeking benefits needs to provide proof of address of her marital home, which proves challenging for a newlywed expecting a child and often residing in her natal home during pregnancy.
- The application form requires separate undertakings from the woman and her husband that the child for whom they are seeking the benefit will be “the first living child for both of them”, further making it prohibitive.

SOCIAL SECURITY CODE

Why in news?

Benefits of the Bill
- Once the bill is passed, the central government may “formulate and notify, from time to time, suitable welfare schemes for unorganized workers on matters relating to life and disability cover; health and maternity benefits; old age protection; and any other benefit as may be determined by the central government”.
- The bill once passed will empower the central government to exempt select establishments from all or any of the provisions of the code and makes Aadhaar
mandatory for availing benefits under various social security schemes.

NATIONAL AWARDS

Why in news?
- On the occasion of the “International Day of Persons with Disabilities” (December 3rd, 2019), organized by the Department of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, National Awards have been conferred on Individuals, Institutions, Organizations, and State/District etc. for their outstanding achievements and work done towards empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs).
- According to the Census of India 2011, there are 2.68 crore PwDs, which constitutes 2.21% of India’s population.

International Day of People with Disabilities (IDPwD) is a United Nations sanctioned day celebrated internationally on 3 December each year.

The annual observance of the International Day of Disabled Persons was proclaimed in 1992 by United Nations General Assembly resolution 47/3. Its objective is to promote the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities in all spheres of society and development and to increase awareness.

The theme this year is - Promoting the Participation of Persons with Disabilities and their leadership: Taking Action on the 2030 Development Agenda.

NATIONAL FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE AWARDS

Why in news?
- The President of India presented the National Florence Nightingale Awards to nursing personnel in New Delhi on December 5 on the occasion of International Nurses Day.

About
- Nurses play a vital role in delivering quality and cost effective healthcare, addressing multiple health challenges and responding to health needs of individuals, families and communities. The world is more and more in need of care and compassion, and nurses indeed are a symbol of seva, shushrusha, karuna. For patients and their families, nurses are the face of healthcare services.
- The World Health Organisation has announced 2020 as the Year of the Nurse and Mid-wife.
- The year 2020 is also the 200th birth anniversary of Florence Nightingale, after whom the awards have been named.
- Florence Nightingale awards were instituted in the year 1973 by the Government as a mark of recognition for the meritorious services rendered by nurses to the society.

ACCESSIBLE INDIA CAMPAIGN

Why in news?
- The deadline for the government’s Accessible India Campaign (AIC) has been extended to March 2020 due to slow progress.

About
- AIC is the nationwide flagship campaign of the Department of Empowerment of
Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

- The aim of the Campaign is to make a barrier free and conducive environment for Divyangjans all over the country.
- The campaign has the vision to build an inclusive society in which equal opportunities are provided for the growth and development of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) so that they can lead productive, safe and dignified lives.
- For creating universal accessibility for Persons with Disabilities, the campaign has been divided into three verticals: Built Environment; Transport and Information & Communication Technology (ICT) ecosystem.

ENVIRONMENT

PROJECT DOLPHIN

Why in news?
- The government is planning to launch a programme called “Project Dolphin”, along the lines of “Project Tiger” to enhance the population of these dolphins.

About Gangetic river dolphins
- It can only live in freshwater, are blind and catch their prey in a unique manner, using ultrasonic sound waves.
- These were officially discovered in 1801 and are one of the oldest creatures in the world along with some species of turtles, crocodiles and sharks, according to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF).
- They once lived in the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems of Nepal, India, and Bangladesh, but are now mostly extinct from many of its early distribution ranges, as per WWF.
- In 2009, the Gangetic dolphin was declared India’s National Aquatic animal. Gangetic dolphin has been notified by the Assam as the state aquatic animal too.
- It is placed under the “endangered” category by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
- They are distributed across seven states in India: Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal.
- Their numbers have dwindled in the last few decades mainly because of direct killing, habitat fragmentation by dams and barrages and indiscriminate fishing.

Assessment
- According to data provided in Rajya Sabha by Ministry of Environment, At last count, the rivers of Assam and Uttar Pradesh respectively had 962 and 1,275 Gangetic dolphins (or Platanistagangetica).
- The population assessment in Assam was done between January and March 2018, while the UP count of 1,272 is for 2015, up from 671 in 2012.
- In Assam, the assessment was carried out in three rivers, with the Brahmaputra accounting for 877 of the 962 dolphins.

Steps taken
- Setting up of the Conservation Action Plan for the Gangetic Dolphin (2010-2020), which has identified threats to Gangetic dolphins and impact of river traffic, irrigation canals and depletion of prey-base on dolphin populations.
- Gangetic dolphins have been included in Schedule -I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, which means they have the highest degree of protection against hunting.
- They are also one among the 21 species identified under the centrally sponsored scheme, “Development of Wildlife Habitat”.

**HEALTH AND POLLUTION**

**Why in news?**
- The Global Alliance on Health and Pollution (GAHP) released The 2019 Pollution and Health Metrics: Global, Regional and Country Analysis report.

**About**
- In 2017, pollution was responsible for 15% of all deaths globally and 275 million Disability-Adjusted Life Years.
- The report includes three lists on pollution-induced deaths. India is the only country that features in the top 10 in all three lists.
- India saw the most pollution deaths of about 2.3 million.
- The top 10 countries with the most pollution deaths include both the world’s largest and wealthiest nations and some of the poorer ones.
- In the list of top 10 countries with the most pollution-related deaths in proportion to their population, there are many smaller countries where the impact of pollution in relation to population size is more intense.
- The list of top 10 countries with the most deaths related to air pollution corresponds closely to the list of top 10 countries with the most pollution-related deaths.

- Air pollution, both ambient and indoor, is one of the largest and most obvious types of pollution affecting global health.

**ECHO NETWORK**

**Why in news?**
- EChO Network was launched in New Delhi by Prof. K Vijay Raghavan, Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India.
- The initiative has drawn in partners from Government, industry and academia, with the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to Govt. of India steering the program under the guidance of Prof. Shannon Olsson, Director, EChO Network.

**About**
- It is a national program to provide a template for cross-disciplinary leadership in India with the specific focus of increasing research, knowledge, and awareness of Indian ecology and the environment has been launched.
- EChO Network would develop a national network to catalyse a new generation of Indians who can synthesize interdisciplinary concepts and tackle real-world problems in medicine, agriculture, ecology, and technology.
- The purpose of this Network is to bring all those together to share knowledge and synergize efforts under the umbrella of science.
- It aims to train a new generation of educators and students who can identify and solve problems in an interdisciplinary manner to tackle real-world problems in
medicine, agriculture, ecology, and technology.

1840 NEW SPECIES TO THE RED LIST OF THREATENED SPECIES

Why in news?

- The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) added 1,840 new species to its catalogue of plants and animals that risk extinction on 10 December. Now, the list now contains more than 30,000 species.

About

- The IUCN mentioned it was increasingly clear that climate change on its own was a growing threat. More than one million species are now at risk of vanishing as insatiable human demand puts them in danger of habitat loss, overexploitation, pollution and climate change.

- Rising temperatures have already contributed to the decline of several freshwater fish and sharks. The latest update showed that 37 percent of Australia’s freshwater fish species were threatened with extinction.

- Stocks of the Short-tail nurse shark have declined around 80 percent in the last 30 years. Its shallow water habitat is being degraded as the ocean warms.

- The IUCN did highlight a small handful of conservation successes, including the recovery of the Guam Rail, a bird previously listed as extinct in the wild.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT CELL

Why in news?

- The Ministry of Coal has decided to establish a ‘Sustainable Development Cell’ in order to promote environmentally sustainable coal mining in the country and address environmental concerns during the decommissioning or closure of mines.

- This move gains significance as the new private entities are now going to form a significant part of the future, a set of guidelines for proper rehabilitation of mines need to be evolved in tune with global best practices.

Role of SDC

- This cell will also formulate the future policy framework for the environmental mitigation measures including the Mine closure Fund.

- The SDC will adopt a systemic approach, starting from collection of data, analysis of data, presentation of information, planning based on information; by domain experts, adoption of best practices, consultations, innovative thinking, site-specific approaches, knowledge sharing and dissemination and finally end with an aim to ease the lives of people and communities in general.

- It will advise, mentor, plan and monitor the mitigation measures taken by the coal companies for maximising the utilisation of available resources in a sustainable way, minimising the adverse impact of mining and
mitigating it for further ecosystem services and will act as nodal point at Ministry of Coal level in this matter.

- All of the above will be done by executing the following tasks in a planned way.
- Thus, the Sustainable Development Cell envisages to address the environment mitigation measures in a systematic manner and to provide a better environment to people working and residing in the vicinity of Mines.

**ARCTIC OCEAN MAY BE ICE-FREE FOR PART OF YEAR BY 2044**

**Why in news?**

- Human-caused climate change is on track to make the Arctic Ocean functionally ice-free for part of each year starting sometime between 2044 and 2067, according to a study.
- Researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in the US noted that as long as humans have been on Earth, the planet has had a large cap of sea ice at the Arctic Circle that expands each winter and contracts each summer.
- Satellite observations show that since 1979, the amount of sea ice in the Arctic in September 2019 – the month when there is the least sea ice, before water starts freezing again – has declined by 13% per decade.
- The process occurs when a patch of sea ice completely melts, uncovering a seawater surface that is darker and absorbs more sunlight than ice would have.
- That change in the surface’s reflectivity of sunlight, or albedo, causes greater local warming, which in turn leads to further ice melt, the researchers said.
- The cycle exacerbates warming – one reason the Arctic is heating up twice as fast as the rest of the globe.

**EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL**

**Why in news?**

- The European Union has announced European Green Deal which contains additional measures it would take to counter climate change.

**Two major decisions at the heart of the European Green Deal**

1. In its climate action plan declared under the Paris Agreement, the EU has committed to making a 50 per cent reduction in its emissions by 2030 compared to 1990 levels and work towards 55 per cent.
2. The EU has promised to bring a law, binding on all member countries, to ensure it becomes “climate neutral” by 2050. Climate neutrality is achieved when a country’s emissions are balanced by absorptions and removal of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere.

**WILDLIFE CRIMES**

**Why in news?**

- The Union Ministry of Environment informed parliament about the wildlife crimes.
About
- In 2018, 388 cases of wildlife-related crimes were registered under the Wildlife Protection Act.

- In nearly one in every three cases — 123 of the 388 — the species involved was leopards or tigers. Leopards alone accounted for over one in five cases, at 81, while 42 cases involved tigers.

- Just five species accounted for two in every three cases — 259 of 388 — with leopards (21%), scheduled birds (16%) and tigers (11%) being followed by star tortoises or turtles (10%) and deer (9%).

- Overall, the number of cases of wildlife crime has come down since 2016, when 565 were registered, and risen slightly since 2017, when 342 were registered.

LARGE IGNEOUS PROVINCES (LIPs)
Why in news?
- According to a study published in the journal Nature Communications, greenhouse gas emissions directly from the movement of volcanic rocks can create massive global warming effects.

About
- The researchers said one such role in climate change could be played by Large Igneous Provinces (LIPs), extremely large accumulations of rocks form when magma travelled through the crust towards the surface.

- They created a model of changes in carbon emissions during the Paleocene-Eocene Thermal Maximum (PETM) - a short interval of maximum temperature lasting around 100,000 years some 55 million years ago.

- As part of the study, the researchers calculated the greenhouse gas fluxes associated with the North Atlantic Igneous Province (NAIP) - one of Earth’s largest LIPs that spans Britain, Ireland, Norway and Greenland.

- The simulations by the researchers predicted that the volcanic rocks part of the NAIP could have initiated PETM climate change. According to the researchers, the PETM is the largest natural climate change event of this era.

BAR-HEADED GOOSE
Why in news?
- Bar-headed goose, a rare goose species was sighted in the wetlands of Karingali Puncha in Kerala.

About
- Rare-goose species first sighted in Karingali Puncha on December 21.

- The bar-headed goose was the 336th bird species found in the district.

- Bar-headed geese are found in Central China and Mongolia and they breed there. They start the migration to the Indian subcontinent during the winter and stay here till the end of the season.

- They are one of the birds which can fly even at very high altitude.

- They come to India and return to their homes by crossing the Himalayan ranges.

- Their ability to sustain the high oxygen demands of flight in the air that is
exceedingly oxygen-thin is exceptional. The capacity of bar-headed geese to transport and consume oxygen at high rates in hypoxia distinguishes this species from similar lowland waterfowl.

TYRE PYROLYSIS

Why in news?

- The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has pulled up 270 tyre pyrolysis units in 19 States for employing technology that is polluting and harmful to the health of the workers employed.
- The CPCB has said that states should be closing down all pyrolysis units that are not compliant and that the import of hazardous substances — these include used tyres — ought to be strictly regulated.
- More than 40% of tyre pyrolysis units were not complying with rules, the NGT observed in April 2019, after it sought a report from the CPCB.

About

- Tyre pyrolysis refers to a technique of breaking down used tyres in the absence of oxygen. Shredded tyres, at temperatures between 250º C and 500º C, produce liquid oil and gases.
- The National Green Tribunal in 2014 prohibited used tyres from being burnt in the open or being used as fuel in brick kilns, because of the toxic emissions. Subsequently, the board issued a set of guidelines, in which pyrolysis was recommended as an acceptable mode.
- While this is considered a safer technique than burning tyres, pyrolysis leaves fine carbon matter, pyro-gas and oil as residue and the inadequate management of these by-products poses health risks.

DEOXYGENATION OF THE OCEANS

Why in news?

- According to a study by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the world’s oceans have less oxygen today than they did up to 1960.

Key findings

- The levels of oxygen in oceans fell by around 2 per cent from 1960 to 2010.
- The oxygen content of the world’s oceans is not uniform. The water in some parts of the tropics had experienced a 40 per cent to 50 percent reduction in oxygen.
- The deoxygenation of the oceans occurred due to climate change and other human activities (such as nutrient runoff from farm fertilizers into waterways), the report said.

Impact

- In many parts of the world fish have been dying en masse.
- The loss of oxygen in the oceans can affect the planetary cycling of elements such as nitrogen and phosphorous which are essential for life on Earth.
- As oceans lose oxygen, they become more acidic, which has resulted in some places in shellfish having their shells degraded or dissolved — the so called “osteoporosis of the sea”.

GLOBAL CARBON BUDGET 2019

Why in news?

- Global CO2 emissions from fossil fuels and industry have increased every decade from
an average of 11.4 GtCO2 in the 1960s to an average of 34.7±2 yr.

Regional fossil fuel emissions

- In 2018, global CO2 emissions were dominated by emissions from China (28%), the USA (15%), the EU (28-member states; 9%) and India (7%).
- Net CO2 emissions from deforestation and other land-use change accounting for about 14% of all emissions from human activity (fossil fuel, industry, land use change).
- Of the total emissions from human activities during the period 2009-2018, about 45% accumulated in the atmosphere, 23% in the ocean and 29% on land.
- Atmospheric CO2 concentration in 2019 are 47% above pre-industrial levels.
- The cumulative carbon emissions are the sum of the total CO2 emitted during a given period of time. Total cumulative emissions from 1850 to 2019 were 1649 GtCO2 from fossil fuels and industry, and 751 GtCO2 from land use change.

The Global Carbon Project

- It is an organization and a Global Research Project of Future Earth and a research partner of the World Climate Research Programme.
- The main object of the group has been to fully understand the carbon cycle. Its projects include global budgets for three dominant greenhouse gases — carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide. It publishes Global Carbon Budget and Global Carbon Atlas.

Madden–Julian Oscillation (MJO)

Why in news?

- A study by a team of Indian and U.S. researchers has found that Global warming has altered a key weather system and that may be whetting cyclones in the Bay of Bengal, decreasing winter rain in north India and altering global rainfall patterns.

About

- MJO is a moving band of rain clouds that travels around the globe spanning 12,000–20,000 km across the tropical oceans.
- According to a recent study, MJO, in its journey, interacts with surface waters of the Indo-Pacific ocean, the largest pool of warm water in the globe, and due to this the life cycle of the MJO gets affected.
- The MJO clouds on average are spending only 15 days, instead of 19, over the Indian Ocean. Over the west Pacific, it increased by five days (from an average 16 days to 23 days).
- This change in the residence time of MJO clouds that has altered the weather patterns across the globe.
- The changes in MJO behaviour have increased the rainfall over northern Australia, west Pacific, Amazon basin, southwest Africa and southeast Asia.
- This has also brought a decline in rainfall over central Pacific, along the west and east coast of U.S. (e.g., California), north India, east Africa and the Yangtze basin in China.
- The frequent California fires, droughts in Africa and East Asian floods and cyclones in the Bay of Bengal may be linked to these changes in global weather.
TRACHISCHIUM APTEII

Why in news?

- Researchers have discovered a new species of non-venomous burrowing snake Tally Valley Wildlife Sanctuary in Arunachal Pradesh, named Trachischiumapteii.

About

- The newly discovered species belongs to a group of fossorial snakes that live mostly underground, and surface mainly during or after a heavy monsoon shower.
- Trachischium are commonly called slender snakes. Seven species are distributed across the Himalayas, and the Indo-Burma and Indo-China regions.
- Trachischiumapteii was named so to honour the contribution of Deepak Apte, noted marine biologist and Director of the BNHS.
- Morphologically, the snake is distinguished by smooth and dorsal scales arranged in 15 rows throughout the body. The dorsal colour of the holotype is dark brown to black with faint dorsal longitudinal lines.
- Large-sized members of the genus measure about 293 mm to 299 mm.

LOKTAK INLAND WATER WAYS IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Why in news?

- Shipping Ministry gave approval for the development of Loktak Inland Water ways improvement project in Manipur under the central sector scheme.
- The project will develop the Inland water transport connectivity in North East States and give boost to the tourism sector also.
- The estimated cost of the project is over 25 crore rupees.

LOKTAK INLAND WATER WAYS IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Why in news?

- The lake is located near Moirang in Manipur state, India.
- Loktak Lake is the largest freshwater lake in Northeast India.
- It is famous for the phumdis floating over it. Phumdis are a series of floating islands, exclusive to the Loktak Lake in Manipur. They are heterogeneous masses of vegetation, soil and organic matter, in different stages of decay.
- It has been designated as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention in 1990.
- It is also listed under the Montreux Record in 1993, "a record of Ramsar sites where changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring or are likely to occur".

CAUVERY WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Why in News?

- Recently, several cases of wild elephants dying of electrocution near the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary in Karnataka have been reported.

About Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary

- It was constituted in 1987 under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1973 for the purpose of Protecting, Propagating or developing Wildlife and its environment.
- The river Cauvery forms the boundary of the sanctuary and also gives it its name. Cauvery supports a diversified aquatic fauna, predominant species being Crocodiles (listed in Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act), Otters and Hump-backed Mahseer Fish.
- It consists of reserve forests in Chamarajnagar, Ramanagar and Mandya Districts of Karnataka State.
INTERNATIONAL SOLAR ALLIANCE (ISA) ASSEMBLY

Why in news?

- Ministry of New and Renewable Energy hosted the 2nd assembly of International Solar Alliance at New Delhi attended by member countries, ISA Partners, and other invitees.
- As of now, there are 83 member countries with Eritrea and St. Kittis and Nevis latest countries to join ISA.
- The Assembly is the supreme decision-making body of the ISA.
- It gives directions on various administrative, financial and programme related issues.
- India’s Minister for New and Renewable Energy and Power is President of the ISA Assembly and France’s Minister of State for the Ecological and Inclusive Transition is the Co-President of the Assembly.

International Solar Alliance (ISA)

- ISA is partnership of solar resource rich countries to address their special energy needs and provide a platform to collaborate on development of solar energy resource
- It is an intergovernmental body registered with the United Nations under Article 102 of the UN Charter.
- The ISA is open to 121 countries, most of them located between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn. However, ISA is now considering to open the membership to all countries.
- 68 countries have joined the alliance and 44 countries have ratified the framework agreement.

Aim

- To create a collaborative platform for increased deployment of solar energy technologies to enhance energy security & sustainable development and ensure equitable access to energy

Objectives

- Promote solar technologies and investment in the solar sector to enhance income generation for the poor and the global environment
- Formulate projects and programmes to promote solar applications
- Develop innovative Financial Mechanisms to reduce the cost of capital
- Build a common Knowledge e-Portal for sharing of policy development experiences and best practices in member countries
- Facilitate capacity building for promotion and absorption of solar technologies and R&D among member countries

Target

- The ISA has set a target of 1 TW of solar energy by 2030, which would require $1 trillion to achieve.
- India has set a target of 175 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2022, which includes 100 GW of solar energy.

BROWN TO GREEN REPORT 2019

Why in news?

- The 2019 Brown to Green Report has been published by the Climate Transparency partnership.
- The report is the most comprehensive review of G20 countries’ climate performance, mapping achievements and drawbacks in their efforts to reduce emissions, adapt to climate impacts and green the financial system.

Highlights of the report

- G20 energy-related CO2 emissions increased by 1.8 % in 2018 because of high economic growth and growing energy demand. In several countries, energy supply from coal, oil and gas has kept increasing in 2018. 82 % of the G20’s energy mix is still
fossil fuels. This must fall to at least 67% by 2030 and to 33% by 2050 globally to be 1.5°C compatible, and ultimately to much lower levels. Progress in the energy efficiency of G20 economies has also slowed in 2018.

- Currently, none of the G20 countries’ NDCs is in line with a 1.5°C limit. In 2030, emissions would be more than twice as high as what is needed for 1.5°C. Seeing that about half of the G20 countries are projected to meet or surpass their national climate targets (NDCs), this indicates plenty of room for increasing ambition in the 2020 NDC update.

India specific observations
- Among the G20 countries, India has the most ambitious NDC. However, it still needs real action now to prepare the different sectors for stringent emission reductions.
- In the power, India is currently investing in renewable energy, while Brazil and Germany are the only G20 countries with long-term renewable energy strategies.
- India and China are among the G20 countries with the most progressive energy efficiency policies.

About the report
- The Brown to Green Report is the world’s most comprehensive annual review of G20 climate action: it provides concise and comparable information on mitigation, finance and vulnerability. The report is published annually by „Climate Transparency“, a global partnership of 14 climate research organisations and NGOs from the majority of G20 countries, many from emerging economies.
- Germanwatch is one of the main authors.

IUCN RED LIST OF THREATENED SPECIES

Why in news?
- The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) added 1,840 new species to its catalogue of plants and animals that risk extinction.
- Now, the list now contains more than 30,000 species.

About
- Climate change on its own was a growing threat. More than one million species are now at risk of vanishing as insatiable human demand puts them in danger of habitat loss, overexploitation, pollution and climate change.
- Rising temperatures have already contributed to the decline of several freshwater fish and sharks. The latest update showed that 37 percent of Australia’s freshwater fish species were threatened with extinction.
- Stocks of the Short-tail nurse shark have declined around 80 percent in the last 30 years. Its shallow water habitat is being degraded as the ocean warms.
- The IUCN did highlight a small handful of conservation successes, including the recovery of the Guam Rail, a bird previously listed as extinct in the wild.

FROG PHONE

Why in News?
- Researchers have developed a device that will allow scientists to monitor frogs in the wild.
- It is world’s first solar-powered remote survey device that can be installed at any frog pond and which receives a 3G or 4G
cellular network, it has been named “Frog Phone”.

- It has been developed by a team from various Australian institutions, including the University of New South Wales and the University of Canberra.
- A field trial conducted between August 2017 and March 2018 in Canberra proved successful.

About

- With Frog Phone, researchers can simply “call” a frog habitat. After a call is made to one of the Frog Phones already on the site, the device will take three seconds to receive it.
- During these few seconds, the device’s temperature sensors will get activated and environmental data such as air temperature, water temperature and battery voltage will be sent to the caller’s phone via a text message.
- Because frogs are most active during the night, researchers are usually required to make nightly observations in order to monitor them on site. The Frog Phone will allow researchers to dial these devices remotely, and analyse the data later.

Importance of this device

- It will reduce costs and risks, including the negative impact of human presence on the field site.
- It allows for monitoring of local frog populations more frequently than before, which is important because these populations are recognised as indicators of environmental health.

NATIONAL GANNA COUNCIL

Why in news?

- Prime Minister chaired the first meeting of the National Ganga Council in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh on 15 December.
- The Council has been given overall responsibility for superintendence of pollution prevention and rejuvenation of River Ganga Basin, including Ganga and its tributaries. The first meeting of the Council was aimed at reinforcing the importance of a ‘Ganga-centric’ approach in all departments of the concerned states as well as relevant Central Ministries.

ERUPTION OF WHITE ISLAND VOLCANO

Why in News?

- The White Island Volcano, also called Whakaari, in New Zealand has recently erupted.
- The volcano is located in the Bay of Plenty, about 48km (29 miles) from the east coast of New Zealand's North Island.

- White Island has been classified as New Zealand's most active volcano since 1976,
when it began 24 years of almost continuous eruption.

- A second "eruptive episode" started in 2011 and continues today.
- White Island was "persistently active in the sense that it has a very active hydrothermal system.
- White Island reportedly got its English-language name from explorer Capt James Cook in 1769 because it always appeared to be in a white cloud.

**OPERATION CLEAN ART**

**Why in news?**

- Recently, there has been a widespread crackdown on factories making paint brushes with mongoose hair across the country.
- Hence, Operation Clean Art was conducted in India to ensure that the mongoose hair brush trade to be closed down across India.

**Mongoose**

- Brushes made of mongoose hair are preferred because they are superior and hold colour better.
- Mongoose is listed in Schedule II Part 2 of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and any smuggling or possession of its body part is a non-bailable offence.
- IUCN Red List status- Least Concerned.
- There are six species of mongoose found in India namely Indian grey mongoose, Small Indian mongoose, Ruddy mongoose, Crab-eating mongoose, Stripe-necked mongoose, and Brown mongoose. The Indian grey mongoose is the most commonly found species and also the most hunted.
- All six species are listed on CITES Appendix III with a zero quota for commercial trade.

**Operation Clean Art**

- It aims to crackdown on the smuggling of mongoose hair in India.
- It was conceived by the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB).

**BLUE FLAG PROGRAMME**

**Why in news?**

- Ministry of Forest, Environment and Climate Change has embarked upon a programme for ‘Blue Flag’ certification for 13 pilot beaches in the country.

**About**

- 13 pilot beaches have been identified for the certification, in consultation with concerned coastal states and Union Territories.
- They are Ghoghala beach (Diu), Shivrajpur beach (Gujarat), Bhogave (Maharashtra), Padubidri and Kasarkod (Karnataka), Kappad beach (Kerala), Kovalam beach (Tamil Nadu), Eden beach (Puducherry), Rushikonda beach (Andhra Pradesh), Miramar beach (Goa), Golden beach (Odisha), Radhanagar beach (Andaman and Nicobar Islands) and Bangraram beach (Lakshadweep).
- This certification is accorded by an international agency ‘Foundation for Environment Education, Denmark’ based on 33 stringent criteria in 4 major heads i.e., (i) Environment Education and Information, (ii) Bathing Water Quality, (iii) Environment Management and Conservation and (iv) Safety and Services in the beaches.
**Blue Flag beach**

- It is an eco-tourism model endeavouring to provide to the tourists/beach goers clean and hygienic bathing water, facilities/amenities, safe and healthy environment and sustainable development of the area.

- The presence of a Blue Flag on a beach recognises and encourages the efforts of local authorities to ensure that the beach meets certain criteria.

- This criteria includes the law, accessibility, health, cleanliness and safety, as well as have adequate information and environmental management.

**INDIA’S FIRST HAM PROJECT IN SEWERAGE SECTOR**

**Why in news?**

- India’s first Hybrid Annuity (HAM) project in sewerage sector, the 14MLD Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) at Sarai in Haridwar, was inaugurated by the Chief Minister of Uttarakhand.

**About**

- The Sarai 14 MLD Sewage Treatment Plant is the first STP to be completed under the Hybrid Annuity (HAM) Based Public Private Partnership Model, involving a cost of Rs. 41.40 crores, and the Plant has been completed before its scheduled timeline.

- This Plant is based on advanced aerobic biological process, Sequential Batch Reactor (SBR) process, capable of removing the nutrients during treatment and is a 100% eco-friendly project.

- The plant will meet the highest standards of output parameters.

- Another unique feature of this HAM project is that after its commissioning, this plant will also be maintained and operated for a period of 15 years by the same developer for efficient performance and for meeting output parameters. The vision of the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) is long term and hence the capability being created would fully take care of the requirements up to 2035.

**RIPU DAMAN BEVLI**

**Why in news?**

- Fit India Plogging Run, which was launched on October 2, 2019, concluded in Delhi’s JawaharLal Nehru Stadium on 5th December, having covered 50 cities across the country in which Ripu Daman Bevli has been declared as the Plogging Ambassador of India.

**About**

- During the event, Minister of State(I/C) for Youth Affairs & Sports, Shri Kiren Rijiju felicitated Ripu Daman Bevli, popularly known as the Plogman of India and named him the Plogging Ambassador of India.

- The minister also launched the nation-wide Plogging Ambassador Mission under which, Indians who have been running and cleaning their cities, towns or districts, will be nominated as Plogging Ambassadors of their region.

**Plogging**

- Plog Run is a unique way of picking up garbage while jogging and was added to the Fit India Movement as a unique way of combining cleanliness and fitness.

- Bevli, who started plogging in 2017, started the Fit India Plogging Run with the aim to make India litter-free. Bevli and his team have cleaned up 50
cities and covered over 1000km in about 2 months, collecting 2.7 tonnes of garbage.

- In the first Fit India Plogging Run held on October 2, 2019, over 36 lakh people participated in over 62,000 locations across the country. This was organised with the combined efforts of Sports Authority of India, Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS), National Service Scheme (NSS), NGOs, KendriyaVidalaya and several other organizations joining in.

DEFENCE AND INTERNAL SECURITY

MIG-27 JETS DECOMMISSIONED

Why in news?

- Indian Air Force (IAF) conducted the de-induction ceremony of Mig -27 aircrafts, one of the most prominent fighter jets. The ceremony took place at Air Force Station, Jodhpur on 27 December 2019.

About

- Mig-27 (Russian origin), inducted in 1985, aircrafts has earned the nickname 'Bahadur' from IAF pilots for the lethal role they had played during the 1999 Kargil War. The fleet earned its glory in the historic Kargil conflict when it delivered rockets and bombs with accuracy on enemy positions.
- The swing-wing fighter aircraft has been the backbone of ground attack fleet of Indian Air Force (IAF) for the past four decades.
- The upgraded variant of this last swing-wing fleet has been the pride of IAF strike fleet since 2006.
- IAF has been gradually retiring the Russian MiG variants of fighters from service including the MiG-23 BN & MiG-23 MF and the pure MiG 27 have already retired earlier. The MiG-29 UPG will be operated by the IAF and the Indian Navy will operate two squadrons of the MiG-29K/KUB off its aircraft carriers.
- These aircraft have made an immense contribution to the nation, both during peace and war. The fleet also took an active part in Op-Parakram.

INDO - RUSSIAN TRI- SERVICES EXERCISE

INDRA 2019

Why in news?

- Exercise INDRA - 2019 is the second edition of Joint Tri Services Exercise between Indian and Russian Armed Forces which is being conducted from 10-20 December 2019 simultaneously at Pune and Gwalior for Air Force elements.

About

- IAF is undertaking service specific and joint missions during the exercise. Russian Federation Air Force (RFAF) element is participating in the exercise along with IAF counterparts.
- The broad theme for the exercise is to organise a Joint Task Force for undertaking planning and execution of air operations for eliminating terrorists at the request of the third country under UN mandate. However, combined missions between IAF and RFAF would also be undertaken for enriching
experience and maximising training value in terms of interoperability.

- The INDRA exercises are being regularly held since 2003, initially being a bilateral single service exercise between India and Russia. The first-ever Joint Tri Services Exercise was held in the Eastern Military District of Russia in Oct 2017. This year IAF has fielded Su-30MKI, Jaguar, MI-17 helicopters, Airborne Warning & Control System aircraft and Garuds of IAF are participating in the exercise.
- Tri Services Ex INDRA-2019 will further strengthen mutual confidence, interoperability and enable sharing of best practices between the Armed Forces of both countries. The exercise show cases the long-standing bond of India and Russia friendship.

**SURYA KIRAN – XIV**

**Why in news?**

- Exercise SURYA KIRAN-XIV, a joint military training exercise between India and Nepal culminated today at Nepal Army Battle School (NABS), Salijhandi, Rupendehi district of Nepal, wherein the troops of both the Armies participated in 14 days long joint training based on counter insurgency operations in jungle and mountainous terrain and also practised response mechanism in the eventualities of natural and man made disasters.

**BRAHMOS MISSILES**

**Why in news?**

- Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO), Indian Air Force (IAF) and BrahMos jointly successfully conducted two BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles tests on 17 December, one each from land and air platforms.

**About**

- The first missile launch was from a land based mobile launcher, where most of the components were indigenous, including the missile airframe, fuel management system and DRDO designed seeker.
- The second launch of the missile was carried out by Indian Air Force (IAF) from SU-30MKI platform against a sea target. The test conducted in user configuration, revalidated the ship attack capability of the advanced air-launched cruise missile.
- During the test, the missile was gravity dropped from the air combat platform's fuselage and the two-stage weapon's engine fired up and the missile straightaway propelled towards the intended target positioned at the sea, piercing it with pin point accuracy.
- Earlier on May 22, 2019, IAF had successfully tested the missile against a land-based target in the Car Nicobar Islands region. The BrahMos Air Launched Cruise Missile (ALCM) promises to bolster the air combat capability of IAF from stand-off ranges.

**PINAKA MISSILE SYSTEM**

**Why in news?**

- DRDO successfully flight-tested Pinaka Missile System from the Integrated Test Range, Chandipur off the Odisha coast on 20 December 2019.
It is an indigenously developed missile system. Both the missiles were fired to engage a target located at 20 km range and high accuracy was achieved.

About

- The Pinaka Mark-II rocket has been developed as a missile by combining navigation, control and guidance systems.
- The missile’s navigation system is supported by the Indian Regional Satellite System (IRNSS), also known as NAVIC.
- Pinaka has been jointly developed by Pune’s Armament Research and Development Centre, ARCI and Hyderabad’s Defense Research and Development Laboratory.
- It can strike up to 75 kilometers with high precision into enemy territory.

The Top 10 Police Stations in the country are:-
1. Aberdeen (Andaman & Nicobar Islands)
2. Balasinor (Gujarat)
3. Ajk Burhanpur (Madhya Pradesh)
4. AWPS Theni (Tamil Nadu)
5. Anini (Arunachal Pradesh)
6. Baba Haridas Nagar, Dwarka (Delhi)
7. Bakani (Rajasthan)
8. Choppadandi (Telangana)
9. Bicholim (Goa)
10. Bargawa (Madhya Pradesh)

EXERCISE MITRA SHAKTI –VII

Why in news?

- It was commenced between India and Sri Lanka on 1 December 2019 at Aundh Military Station, Pune.

About

- The seventh edition of Exercise MITRA SHAKTI- 2019 aimed at enhancing interoperability and operational efficiency amongst the armies of both nations.

Methodology:

- The objective of the exercise is to build and promote positive relations between armies of India and Sri Lanka through focus on sub unit level training on counter insurgency and counter terrorism operations in urban and rural environment under United Nations mandate.

- The joint training exercise also signifies the strength of India-Sri Lanka relations in the field.
of military cooperation and engagement, which is vital for refining the interoperability and operational preparedness.

- The joint exercise is designed for incorporating the current dynamics of United Nations peace keeping operations through practical and comprehensive discussions and tactical exercises. The primary focus of the joint training exercise will remain on field craft, battle drills and procedures as also the ability to operate jointly with seamless interoperability.

- As member nations of the United Nations, the participating contingents will gain immensely through joint operability and enhanced military and diplomatic association.

**TOP 100 ARMS-PRODUCING AND MILITARY SERVICES COMPANIES, 2018**

**Why in news?**

- The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) released a new report titled “The SIPRI Top 100 Arms-Producing And Military Services Companies, 2018.”

**About**

- Sales of arms and military services by the sector’s largest 100 companies (excluding those in China) totalled $420 billion in 2018, marking an increase of 4.6 % compared with the previous year.
- The combined arms sales of the three Indian arms companies listed in the Top 100 were $5.9 billion in 2018—a decrease of 6.9 % in 2017. The decline is mainly a result of Indian Ordnance Factory’s significant 27 % drop in arms sales.
- The turnover of the 100 biggest arms manufacturers came to 420 billion dollars.
- US manufacturers alone accounted for 59 % of the market, or a turnover of 246 billion dollars, up 7.2 % on the previous year.
- Russia was second in the rankings for arms production, with 8.6 % of the market, just ahead of the United Kingdom on 8.4 % and France on 5.5 %. The study did not include China, for lack of sufficient data.
- The top five spots in the ranking are held exclusively by arms companies based in the United States: Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop Grumman, Raytheon and General Dynamics. These five companies alone accounted for 35 % of total Top 100 arms sales in 2018.

**SIPRI**

- SIPRI is an international institute based in Stockholm, Sweden.
- It is dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament. It provides data, analysis and recommendations, based on open sources, to policymakers, researchers, media and the interested public.
- The SIPRI Arms Industry Database was created in 1989. Chinese companies are not included in the database because of a lack of available data.

**DEFENCE ACQUISITION**

**Why in news?**

- The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) Rajnath Singh has accorded approval for Capital Procurement for the Services amounting to over Rs 22,800 crore.

**About**

- The DAC accorded approval for indigenous design, development and manufacturing of 'Thermal Imaging Night Sights' for Assault
Rifles which would enable troops to undertake long range accurate engagements in dark and all weather conditions thereby enhancing the night fighting capabilities.

- After the successful indigenous Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) programme, the DAC revalidated the Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for the procurement of additional AWACS aircraft. The mission system and sub-systems for these aircraft would be indigenously designed and developed by DRDO.

- The DAC also approved procurement of Long Range Maritime Reconnaissance (LRMR) Anti-Submarine Warfare P8I aircraft for the Indian Navy. These aircraft would strengthen the Navy's capabilities for maritime surveillance and Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW).

- The DAC approved procurement of Twin Engine Heavy Helicopters (TEHH) for the Indian Coast Guard. These aircraft would enable the Coast Guard to undertake missions to prevent infiltration of terrorists by sea routes as well as Search & Rescue operations.

SPIKE

Why in news?

- In Madhya Pradesh, the Indian Army successfully test-fired two newly-acquired Israeli Spike LR anti-tank guided missile (ATGM).

About

- Spike is a fourth generation missile which can engage any target with precision at ranges up to 4 kilo metres.
- In addition to fire and forget capability, the missile also has the ability to fire, observe and update, providing substantial flexibility to the firer to pinpoint the impact point, as also the ability to switch to a different target mid-flight, should he want to do so.
- The missile has an inbuilt seeker, which gives the firer the flexibility to use any of two modes: Day (CCD) and Night (IIR). The dual seeker adds to the missile's reliability.
- India became the 33rd country to have the Spike missile as part of its inventory.

INAS 314 - “RAPTORS”

Why in news?

- Indian Naval Air Squadron 314, the sixth Dornier aircraft squadron was commissioned at Naval Air Enclave-Porbandar on Gujarat coast.

About

- The INAS 314 derives its name Raptors from the Bird of Prey family. The insignia of the squadron depicts a Raptor bird searching over the vast blue expanse of the sea.
- Raptors are large birds of prey known for excellent sensory capabilities, powerful and sharp talons and strong wings symbolizing the capabilities of the aircraft and envisaged roles of the squadron.
- This squadron will operate the Dornier aircraft, a multi-role SRMR aircraft, with twin turboprop engine manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautical Limited, Kanpur. The aircraft can be used for electronic warfare missions, maritime surveillance, search and rescue and to provide targeting data to weapon platform.
- Navy is procuring 12 new Dornier aircraft from HAL with state-of-the-art sensors and equipment including glass cockpit, advanced surveillance radar, optical sensors and networking features.
TRAKEA
Why in news?
- It is unique barcoding software adopted by Haryana Police. Haryana Police claims it is the country’s first police force to have introduced this unique barcoding for forensic reports.
- Aim: To ensure that thousands of forensic reports that form the backbone of the criminal investigation system and subsequent trials in the courts of law, are not tampered with.
- Trakea ensures foolproof security of the samples collected from the scene of crime, and the forensic analysis reports.

ANDROID VULNERABLE TO CYBER ATTACK
Why in news?
- The Union Home Ministry has sent an alert to all States warning them about the vulnerability of the Android operating system to a bug called ‘Strand Hogg’ that allows real malware applications to pose as genuine applications and access user data of all kinds.

About
- The flaw can allow hackers to take over typical device functions like sending messages and taking photos because users think malicious activity is a mobile app they use regularly.
- The attack can be designed to request permissions which would be natural for different targeted apps to request, in turn lowering suspicion from victims.
- If the flaw is exploited, to users it appears that they are clicking on an app that they use every day, such as Facebook or Instagram. However, what happens when they click on the app is that instead of the app a user intended to open starting up, malware is deployed that can give permissions to the hacker, who is directed to the legitimate app.
- While all versions of Android, including Android 10, are vulnerable to this bug, it may not be apparent to the affected users that malware applications are already on board their device.
- Links and buttons that become non-functional, apps asking for permissions that are not required are among the other warning signs.

CYBER SECURITY FOR NATIONAL POWER GRID
Why in news?
- The National Power Grid, comprises of large number of assets, has been established across the country.

About
- Interconnectedness is a key feature of networked world and cyber opportunity and threat are part of it. For curbing the cyber threats over national power grid, multiple steps have been taken.
- For securing transmission assets of POWERGRID, communication from equipment of Substations to control centers are done over dedicated optical fibre network owned by POWERGRID without any connectivity to external networks.
- They are further protected through multiple Firewalls. These systems are kept isolated from office networks, to prevent any malicious online attack because of Internet connectivity. Also, POWERGRID is certified for ISO27001 Information Security Management System as laid down in Information Technology Act, 2000.
- Further, Ministry of Power has formed Sectoral CERT-Transmission housed in POWERGRID, which works in close coordination with Indian Computer
Emergency Response Team (CERT-In), National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC), Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and which has laid down detail procedures for Protected Systems, alerts and advisories, regular cyber audit, Crisis Management Plan (CMP), mock drills and exercises.

PRITHVI – II

**Why in news?**

- Recently, India has test-fired Prithvi-II missile off the Integrated Test Range at Chandipur, Odisha.

**About**

- Prithvi II is an indigenously developed surface-to-surface nuclear-capable missile with a short-range of 350km.

- It is capable of carrying 500 to 1,000 kg of warheads and is powered by liquid propulsion twin engines.

- It was inducted into the Indian defence forces in 2003. It is the first one to have been developed by the DRDO under the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme.

- Prithvi – III is a short-range, road-mobile, ballistic missile and its model is a departure from Prithvi I, II as it employs a two-stage, solid propellant motor.

NAVY DAY, 2019

**Why in news?**

- Navy Day was celebrated on December 4 in commemoration of Operation Trident, the attack launched by the Indian Navy on Karachi harbour during 1971's Indo-Pakistan war. It was for the first time that an anti-ship missile was used in the operation.

- The operation was conducted on the night of December 4-5 and it inflicted heavy damage on Pakistani vessels. India did not suffer any loss during the operation.

- As part of the operation, the Indian Navy sank four Pakistani vessels and ravaged Karachi harbour fuel fields in Pakistan.

- The Indian Navy’s three warships, INS Nipat, INS Nirghat and INS Veer, played an important role in the attack.

- The Indian Navy fleet sailed from Gujarat’s Okha Port towards Pakistani waters to attack the Karachi port. The fleet reached 70 miles south of Karachi at night and after missiles were fired Pakistani vessel - - PNS Khaibar -- sunk.

- The Day is also celebrated each year to work towards securing marine borders and bolstering relationships with other countries through joint exercises, humanitarian missions and relief operations.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

REPORT REGARDING LBA

**Why in news?**

- A report has been by civil rights organizations on International Day of Human Rights on the situation in erstwhile enclaves' states that “protest and resistance have become an essential part of their survival in India”.

CHAHAL ACADEMY
About

- It has been more than four years of the historic Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) between India and Bangladesh and still citizens of erstwhile Indian enclaves, who came from Bangladesh, are asked to move from the place where they were settled four years ago.

- It is a breach of the contract between the two countries and violation of their human rights. Their lives still are not the part of the mainstream society and they are yet to get land records and nothing has been done for providing them employment.

- Over 900 people living in three enclave settlement camps in Dinhata, Halbibari and Mekhiliganj in Cooch Behar district who have now been asked to move into flats constructed by the State government.

Recommendations

- A constructive dialogue should be held between the representatives of the three settlement camps of Dinhata, Halbibari and Mekhiliganj on the problems related to their rehabilitation.

- A comprehensive survey should be undertaken to identify and assimilate the people whose names have been left out of the headcount previously, and all the benefits of being a citizen in India should be extended to them.

US MILITARY SPACE FORCE

Why in news?

- President Donald Trump officially launched the US military Space Force on 21 December 2019 at an Army base near Washington.

- According to him, space has become the world’s newest war-fighting domain and amid grave threats to the US national security, American superiority in space is absolutely vital. Space Force will help to deter aggression and control the ultimate high ground.

- The launch of the Space Force, the first in more than 70 years, falls under the US Air Force. It will be funded by an initial 40 million Dollars for its first year.

- President Trump has signed the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act and with it directed the establishment of the U.S. Space Force (USSF) as the sixth branch of the armed forces.

- The new branch will be stood up over the next 18 months. The Space Force would comprise around 16,000 Air Force and civilian personnel.

- It is not intended to put troops into orbit but will protect US assets - such as the hundreds of satellites used for communication and surveillance.

INDIA AND FINLAND SIGN AN MOU

Why in news?

- A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, Government of Finland was signed on 21 November 2019 for strengthening cooperation in the field of Tourism.
· India and Finland have enjoyed a strong diplomatic and long economic relationship. The two countries now desiring to strengthen and further develop the established relationship have signed an MoU for strengthening cooperation in the field of Tourism.

· Finland is one of the important inbound source markets for India. In 2018, 21239 Finland tourists visited India. The signing of MoU with Finland will be instrumental in increasing tourist arrivals from this source market.

· The signing of MoU is expected to establish the basis for a cooperative relationship to encourage and promote successful bilateral cooperation in the field of tourism, sharing data, knowledge, expertise, etc. related to tourism and sharing experiences in making policies, regulation, and standards in planning, implementation, and development of tourism policy, encouraging development of partnerships in the context of multilateral development programs and projects of international Financial Institutions, in which both participants have common interests.

INDIA-SWEDEN SIGN MOU

Why in news?

· India and Sweden signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for India-Sweden Healthcare Innovation Centre in New Delhi on 3 December 2019.

· The objective of the innovation Centre is to develop an ecosystem of open innovation to which start-ups and the healthcare delivery stakeholders can use to collaborate and address current and future challenges in the healthcare sector.

· India-Sweden partnership has been the most active as the Joint Working Group has met ten times since 2009. This MoU focuses on creating new partnerships within the public, private and academic sectors.

GLOBAL REFUGEE FORUM

Why in news?

· The first Global Refugee Forum (GRF), a two-day gathering of United Nations member states, began in Geneva, Switzerland, on December 17th, 2019.

· The Forum, jointly hosted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the government of Switzerland,

· Aims to debate and discuss the response of the world’s countries to the global refugee situation.

· The first GRF has been organised around six areas of focus: burden- and responsibility-sharing, education, jobs and livelihoods, energy and infrastructure, solutions, and protection capacity.

· The number of refugees has risen to over 25 million people worldwide

· The GRF will be held every four years at the Ministerial level.

· It is intended to present an opportunity for UN member states and other stakeholders to announce action plans and pledges towards meeting objectives such as easing the burden on the host country, enhancing refugee self-reliance, expanding access to third-country solutions, and supporting conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.
CAMBRIDGE FIVE

Why in news?

- Russia honoured two members of the British “Cambridge Five” spy ring that passed information to the Soviet Union during World War II. The two members, Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean were honoured with a memorial plaque and a tribute from the head of Russia’s foreign intelligence service.

About

- The memorial plaque was unveiled on the day that Russia celebrates the work of its security forces.
- It was attached to the wall of the building where they lived between 1952-1955 in the city of Samara, Kuibyshev.

Who were the Cambridge Five?

- The Cambridge Five was a KGB group of British spies who passed information to the Soviet Union during World War II and the early stages of the Cold War. The group comprised Donald Maclean (1913-83), Guy Burgess (1911-63), Harold ‘Kim’ Philby (1912-88) and Anthony Blunt (1907-83).
- While studying at Cambridge University, Burgess, Maclean, Philby and Blunt developed ideas and notions against capitalist democracy and recruited by the KGB. In fact, Burgess began supplying information to the Soviet Union during the time he was a BBC correspondent between 1936 and 1938. Subsequently, he was a member of the MI6 from 1938-1941, and a member of the British Foreign Service from 1944.
- According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, in 1951, when Burgess was about to be dismissed from the British Foreign Service, he learned of a counterintelligence investigation by British and US agencies that was about to close in on him and Maclean.
- To avoid being prosecuted, both men fled England after which their whereabouts were unknown till about 1956, when they held a press conference to announce that they were living as communists in Moscow.

INSTRUMENT IN SUPPORT OF TRADE EXCHANGES (INSTEX)

Why in news?

- Six new European countries – Belgium, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden – joined the INSTEX barter mechanism.

About

- INSTEX is a European special-purpose vehicle (SPV) aimed to circumvent U.S. sanctions against trade with Iran by avoiding the use of the dollar. Its headquarters is in Paris, France. It was established in January 2019.
- France, Germany and the United Kingdom are the founding members of INSTEX.
- Its purpose is to facilitate "legitimate trade" with Iran for any EU member and has been conceived to be open to non-EU countries.
- INSTEX functions as a clearing house allowing Iran to continue to sell oil and import other products or services in exchange. The system has not yet enabled any transactions.
• In Iran, INSTEX is mirrored by the STFI (Special Trade and Finance Instrument), a similar SPV. STFI matches incoming and outgoing transactions in the same way.
• As of now, the use of the SPV is limited to humanitarian purposes, such as the purchase of otherwise embargoed foods or medicines.

INDIA MALDIVES RELATIONS
Why in news?
• Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Maldivian President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih jointly inaugurated four key development projects covering a wide range of sectors through video conferencing.
• The Union Cabinet has also approved the proposal of the Election Commission of India (ECI) to enter into the MoU with the Election Commission of Maldives on cooperation in the field of electoral management and administration.

About
• These included gifting of Made in India Fast Interceptor Coast Guard Ship Kaamiyaab to Maldives, launch of RuPay card in Maldives to further ease the travel of Indian to the Maldives, lighting up of Male using LED lights, Inauguration of three fish processing plants
• India’s Neighbourhood First Policy and Maldives’ India first Policy has strengthened the bilateral cooperation in all sectors.
• Government is working on building a cancer hospital and cricket stadium in Hulhumale while work on the water and sanitation project in 34 islands will begin soon.

NATO
Why in news?
• The leaders of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) met in London to mark the 70th birthday of the organization.

About
• NATO is also called the North Atlantic Alliance. It is an intergovernmental military alliance between North American and European countries. It constitutes a system of collective defence whereby its independent member states agree to mutual defence in response to an attack by any external party.
• Its headquarters is in Brussels, Belgium.
• The alliance is based on the North Atlantic Treaty that was signed in 1949.
• It consists of 29 independent member countries. Three former Soviet states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) are members of NATO.
• NATO cooperates with a range of international organisations and countries in different structures: Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue, Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI)
• Under it, countries develop cooperation with NATO in areas of mutual interest, including emerging security challenges. Pakistan is also NATO’s partner across the globe.
INDIA SRI LANKA RELATIONS

Why in news?

- Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa’s paid a two-day visit to India. This was Mr Gotabaya’s first overseas visit since assuming office.

About

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi has announced a 400 million dollar Line of Credit to Sri Lanka to boost the island nation’s development. India will also extend a 50 million dollars Line of Credit to Sri Lanka to fight terrorism.
- The Prime Minister also said that the two leaders had decided to utilise the $100 million credit line earlier announced for setting up solar projects in the country.
- The two sides also discussed a range of bilateral and regional issues, including fulfilling the aspirations of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka, situation in the Indian Ocean region and steps to boost trade and investment ties.

India-Australia bilateral relations

- When it comes to defence, India and Australia share a common concern over China; it is that aspect which informs a lot of bilateral transactions between the two countries. While Australia is worried about China’s presence in the Pacific, India is worried about China’s increasing activities and influence in the Indian Ocean.
- Earlier this year, the Australian and Indian navies concluded a two-week-long bilateral maritime exercise code-named AUSINDEX. From 2016-18, the armies of the countries conducted a joint military exercise dubbed “AUSTRA HIND”.
- Significantly, for the first time in 2017, Australia’s Foreign Policy identified India as being at the “front rank” of Australia’s international partnerships, “on par with the US, Japan, Indonesia, and China”.

SANNAMIRELLA MARIN

Why in news?

- Sanna Marin has been selected as the next Prime Minister of Finland. She will be the youngest Prime Minister of the world at the age of just 34.

About

- She (born 1985) is a Finnish politician. A Social Democrat, she has been a member of the Parliament of Finland since 2015 and the Minister of Transport and Communications since June 2019.
- After Antti Rinne left his position as Prime Minister, Social Democratic Party of Finland selected Marin as its candidate for the new Prime Minister on 8 December 2019.
• If confirmed, Marin will become the world's youngest currently-serving prime minister, Finland's youngest-ever prime minister and Finland's third female prime minister.
• When she takes office, Ms Marin will be the world's youngest sitting prime minister. New Zealand PM Jacinda Ardern is 39, while Ukrainian premier Oleksiy Honcharuk is 35.

AGREEMENT ON SOCIAL SECURITY BETWEEN INDIA AND BRAZIL
Why in news?
• The Union Cabinet has given its approval for signing the Agreement on Social Security between the Republic of India and the Federative Republic of Brazil.

Background
• The idea to ink pacts on social security programmes with BRICS nations was discussed at the meetings of the BRICS Labour & Employment Ministers held on 9 June 2016 in Geneva and on 27-28 September 2016 in New Delhi, respectively.
• The possibility of concluding social security agreements between BRICS countries also finds mention in the Goa Declaration of the 8th BRICS Leaders’ Summit.
• Taking forward the spirit of the Goa Declaration, India and Brazil held the negotiations on SSA from 13-16 March 2017 in Brasilia. At the end of the negotiations, both sides initialled the finalized text of the Agreement on Social Security.

BOUGAINVILLE: A NEW COUNTRY IN THE PACIFIC
Why in news?
• The Autonomous Region of Bougainville, a chain of islands that lie 959 kilometres northwest of Papua New Guinea’s capital, Port Moresby, has voted unequivocally for independence.

About
• People of Bougainville casted their votes in a referendum on whether they should seek independence from Papua New Guinea. The referendum is an important step in the peace process between groups on Bougainville and Papua.
• It sends a strong signal for other self-determination movements across the Pacific, including in New Caledonia which will hold a second referendum for independence in 2020.
• The referendum has taken place during a period of heightened strategic anxiety among the Pacific’s so-called traditional partners – Australia, New Zealand and the United States, as well as the United Kingdom, France and Japan.
• China’s interest in Bougainville is two-fold: first, it is seeking to shore up diplomatic support in the Pacific Islands region, thereby reducing support for Taiwan which lost a further two Pacific allies this year. And second, to access to resources, namely fisheries and extractive minerals.
ART AND CULTURE

NEW PARLIAMENT BUILDING

Why in news?

- Government of India has changed the usage of a 9.5-acre plot, opposite the present parliament building. It will be used for the construction of a new Parliament building in Delhi’s Master Plan-2021.
- The plot had earlier been marked for recreational purposes in the form of a district park. Apart from this, it is also expected that the Prime Minister’s official residence may be shifted close to the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) in the South Block.
- In the notification, the DDA also proposed changing the use of a 15-acre plot on Church Road near the Central Secretariat bus terminal from transportation (bus terminal and parking) and recreational (neighbourhood play area) to “government office”.
- Another plot to the south of Dr. Rajendra Prasad Road that houses the National Archives was proposed to be changed from public and semi-public facilities to “government office”.

About

- The notification came at a time when the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry, under which the DDA operates, is preparing for a revamp of Parliament, the Central Vista and government offices in the area.
- While the Ministry is yet to make this plan in public, even the Prime Minister’s residence could be shifted closer to the Prime Minister’s Office in South Block.
- The new Parliament is likely to get completed by 75th anniversary of Indian Independence (2022).
- This step has been taken because whenever Parliament session begins, MPs face inconvenience regarding lodging arrangements. At times, hotels have to be booked for a long time.
- Number of staff, security personnel, media visitors and parliamentary activities within the existing Parliament building has increased manifold ever since it was commissioned in 1927.
- But this is not new. In fact, four years ago, Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan had first pitched for a new building for the Indian Parliament as the existing building was in distress and will not be able to handle growing demands for space in the years to come.
HANOI JOINS UNESCO CREATIVE CITIES NETWORK

Why in news?

- The government of Hanoi recently held a ceremony to formally announce that the Vietnamese capital city is joining the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN).

About

- UCCN was created in 2004 to promote cooperation with and among cities that have identified creativity as a strategic factor for sustainable urban development.
- Objective: placing creativity and cultural industries at the heart of their development plans at the local level and cooperating actively at the international level.
- The Network covers seven creative fields: Crafts and Folk Arts, Media Arts, Film, Design, Gastronomy, Literature and Music.
- To date, the UCCN has granted membership to 246 cities around the world.
- Joining the Network, cities commit to sharing their best practices and developing partnerships involving the public and private sectors as well as civil society in order to strengthen the creation, production, distribution and dissemination of cultural activities, goods and services; develop hubs of creativity and innovation and broaden opportunities for creators and professionals in the cultural sector; improve access to and participation in cultural life, in particular for marginalized or vulnerable groups and individuals; fully integrate culture and creativity into sustainable development plans.

As of November, 2019, there are five Indian cities in UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) as follows:

- Jaipur-Crafts and Folk Arts (2015)
- Chennai-Creative city of Music (2017)
- Mumbai – Film (2019)
- Hyderabad – Gastronomy (2019)

DECLASSIFIED FILES/RECORDS

Why in news?

- The Minister of Culture and Tourism informed Lok Sabha that the Government of India has de-classified all records relating to Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose and Azad Hind Fauj and placed them in the National Archives of India.

About

- Accordingly, a total of 304 declassified records/files have been transferred to National Archives of India by above mentioned Ministries/Offices for permanent retention. Out of 304 files, 303 files are already uploaded on the Netaji web portal i.e. www.netajipapers.gov.in
- The National Archives of India is the custodian of declassified files/records of the Government of India.
- The National Archives of India is an Attached Office under the Ministry of Culture.
- It was established in 1891 at Kolkata (Calcutta) as the Imperial Record Department.
Following the transfer of the capital from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911, the present building of the National Archives of India was constructed in 1926 in Delhi.

There are over 50 lakhs files/documents presently in the holdings in the National Archives of India.

MAORI

Why in news?
- As the toll in the New Zealand volcano disaster climbed to 16, some Maori feel this volcano disaster was a form of divine retribution.

About Maori
- They are the indigenous Polynesian people of New Zealand.
- In the 2018 census, there were 775,836 people in New Zealand identifying as Māori, making up 16.5 per cent of the national population.
- In addition, more than 140,000 Māori live in Australia.
- White Island is a jewel of Aotearoa — the Maori name for New Zealand — and the local Ngati Awa tribe consider Whakaari to be a living ancestor. In the Maori cognition, it is wrong for anyone to stomp on her sacred soil.

DSC Prize

Why in News?
- Amitabha Bagchi’s novel Half The Night Is Gone has won the $25,000 DSC Prize for South Asian Literature 2019, topping a shortlist of six works of fiction.

About
- The winner was announced at the IME Nepal Literature Festival in Pokhara, Nepal, where Pradeep Gyawali, minister for foreign affairs of Nepal, presented the winner’s trophy to Bagchi.
- The other shortlisted books were:
  1. The Empty Room, Sadia Abbas, Zubaan
  2. There’s Gunpowder in the Air, Manoranjana Bryar, translated from the Bengali by Arunava Sinha, Eka
  3. The City and the Sea, Raj Kamal Jha, Penguin Books
  4. 99 Nights in Logar, Jamil Jan Kochai, Bloomsbury
  5. The Far Field, Madhuri Vijay, Harper Collins

About the book
- A post-colonial saga that unfolds over three generations, Bagchi’s novel explores human relationships, and the intertwining of fates and cultures in a thoroughly Indian context, though close attention to detail and the inventive use of language.
- Many have referred to it as a Hindi novel written in English. Bagchi himself acknowledges his debt to more than one modern Hindi writer.

The vision behind the DSC Prize
- The DSC Prize for South Asian Literature celebrates the rich and varied world of literature of the South Asian region. Authors could belong to this region through birth or be of any ethnicity but the writing should pertain to the South Asian region in terms of content and theme.
- The prize brings South Asian writing to a new global audience through a celebration of the achievements of South Asian writers, and aims to raise awareness of South Asian culture around the world.
The DSC Prize for South Asian Literature was instituted in 2010 by its founders, Surina Narula and Manhad Narula.

**CRYSTAL AWARD**

**Why in News?**
- Artist Theaster Gates, choreographer and media personality Jin Xing, actor Deepika Padukone and artist Lynette Wallworth are the recipients of the 26th Annual Crystal Award, the World Economic Forum announced on 15 December.

**About**
- The award celebrates the achievements of artists and cultural figures whose leadership inspires inclusive and sustainable change.
- These wonderful cultural leaders are bridge-builders. They connect us to each other, they help us reflect on the human condition and they provide visions of the world that can cut through the limitations of short-term or linear thinking.
- The winners will be honoured in the opening session of the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2020 in Davos-Klosters, Switzerland, on Monday 20 January.

**Award recipients**
- Theaster Gates, for his leadership in creating sustainable communities
- Jin Xing, for her leadership in shaping inclusive cultural norms
- Deepika Padukone, for her leadership in raising mental health awareness
- Lynette Wallworth, for her leadership in creating inclusive narratives

**BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF SUBRAMANIAN BHARATI**

**Why in news?**
- He is the first person to advocate and campaign for women's participation in politics, greater rights for women and their education.
- He visualized the modern Indian woman as the one who will lead society on the right path.
- He was born in Ettayapuram in Tuticorin district on 11 December.

**UNESCO’S LIST OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE**

**Why in news?**
- Recently, UNESCO has recognised the “Nuad” Thai massage as part of its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity at its meeting that was held in Bogota, Columbia.

**About**
- The form of massage is one among over 20 elements that have been chosen for inclusion in the list this year.
- The other elements include Irish harping, Portugal’s Carnival of Podence, traditional Turkish archery and Slovakia’s wire craft and art.
- Till date, this list includes 13 intangible cultural heritage items from India, the most recent addition was made in 2017 when Kumbh Mela was added to the list.
- The first three entries were made in 2008, when Vedic chanting, Ramlila and Sanskrit theatre Kutiyattam were added.
As per the UNESCO website, Nuad is regarded as part of the art and science of traditional Thai healthcare. It is a non-medicinal, manual therapy that involves bodily manipulations through which practitioners help “rebalance” the patient’s body, energy and structure to treat illnesses that are believed to have been caused due to the obstruction of energy flow.

In order to open up blocked routes, Nuad Thai therapists perform a combination of manipulations using their hands, elbows, knees and feet along with hot compresses to reduce inflammation.

HORNBILL FESTIVAL

Why in news?

· The 10 days Hornbill festival was celebrated in Nagaland starting from 1 December.

About

· The Hornbill Festival began with a colourful blend of culture and tradition with a modern twist at Naga Heritage Kisama in Nagaland. This is the 20th edition of Hornbill Festival.

· The festival, organised by Nagaland Government, is an annual tourism promotional event to showcase the state’s traditional and rich cultural heritage in all its ethnicity, diversity and grandeur.

· Highlights of the Hornbill Festival will witness cultural performance of different tribes of Nagaland and North-easter States, indigenous games, city tour, night carnival, art exhibition, photo-fest and many more.

NEW PORTAL ON INDIAN CULTURE

Why in news?

· Ministry of Culture unveiled a portal on Indian culture, which will bring together all the cultural resources of the country on one platform.

· It has been created by the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay, in collaboration with IGNOU, over a course of three years, http://www.indian culture.gov.in is a digital resource of documents, artefacts, paintings and other items available in the archive.

About the portal

· The portal currently has details on 90 lakh items, including manuscripts, archives, research papers, audio books and folk tales.

· It also has information on UNESCO sites, reports and proceedings of various events organised by the Ministry of Culture as well as details of museum collections. This pertains to all the organisations that come under the aegis of the Ministry, such as the National Archives of India, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Smriti, Archaeological Survey of India and Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts.

· The timeline of the content dates back to 4,000 years, and includes sculptures and paintings from the repository of the National Museum and several rare manuscripts.

· It is the first government-authorized portal where knowledge and cultural resources of various organizations of the Ministry of Culture are available in the public domain on a single platform.
**Must See Monuments**

**Why in news?**

- The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has identified 138 monuments as Must See Monuments.

**About**

- The information has been made available on the Must See portal of ASI.
- There are 38 World Heritage Sites in India, out of which 22 cultural sites including monuments/buildings and caves are under the protection of the ASI.
- The Must See list features outstanding Indian monuments and archaeological sites, under the protection of the ASI, including those that feature on UNESCO’s World Heritage List.
- Such monuments and sites display exceptionality in terms of arts and architecture, planning and design, are a unique testimony to the civilization in the past and are outstanding types of buildings showing exemplary engineering skills.

“NUAD” THAI MASSAGE

**Why in news?**

- UNESCO, the United Nations agency for education, culture and science has recognised the “Nuad” Thai massage as part of its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity on 12 December at its meeting that was held in Bogota, Columbia.

**About**

- The form of massage is one among over 20 elements that have been chosen for inclusion in the list 2019.
- The other elements include Irish harping, Portugal’s Carnival of Podence, traditional Turkish archery and Slovakia’s wire craft and art.
- Till date, this list includes 13 intangible cultural heritage items from India, the most recent addition was made in 2017 when Kumbh Mela was added to the list.
- The first three entries were made in 2008, when Vedic chanting, Ramlila and Sanskrit theatre Kutiyattam were added.
JALLIANWALA BAGH NATIONAL MEMORIAL (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2019

Why in news?

- The Rajya Sabha has passed the Jallianwala Bagh National Memorial (Amendment) Bill, 2019 on 19 December 2019.

About

- The Bill seeks to amend Jallianwala Bagh National Memorial Act, 1951 to change provisions related to composition of Trustees of memorial and termination of trustee.

- The Bill also allows the Central government to terminate the term of a nominated trustee before the expiry of the period of his term, without assigning any reason.

Amendments

- The 2019 amendment bill removes the President of the Indian National Congress as a Trustee.

- It clarifies that when there is no Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, the leader of the single largest opposition party in the Lok Sabha will be the Trustee.

- The bill is introduced so that such organizations or trusts could not be politicized and should instead be nationalized.

- The 1951 act provided that the three eminent persons nominated by the central government will have a term of five years and will be eligible for re-nomination.

- The 2019 bill added a clause to allow the central government to terminate the term of a nominated trustee before the expiry of his term without assigning any reason.

EARLIEST SANSKRIT INSCRIPTION IN SOUTH INDIA FOUND IN A.P.

Why in News?

- The Epigraphy Branch of the Archaeological Survey of India has discovered the earliest epigraphic evidence so far for the Saptamatrika cult.

About

- It was discovered in Chebrolu village in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh. The inscription is in Sanskrit and in Brahmi characters and was issued by Satavahana king Vijaya in 207 A.D. Now this is known as Chebrolu inscription.

- Saptamatrikas are a group of seven female deities worshipped in Hinduism as personifying the energy of their respective consorts.

- According to studies the inscription records the construction of a prasada (temple), a mandapa and consecration of images on the southern side of the temple by a person named Kartika for the merit of the king at the temple of Bhagavathi (Goddess) Saktimatrika (Saptamatrika) at Tamrape.

- Earlier there were references of Saptamatrika worship in the early Kadamba copper plates and the early Chalukyas and Eastern Chalukya copper plates but the new discovery predates them by almost 200 years.

- After all verification of the available records it is proved that the Chebrolu inscription of Satavahana king Vijaya issued in his 5th regnal year – 207 A.D. and is also the
earliest datable Sanskrit inscription from South India so far.
- So far the Nagarjunakonda inscription of Ikshavaku king Ehaavala Chantamula issued in his 11th regnal year corresponding to the 4th century A.D. was considered the earliest Sanskrit inscription in South India.
- Another inscription which is in Prakrit language and of Brahmi characters and belongs to the 1st century A.D also yielded from the same place.

Miscellaneous
Cuba to have a PM for the first time since 1976
Why in news?
- Cuban President Miguel Diaz Canel on 21 December 2019 named Tourism Minister Manuel Marrero Cruz as the country’s first Prime Minister since 1976, under a new Constitution

SAHITYA AKADEMI AWARDS
Why in news?
- Sahitya Akademi announced its annual Sahitya Akademi Awards in 23 languages. In Hindi, Nand Kishore has been awarded for his Poetry ‘Chheelate Hue Apne Ko’ and in English Shashi Tharoor has been awarded for his Non-Fiction ‘An Era of Darkness’.

HUMAN LIBRARY
Why in news?
- Human Library, a concept which seeks to replace books with humans, was held in Mysuru.

About
- The Human Library event aims to break past long-standing prejudices and stereotypes by creating a safe framework for conservation by using a library analogy of lending people rather than books.
- It intends to generate greater human cohesion across various social, religious and ethnic diversities. The readers of human library have an opportunity during a planned event to borrow Human Books and to engage in conversation with the books.

55th JNANPITH AWARD
Why in news?
- Eminent Malayalam poet Akkitham Achuthan Namboothiri, popularly known as Akkitham, has been chosen for the 55th Jnanpith Award.
- Some of his celebrated creations include "Veeravadam", "Balidarsanam", "NimishaKshethram", "Amrita Khatika", "AkkithamKavithaka", "Epic of Twentieth Century" and "Antimahakalam".
- A Padma Shri awardee, he has won several literary accolades including the SahityaAkademi Award (1973), Kerala SahityaAkademi Award (1972 and 1988), Mathrubhumi Award, Vayalar Award, and KabirSamman.
- Jnanpith Award is given by BharatiyaJnanpith, a literary and research organization based in Delhi.
- It is given annually to an author for their "outstanding contribution towards literature".
- It is bestowed only on Indian writers writing in Indian languages included in the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution of India and English.
Why in news?

- 19 November 2019 marks the 191st birth anniversary of Rani Lakshmibai.

About

- Rani Lakshmibai or Jhansi ki Rani, the queen of Jhansi was one of the leading figures of the Rebellion of 1857. For Indian nationalists, she became an icon for the freedom struggle against the British Raj for Indian.

- She, one of the warriors of India’s struggle for Independence, was born as Manikarnika Tambe in 1828 in Varanasi.

- She lost her mother at the age of four and was raised in an unconventional way by her father who worked as an advisor in the court of Peshwa. He supported her in learning horsemanship, archery, self-defense, and shooting.

- In 1842, Lakshmibai got married to Gangadhar Rao Newalkar, the Maharaja of Jhansi and got the name of Rani Lakshmibai. Few years after marriage, in 1851, Manikarnika gave birth to a boy but he couldn’t survive and died after four months.

- Then Lakshmibai and Gangadhar Rao adopted Rao’s cousin’s son, Anand Rao, who was later renamed as Damodar.

- Soon after they adopted Anand, Maharaja died due to an illness in 1853. Rani Lakshmibai was just 18 at that time.

- The East India Company took advantage of the Maharaja’s death and applied the Doctrine of Lapse.

What was the Doctrine of Lapse?

- The Doctrine of Lapse was an annexation policy followed widely by Lord Dalhousie when he was India’s Governor-General from 1848 to 1856.

- According to this, any princely state under the direct or indirect (as a vassal) control of the East India Company where the ruler did not have a legal male heir would be annexed by the company.

- As per this, any adopted son of the Indian ruler could not be proclaimed as heir to the kingdom.

- This challenged the Indian ruler’s long-held authority to appoint an heir of their choice.

- So, due to the Doctrine of Lapse, Britishers did not accept Damodar Rao as the legal heir.

- Displeased by injustice, Rani Lakshmibai even appealed to a court in London which discarded her case.

- The plan of the Britishers was to annex Jhansi. They seized the state jewels, granted her an annual pension of Rs 60,000 and asked her to leave the fort forever.
Revolt of 1857

- It is believed that prior to sepoy mutiny, Lakshmibai was unwilling to rebel against the British but changed her mind in 1858 when commanding officer of the British forces, Sir Hugh Rose, demanded the surrender of Jhansi.
- Lakshmibai gave a great fight to the British as the siege of Jhansi lasted for about two weeks.
- She was supported by Tantia Tope and Nana Sahib.
- After a fierce war, when the British army entered Jhansi, Rani Lakshmibai, tied her son Damodar Rao to her back and fought bravely using two swords in both her hands.
- She escaped to Kalpi and was accompanied by other rebellions. She then departed to Gwalior and a fierce battle was fought between the British and Lakshmibai’s army.
- She died on June 17, 1958, martyring her life for India’s freedom. Rani Lakshmibai’s tomb is situated in the Phool Bagh area of Gwalior.

FOREST REPORT (ISFR) 2019

Why in news?

- The Ministry for Environment, Forests and Climate Change has released the biennial 16th India State of Forest Report (ISFR), 2019 on 30 December 2019. It has been published by the Forest Survey of India (FSI), an organization under the Ministry.
- In tune with the Government of India’s vision of Digital India, FSI’s assessment is largely based on digital data whether it is satellite data, vector boundaries of districts or data processing of field measurements.

Highlights

- The report provides information on forest cover, tree cover, mangrove cover, growing stock inside and outside the forest areas, carbon stock in India’s forests, Forest Types and Biodiversity, Forest Fire monitoring and forest cover in different slopes & altitudes.
- Special thematic information on forest cover such as hill, tribal districts, and north eastern region has also been given separately in the report.
- It also created a national forest inventory for the first time on produce from forests.
- The total forest and tree cover is 80.73 million hectare which is 24.56 percent of the geographical area of India.
- Madhya Pradesh has the largest forest cover followed by Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Maharashtra. In terms of forest cover as percentage of total geographical area, the top five States are Mizoram (85.41%), Arunachal Pradesh (79.63%), Meghalaya (76.33%), Manipur (75.46%) and Nagaland (75.31%).
- The top three states showing increase in forest cover are Karnataka followed by Andhra Pradesh and Kerala.
- About 21.40% of forest cover is prone to fires, with forests in the north-eastern region and central India being the most vulnerable.
- Top three states showing mangrove cover increase are Gujarat followed by Maharashtra and Odisha.
- There has been a decrease of forest cover to the extent of 765 sq km (0.45%) in the region.
Except Assam and Tripura, all the States in the region show decrease in forest cover.

- There has been a decline in tree cover inside forests due to tribal populations getting “land titles” (patta) and there has been a rise in trees outside the forest area due to an increase in tree plantation and afforestation activities.
- The total carbon stock of the country was estimated at 7124 million tons, which is an increase of 42.6 million tons from the last assessment.
- Amongst the States, Gujarat has the largest area of wetlands within RFA in the country followed by West Bengal.
- Dependence of fuelwood on forests is the highest in the State of Maharashtra, whereas, for fodder, small timber and bamboo, dependence is highest in Madhya Pradesh.

MAHARAJA SURAJMAL: ‘PANIPAT’ CONTROVERSY

Why in news?

- On 9 December 2019, Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot urged the Censor Board to take note of allegations that Ashutosh Gowariker’s film, Panipat, had wrongly portrayed Maharaja Surajmal.

- A day earlier, Rajasthan Tourism Minister Vishvendra Singh had demanded a ban on screening of the film in North India to avoid any law and order situation.

About

- In the film, Maharaja Surajmal of Bharatpur is reportedly shown as having denied help to the Maratha army, one of the factors leading to the Marathas’ eventual defeat.

- The film is based on the Third Battle of Panipat fought between the Maratha empire and the Afghan king Ahmad Shah Abdali.

- Members of the Jat community have protested against the film and several theatres in Rajasthan have decided not to screen the film, which was released on Friday.

Maharaja Surajmal

- He was born in 1707 in the kingdom of Bharatpur, Rajasthan. He ruled in the 18th century and was the son of the Jat chieftain Badan Singh.

- He was the strong leader who harried the Mughal empire in the anarchic period of its decline, consolidated the kingdom with its capital at Bharatpur and used the resources gained to build forts and palaces, the most famous being the palace at Deeg and the Bharatpur Fort.

- Some institutions that have been named after him include the Maharaja Surajmal Institute of Technology and Maharaja Surajmal Brij University, Bharatpur.

The Third Battle of Panipat

- It was fought between the Marathas and the invading armies of Afghan general Ahmed Shah Abdali in 1761. The battle, fought about 90 km north of Delhi, was won by the Afghans and left about 40,000 troops of the Marathas dead.

- Maharaja Surajmal was among those who played key roles in the battle. After the battle, the Marathas lost their pre-eminent position in north India, which ultimately paved the way for British colonial powers to take over.
PAIKA REBELLION

Why in News?

- President Ram Nath Kovind laid the foundation stone to the memorial being built in memory of the Paika rebellion, a two hundred year old armed revolt against the British East India Company in Odisha.

Did the Paikas lead India’s “first war of independence”?

- Through the 19th century, India’s vast rural areas were alive with discontent that periodically manifested itself in resistance against old inequities and new hardships.
- These uprisings coincided with the military expansion of the British East India Company inside India, and forced disruptions in existing social relations in peasant and tribal communities.

- Because these expressions of discontent coincided with traditional society coming into contact with European colonialists and missionaries, the uprisings are seen as expressions of resistance against colonial rule.
- This is the reason why several recent descriptions of the Paika Rebellion in Odisha’s Khurda in 1817 have referred to it as the “original” first war of Indian Independence.

About Paikas

- The Paikas (pronounced “paiko”, literally ‘foot soldiers’), were a class of military retainers who had been recruited since the 16th century by kings in Odisha from a variety of social groups to render martial services in return for hereditary rent-free land (nish-karjagirs) and titles.

- The advent of the British and the establishment of colonial rule brought new land revenue settlements, which led to the Paikas losing their estates.
- Before and after the revolt of the Paikas in Khurda came risings in Paralakhemundi (1799-1814), Ghumusar (1835-36) and Angul (1846-47); the rebellion of Kondhs in Kalahandi (1855); and the Sabara Rebellion of 1856-57, again in Paralakhemundi.
- Many of these [uprisings in Odisha] were led by propertied sections whose position was undermined by colonial interventions. Nevertheless, they mobilised large sections of peasants, tribals and outcastes against the British.
- These sections had been angered by the disruptions and dislocations caused by the colonial agrarian settlements which had seriously interfered with their lives and undermined their existence.

GENERAL STUDIES II (GOVERNANCE, CONSTITUTION, POLITY, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS)

INDIAN RAILWAY MANAGEMENT SERVICE (IRMS)

Why in news?

- The Union Cabinet has approved the organizational restructuring of the railways through the unification of the existing eight Group A services into one central service — the Indian Railway Management Service (IRMS).
The move was required as there was huge “departmentalism” that delayed many projects.

About present system

- The Indian Railways is governed by a pool of officers, among whom engineers are recruited through the Indian Engineering Services Examination and civil servants through the Civil Services Examination.
- The engineers are in five technical service cadres — Indian Railway Service of Engineers (IRSE), Indian Railway Service of Mechanical Engineers (IRSM), Indian Railway Service of Electrical Engineers (IRE), Indian Railway Service of Signal Engineers (IRSE) and the Indian Railway Stores Service (IRSS).
- The Civil Servants are in the Indian Railway Traffic Service (IRTS), Indian Railway Accounts Service (IRAS) and Indian Railway Personnel Service (IRPS).

Need of an hour

- Several committees including the Bibek Debroy Committee in 2015 have noted that “departmentalism” is a major problem in the system.
- The Debroy panel had recommended the merging of the eight services into two — the Indian Railway Technical Service (IRTechS) comprising five engineering services (IRSE, IRSS, IRE, IRSM and IRSS), and the Indian Railway Logistics Service (IRLogS), comprising non-technical services (IRAS, IRPS and IRTS). The government has now collapsed all services into one.
- The government has followed the Prakash Tandon Committee’s recommendations of 1994 as it was apprehensive that even if there are two services, there would be infighting.

Problems

- The merger is unscientific and against established norms, because it proposes to merge two fundamentally dissimilar entities, with multiple disparities.
- People with a specific skill set might be pushed to perform other work about which there is no clarity. There is growing uncertainty over promotions and career progression of the officers who are currently employed in Railways.
- There could be misunderstanding between civil servants and engineers in Railways.

REVIEW OF SC/ST CREAMY LAYER

Why in news?

- Recently, the Centre urged the Supreme Court of India (SC) to refer its verdict of 2018 excluding the creamy layer within the Scheduled Castes (SC)/Scheduled Tribe (ST) community from reservation benefits to a seven-judge bench for a review.
- The Union Government has called upon the Supreme Court to form a seven-judge Bench to reconsider the formulation in M. Nagaraj vs Union of India (2006) that it should be applied to SC/ST communities.
- A plea seeks substantive equality among the SC and ST communities under Articles 14 and 16 of the Constitution, to enable proper distribution of benefits of affirmative action’s to the genuinely needy SC/ST candidates after removing those who longer remain identified with the term “backward classes”, specifically to SCs/STs.
Background

· A five-judge Constitution bench in 2018 held that the well-off members of the SC and ST communities cannot be granted benefits of reservation in college admissions and government jobs.

· The apex court in the Jarnail Singh case held that the Constitutional courts in implementing the principle of reservation will be within their jurisdiction to exclude the creamy layer from such groups or sub-groups from quota benefits by applying the principle of equality.

Main Judgments

1. Indra Sawhney vs Union of India: In its landmark 1992 decision in Indra Sawhney vs Union of India, the Supreme Court had held that reservations under Article 16(4) could only be provided at the time of entry into government service but not in matters of promotion. And the principle would operate only prospectively and not affect promotions already made and reservation already provided in promotions shall continue in operation for a period of five years from the date of the judgment. More significantly, It ruled that the creamy layer can be and must be excluded. On June 17, 1995, Parliament, acting in its constituent capacity, adopted the seventy-seventh amendment by which clause (4A) was inserted into Article 16 to enable reservation to be made in promotion for SCs and STs.

2. The validity of the amendment was challenged before the Supreme Court in the Nagaraj case (2006). Upholding the validity of Article 16 (4A), the court then said that it is an enabling provision. “The State is not bound to make reservation for the SCs and STs in promotions. But, if it seeks to do so, it must collect quantifiable data on three facets — the backwardness of the class; the inadequacy of the representation of that class in public employment; and the general efficiency of service as mandated by Article 335 would not be affected”. The court ruled that the constitutional amendments do not abrogate the fundamentals of equality.

Constitutional Provision

Article 335 recognises that special measures need to be adopted for considering the claims of SCs and STs to services and posts, in order to bring them at par. It is read as: “The claims of the members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes shall be taken into consideration, consistently with the maintenance of efficiency of administration, in the making of appointments to services and posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or of a State.”

INDIA, AFGHANISTAN AND IRAN ON CHABAHAR PORT

Why in news?

· India, Afghanistan and Iran held their first trilateral meeting on Chabahar port project (Iran) in New Delhi during which they reviewed its implementation.

Highlights of the meeting

· The progress of the project of the Chabahar port was welcomed by all three countries.

· At the meeting, nations decided to constitute a follow-up committee that would hold its first meeting within two months in Chabahar Port. The committee would aim to finalise protocol to harmonise transit, roads, customs and consular matters for making the route attractive and decrease logistic costs.
It was also agreed to include Mormugoa and New Mangalore ports of India under the Chabahar Agreement.

It was also decided that a study will be conducted by Freight Forwarder Association in India to streamline the cargo transit in the country.

Chabahar is strategically-located port on the energy-rich Iran’s southern coast. India is one of a handful of countries that continued trade links with Iran despite it being isolated by Western countries against its disputed nuclear programme. India is Tehran’s second-biggest oil client after Beijing (China).

From a diplomatic perspective, this port could be used as a point from where humanitarian operations could be coordinated.

Chabahar port will be beneficial to India in countering Chinese presence in the Arabian Sea which China is trying to ensure by helping Pakistan develop the Gwadar port.

There will be a significant boost in the import of iron ore, sugar and rice to India with this port’s becoming functional. The import cost of oil to India will also see a considerable decline. India has already increased its crude purchase from Iran since the West imposed ban on Iran was lifted.

**TRUMP TO BE IMPEACHED**

**Why in news?**

- Donald Trump became the third US President to be impeached by the House of Representatives, setting up a trial in the Senate that will decide whether he remains in office.

**About**

- Impeachment is a provision that allows Congress to remove the President of the United States. Under the US Constitution, the House of Representatives (Lower House) has the “the sole power of impeachment” while the Senate (Upper House) has “the sole power to try all impeachments”. The Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court has the duty of presiding over impeachment trials in the Senate.

**Grounds for impeachment**

- The President can be removed from office for “treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanors”. What constitutes these “high crimes” and “misdemeanors” (misdemeanors), however, is not clearly spelt out.

  - The New York Times explained that the expression “high crimes and misdemeanors” came out of the British common law tradition. “Essentially, it means an abuse of power by a high-level public official.

- This does not necessarily have to be a violation of an ordinary criminal statute,” The NYT said. Historically, in the US, it has encompassed corruption and other abuses, including trying to obstruct judicial proceedings.

**Impeachment history**

- No US President has ever been removed as a direct result of impeachment. The House did impeach two Presidents — Andrew Johnson (1968) and Bill Clinton (1998) — but the Senate did not convict them.
between, President Richard Nixon (1974) resigned before he could be removed.

The process

- HOUSE VOTE: It begins with an investigation by a House committee. In the Nixon and Clinton cases, the House Judiciary Committee held that investigation and recommended articles of impeachment to the full House. In Trump’s case, six committees are investigating him on impeachable offences. If they find that there is enough evidence of wrongdoing, it will refer the matter to the full House (see flow chart).
- HOUSE VOTE: When the full House votes, if one or more of the articles of impeachment gets a majority vote, the President is impeached. Next, the proceedings move to the Senate.
- SENATE TRIAL & VOTE: The Senate holds a trial, overseen by the chief justice of the Supreme Court. A team of lawmakers from the House, known as managers, play the role of prosecutors, The NYT explained. The President has defence lawyers, and the Senate serves as the jury. If at least two-thirds of the Senators present find the President guilty, he is removed and the Vice President takes over as President.

Numbers in the Houses

- The House has 235 Democrats, 199 Republicans, and one independent. The Democrats could, therefore, impeach Trump with no Republican support.
- The Senate has 53 Republicans, 45 Democrats and two independents who usually vote with the Democrats. Conviction of the President would require 67 votes, which cannot happen unless some Republicans vote against him.

22ND ROUND OF THE SINO-INDIA BOUNDARY TALKS

Why in news?

- 22nd round of the Sino-India boundary talks held under the framework of Special Representatives dialogue. India and China will intensify the quest for the settlement of the boundary question.

About

- The Special Representatives resolved to intensify their efforts to achieve a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable solution to the India-China boundary question in accordance with the directives provided by Indian Prime Minister and his Chinese President.
- Both sides agreed that it was important to maintain peace and tranquility in the border areas for the “overall bilateral relationship”.
- Two countries are planning 70 events to celebrate the 70th anniversary of diplomatic ties next year. They would ‘actively advance boundary negotiations in line with the Agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the Indo-China Boundary Question’.
- Officials in this meeting underlined the importance of approaching the question from the ‘strategic perspective of India-China relations’.
- The Indian and Chinese leaders last met at the Mamallapuram informal summit in October 2019.
Significance of this meeting
- This border-related meeting was significant as China has been critical of India’s 5 August, 2019 decision to end the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and bifurcation of the region into two Union territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.

WTO’S DISPUTE SETTLEMENT MECHANISM

Why in news?
- The World Trade Organization’s (WTO) dispute settlement mechanism is on the brink of collapsing. Of the three members currently on the seven-member body, the terms of two ended on 10 December 2019 and a veto by the US on fresh appointments, the crown jewel of the WTO been rendered dysfunctional.
- The dispute settlement mechanism requires at least three members to function, and world trade is about to enter a phase in which there will be no official resolution for many international disputes — potentially creating the circumstances for a free-for-all.
- The most important function of WTO is to settle disputes but this collapse could signal the demise of the 24-year-old WTO itself.

Problem with the WTO Appellate Body
- Over the last couple of years, the membership of the body has dwindled to (the present) three persons (instead of the required 7) as the US has blocked the appointments of new members, and the reappointments of members who had completed their four-year tenures.
- The US believes the WTO is biased against it, and has criticized it for being “unfair”.

Therefore, the US has taken the decision to starve the body of personnel and to disregard its authority — imposing new tariffs on not just China, but also American allies such as Canada, Europe, and Japan.
- The US sees the WTO — which seeks to ensure equal treatment for all its members — as standing in the way of “America First”, tying its hands when it tries to protect American workers or seeks to effectively employ the advantages of being the world’s most powerful economy. WTO has encouraged China — helping it to strengthen its economy at the cost of other nations including the US, while doing nothing about the unfair trade practices that it uses widely.

Way Ahead
- There is now great uncertainty over the dispute settlement process. Once the body becomes non-functional, countries may be compelled to implement rulings by the panel even if they feel that gross errors have been committed.
- Should such a country refuse to comply with the order of the panel on the grounds that it has no avenue for appeal, it will run the risk of facing arbitration proceedings initiated by the other party in the dispute.
- This does not bode well for India, which is facing a rising number of dispute cases, especially on agricultural products. In the last few months alone, four cases have been brought to the WTO against India’s alleged support measures for its sugar and sugarcane producers.
**TRANSGENDER PERSONS (PROTECTION OF RIGHTS) BILL, 2019**

**Why in news?**
- The Rajya Sabha has passed the Bill by voice vote that seeks to provide a mechanism for social, economic and educational empowerment of transgender persons in India.
- The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill 2019 has been passed by the Parliament. It was passed by the Rajya Sabha on 26th November and already passed by the 17th Lok Sabha on 5th August.

**Features of the Bill**
- It aims to non discrimination against a Transgender Person in educational institutions, employment, healthcare services etc.
- It recognizes the identity of Transgender Persons and aims to to confer upon them right to self perceived gender identity.
- It envisages the provision of right of Residence with parents and immediate family members of Transgender Persons, formulation of welfare schemes and programmes for education, social security and health of Transgender Persons, and provision for National Council for Transgender Persons to advice, monitor and evaluate measures for the protection of their rights.

**Impact of the Bill**
- It will make all the stakeholders responsive and accountable for upholding the principles underlying the Bill.
- It will bring greater accountability on the part of the Central Government and State Governments/Union Territories Administrations for issues concerning Transgender persons.
- It will benefit a large number of transgender persons, mitigate the stigma, discrimination and abuse against this marginalized section and bring them into the mainstream of society. It will lead to greater inclusiveness and will make the transgender persons productive members of the society.

**DATA ON EXTENT AND PATTERN OF SUBSTANCE USE**

**Why in News?**
- The National Crime Record Bureau under the Ministry of Home Affairs has informed that a total number of 874, 750 and 778 people have died during 2014, 2015 and 2016 respectively due to a drug overdose in the country.
- Out of which, 543, 493 and 471 people between the age group of 14 and 45 have died during 2014, 2015 and 2016 respectively.

**About**
- A National Survey to collect State wise Data on Extent and Pattern of Substance Use was conducted in the country during the year 2018. The report presents major findings of the survey in terms of proportion of Indian population in the group of 10-75 years using various substances and those affected by substance use disorders.
- As per the report, prevalence in percentage and estimated number of individuals who are currently users of various psychoactive substances (as per the estimated population in 2018) is given below.
Highlights of the report

- The National survey was conducted to generate estimates for eight categories of psychoactive substances: Alcohol, Cannabis, Opioids, Cocaine, Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS), Sedatives, Inhalants and Hallucinogens.
- As per the report, Alcohol is the most common psychoactive substance used by Indians.
- After Alcohol, Cannabis and Opioids are the next commonly used substances in India.

Steps taken

- The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has formulated and is implementing a National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR) for 2018-2025.
- The Plan aims at reduction of adverse consequences of drug abuse through a multi-pronged strategy.
- The activities under the NAPDDR, inter-alia, include awareness generation programmes in schools/colleges/Universities, workshops/seminars/with parents, community based peer led interactions intervention programmes for vulnerable adolescents and youth in the community, provisioning of treatment facilities and capacity building of service providers.
- The Ministry also implements a “Central Sector Scheme of Assistance for Prevention of Alcoholism and Substance (Drug) Abuse” under which financial assistance is provided to eligible Non-Governmental Organizations based on the recommendations of State Governments/UT Administrations for running Integrated Rehabilitation Centres for Addicts to provide composite/integrated services for the rehabilitation of addicts, including adolescents.

INCREASING CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN

Why in news?

- After the rape and murder of a veterinarian in Hyderabad and the burning of a rape survivor in Unnao, Uttar Pradesh, there has been an outcry for justice for the victims.
- There has been a clamour within and outside of the Parliament to make the criminal justice system stringent and tougher on an offender who commits sexual crimes against women and children.

About

- ‘Rape’ as a clearly defined offence was first introduced in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) in 1860.
- The definition of rape also included sex when her consent has been obtained by putting her or any person in whom she is interested, in fear of death or of hurt.
- Also, sex with or without consent, when she is under 18 years is considered rape. However, under the exception, sexual intercourse or sexual acts by a man with his wife, the wife not being under 15 years of age, is not rape.
- Section 375 of the IPC made punishable the act of sex by a man with a woman, if it was done against her will or without her consent. Section 376 provided for 7 years of jail term to life imprisonment to whoever commits the offense of rape.

Issue

- Every year 25th November is observed as International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and this year the
theme was Generation Equality Stands Against Rape.

- Violence against women continues to be an obstacle to achieving equality, development, peace and fulfilment of women and girls human rights.
- According to a WHO report, one in every three women and girls experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime most frequently by an intimate partner. Mental or emotional violence remains unnoticed and does not go under the scanner.
- As per the NCRB data in India, cruelty by husband or his relatives accounted for the highest number of cases recorded in the crime against women category in 2017.

Reasons for increasing sexual violence against women in India

- Poorly lit urban spaces coupled with inadequate police patrolling are favourable for rising sexual violence.
- Lack of stringent laws for punishing sexual assault is compounded by inefficient criminal justice system. It is evident from the rate of conviction in rape cases, which is continuously declining since the few decades. Such a situation serves to be an incentive, rather than detrimental, for committing violence against women.
- Increasing objectification of women by the media as an object for sexual satisfaction.
- Inefficient and apathetic attitude of law enforcement agencies.
- The lack of gender equality makes girls and women vulnerable to increasing discrimination, violence, trafficking and other harmful practices.
- Patriarchal structure dominates Indian society.
- Exposure to harsh physical discipline during childhood and witnessing the father beating the mother during childhood is a predictor of victimization and perpetration of violence against his wife in adulthood.
- The last decade has seen fadness of family values, because of the shift towards the materialistic world. It is because of this materialism that the family value system is coming down.

Provisions regarding Women

- The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio economic, education and political disadvantages faced by them.
- The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act (POSH Act) was enacted in 2013 as a comprehensive legislation to provide a safe, secure and enabling environment, free from sexual harassment, to every woman.
- Fundamental Rights, among others, ensure equality before the law and equal protection of law; prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, and guarantee equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters relating to employment.
- The Indian Penal Code has many stringent provisions in itself. After the Nirbhaya case, amendments were made in the code in 2013 on the recommendations of Justice Verma committee. The amendments have made the code further stringent.
- Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(a), 39(b), 39(c) and 42 of the Constitution are of specific importance in this regard.
- Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) law was enacted to protect
minors. This is one of the first laws, which is gender neutral.

Special Initiatives for Women

- **National Commission for Women**: In January 1992, it is a statutory body that mandates to study and monitor all matters relating to the constitutional and legal safeguards provided for women, review the existing legislation to suggest amendments wherever necessary, etc.

- **Reservation for Women in Local Self-Government**: The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act passed in 1992 by Parliament ensure one-third of the total seats for women in all elected offices in local bodies whether in rural areas or urban areas.

- **The National Plan of Action for the Girl Child (1991-2000)**: It aims to ensure survival, protection and building up a better future for the girl child.

- **National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001**: The Department of Women & Child Development under the Ministry of Human Resource Development has prepared this policy, to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women.

Measures taken by Government to prevent Crime against Women

- The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2013 was enacted for effective deterrence against sexual offences. Further, the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2018 was enacted to prescribe even more stringent penal provisions including death penalty for rape of a girl below the age of 12 years.

- The Act also inter-alia mandates completion of investigation and trials within 2 months each. Emergency Response Support System provides a pan-India, single, internationally recognized number (112) based system for all emergencies, with computer aided dispatch of field resources to the location of distress.

- Using technology to aid smart policing and safety management, Safe City Projects have been sanctioned in first Phase in 8 cities (Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Lucknow and Mumbai).

- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has launched a cyber-crime portal on 20th September 2018 for citizens to report obscene content.

- MHA has launched the ‘National Database on Sexual Offenders’ (NDSO) on 20th September 2018 to facilitate investigation and tracking of sexual offenders across the country by law enforcement agencies.

- In order to facilitate States/UTs, MHA on 19th February 2019 launched an online analytic tool for police called ‘Investigation Tracking System for Sexual Offences’ to monitor and track time-bound investigation in sexual assault cases in accordance with the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2018.

- One Stop Centre (OSC) scheme is being implemented across the country since 1st April 2015 which is exclusively designed to provide integrated services such as medical aid, police assistance, legal counselling/court case management, psycho-social counselling and temporary shelter to women affected by violence under one roof. As per available information, 728 OSCs have been approved by the Government of India, 595 OSCs are operational in the country.

- Recently, the Andhra Pradesh Cabinet cleared the A.P. Disha Bill, 2019 (A.P. Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, 2019)
paving the way for awarding the death penalty for the offenses of rape and gang-rape and expediting the verdict in trials of such cases to 21 days. The Cabinet also gave its nod for introduction of the A.P. Special Court for Specified Offenses against Women and Children Bill, 2019, for dealing with various crimes against women under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses (POSCO) Act.

Way ahead

- **Gender-sensitization programmes:** These should be started for males of family, police personnel, medical fraternity etc. Police apathy, especially when a woman approaches the police should be worked upon.

- **Judiciary:** There should be a special court with a woman judge and magistrate in each district to handle domestic violence cases. Mobile courts should be introduced as an effective strategy to provide justice to the victims of domestic violence.

- **Participation:** Society and a country have to take solid steps to bring about women empowerment in true sense. Students should be taught to engage in community activities so that they understand realities and also understand how to cope up with realities. Community get-together should also be encouraged so that people get to know each other. Neighbours should also get to know their neighbours. Community activities should be encouraged.

- **Role of police:** Police should be trained to be respectful and courteous to women in distress. A separate wing of police may opened for dealing with women’s issues, in all police stations and personnel of this wing should be exempted from other duties.

- **Role of Media:** Media should be used to sensitise the officials and the public about violence so as to develop a positive attitude towards women in general, and women victims, in particular.

- **Role of awareness and education:** Spreading awareness and education must be our priority as only education can help to lift the curtains of patriarchy from people’s minds. Laws were enacted after the Nirbhaya case (2012) but the solution lies in implementing these laws effectively. The state has to work towards making people aware of laws like POCSO Act, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act etc.

- **Stringent rules:** The state should also make the penalties of not abiding by these laws clear to the public.

- **Say yes to Right to Equality:** Equality starts at home, so it is the need of the hour that everyone learns to give equal rights to the women at home.

### Disposal of cases under SHe-BOX

- A total number of 203 cases have been disposed off so far which includes cases under Central Government, State Government and the Private sector under the SHe-Box portal.

- Once a complaint is submitted to the SHe-Box portal, it directly reaches to the concerned authority having jurisdiction to take action in the matter.

- A total number of 203 cases have been disposed off so far which includes cases under Central Government, State Government and the Private sector.

- The SHe-Box portal has been developed with the objective to facilitate the registration of complaints related to sexual harassment of women at workplace.

- Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India has developed an
online complaint management system titled Sexual Harassment electronic–Box (SHe-Box) for registering complaints related to sexual harassment at workplace by women, including government and private employees.

SALT AND TRANS-FAT IN JUNK FOOD

Why in news?
- The Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) unveiled a new study which showed that salt and fat in an array of junk food was well above proposed regulatory thresholds. The packaged and fast foods analysed were chips, savouries, burgers and pizzas that are widely available in restaurants and other commercial outlets.

About
- This is not the first time that the CSE has conducted such research. However, the findings are significant as the Food Safety and Standards and Authority (FSSAI) is yet to make into law draft regulations on setting limits and publicizing information, about nutrients in fast and packaged food.

How the study was conducted?
- The Environment Monitoring Laboratory of CSE tested salts, fat, trans-fat, and carbohydrates in 33 foods using 14 samples of chips, savouries, instant noodles, and instant soups. There were also 19 samples of burgers, fries, fried chicken, pizza, sandwiches and wraps, sourced from grocery stores and fast foods outlets in New Delhi.

- The pizza, burgers, chips and snacks were to be tested were stored in laboratory conditions and ground to a powder or paste. Then they were chemically analysed to determine the salt, fat, trans-fat and carbohydrate levels. The aim was to find out the levels of these products in actual servings/packets of the foods.

How was it established that these nutrients were above thresholds?
- To calculate this, the organization relied on the concept of the recommended dietary allowance (RDA), a daily ceiling on the amount of salt, fat, carbohydrate and trans-fat.
- The RDA is based on scientific consensus and has been agreed upon by expert bodies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the National Institute of Nutrition (NIN), Hyderabad.
- It say that, ideally, an adult should consume no more than 5g of salt, 60g of fat, 300g carbohydrate and 2.2g of transfat every day.
- Further, the RDA from breakfast, lunch and dinner should not more than 25% and that from snacks (assumed to be those munched between meals), must be no more than 10%.
- Thus, a snack should be ideally having no more than 0.5 g of salt and 6g of fat.

What is the law on disclosing nutritional components?
- Current Food Safety and Standards (Packaging and Labelling) Regulations, 2011 only require companies to disclose energy (kilo calories), protein, carbohydrates, total
fat, trans-fat and saturated fat contained per 100 g or per millilitre or per serve.

- It is not intuitively easy, without some mental math, to figure out how much is actually contained in your serving.
- There are also no disclosures on high salt content and added sugar and no compulsion on companies to disclose nutritional information on the front of the pack.
- In 2013, the FSSAI, the apex food regulator under the Union Health Ministry, set up a committee to regulate packaged snacks.
- This committee, which consisted of doctors, nutrition experts, public policy activists and the CSE itself, recommended in 2014 information on calories, sugar, fat, saturated fat and salt be displayed upfront.
- In 2018, the FSSAI came up with a draft law, the Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2018.
- The draft recommended that a packet should have clear information on how much each nutrient, such as salt, sugar, contributed to the RDA.
- The draft said salt must be declared as sodium chloride for instance and that those ingredients which breached the RDA should be marked in red.
- Food companies had reservations mainly because they felt ‘red’

**GENDER GAP INDEX**

**Why in news?**

- Recently, the World Economic Forum released the overall gender gap ranking in which India made no improvement in 2018, compared to 2017. It stood at a low 108 out of the 149 countries in 2018, the same as in 2017.

**About Performance of India**

- India maintains a stable ranking this year, but its gap is directionally larger this year, with a 33 per cent gap yet to be bridged.
- India ranked lower on all segments - economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival ranking, and political empowerment. It needs to make improvements across the board, from women’s participation to getting more women into senior and professional roles.
- The country continues to rank third-lowest in the world on health and survival. It remained the world’s least-improved country on this sub-index over the past decade. In fact, its ranking slipped to 147 on this segment in 2018, from 141 in the previous year. Only two countries were below India on this ranking — Armenia at 148 and China at 149.
- Interestingly, India has the second-largest artificial intelligence (AI) workforce, but one of the largest AI gender gaps, with only 22 per cent of roles filled by women.

**Global Scenario**

- Sri Lanka stood at the top position on the health and survival category. India’s ranking on political empowerment came down to 19 in 2018, from 15 in the previous year. The country has closed nearly 40 per cent of its gender gap on this sub-index.
- On political empowerment, one country — Bangladesh — has reached a level of gender
parity of more than 50 per cent among South Asia. The region’s remaining countries are yet to achieve a gender parity level of at least 20 per cent.

- It is worth noting that, from a low base, South Asia has made the fastest progress on closing its gender gap of any world region over the past decade.
- Meanwhile, the country also recorded improvements in wage equality for similar work, succeeds in fully closing its tertiary education gender gap for the first time, and keeps primary and secondary education gaps closed for the third year running.
- According to the report, the world has closed 68 per cent of its gender gap and at the current rate of change, it will take 108 years to close the overall gender gap and 202 years to bring about parity in the workplace.
- South Asia was the second-lowest ranking region in the index, with only 65 per cent of its gender gap now closed. India is slightly ahead of the regional average, having closed 66 per cent.
- The global list was topped by Iceland, having closed more than 85.8 per cent of its overall gender gap. Iceland holds the top spot in the index for the 10th consecutive year.
- Nordic countries Norway (2nd, 83.5 per cent), Sweden (3rd, 82.2 per cent), and Finland (4th, 82.1 per cent) dominated the top slots.
- Other countries in the top 10 include Nicaragua (5th, 80.9 per cent), Rwanda (6th, 80.4 per cent), New Zealand (7th, 80.1 per cent), the Philippines (8th, 79.9 per cent), Ireland (9th, 79.6 per cent), and Namibia (10th, 78.9 per cent).

Conclusion

- The economies that will succeed in the fourth industrial revolution will be those that are best able to harness all their available talent. Proactive measures that support gender parity and social inclusion and address historical imbalances are therefore essential for the health of the global economy as well as for the good of society as a whole.

MANUAL SCAVENGING LEFT 282 DEAD SINCE 2016

Why in news?

- According to the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, As many as 282 people have died while cleaning sewers and septic tanks in the country between 2016 and November 2019.

Scenario in states

- Tamil Nadu has recorded 40 deaths, the highest in number, in these four years. This is followed by Haryana with 31 deaths, and Gujarat and Delhi with 30 deaths each. Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh have recorded 27 deaths each in the same period. The main reason behind these deaths is due to rapid and unplanned urbanization.
- According to the data, 50 deaths were reported in 2016, 83 in 2017, 66 in 2018 and 83 till November 2019.

About

- Sanitation being a state subject, the people for cleaning for sewers and septic tanks are employed by local bodies.
States and UTs have been requested to ensure prosecution in all cases of employment of persons for hazardous cleaning for sewers as per the provisions of The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, which came in force from 6 December 2013. Reducing human intervention in cleaning septic tanks and sewers is important to bring these numbers down.

The Act, 2019 seeks to make foreign illegal migrants of 6 religious communities like Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, Christian, Sikh coming from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan eligible for Indian citizenship. The Central Government exempted the said migrants from the adverse penal consequences of the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920 and the Foreigners Act, 1946. Subsequently, the Central Government also made them eligible for long-term visa to stay in India. Now, it is proposed to make the said migrants eligible for Indian Citizenship. It’s the exclusionary part of it that creates a problem and the inclusive aspect of the Act is obviously good.

**Procedure of acquiring citizenship in India**

- Citizenship is regulated by the Citizenship Act, 1955. The Act specifies that citizenship may be acquired in India through five methods – by birth in India, by descent, through registration, by naturalisation (extended residence in India), and by incorporation of territory into India.
- An illegal migrant is prohibited from acquiring Indian citizenship. An illegal immigrant is a foreigner who either enters India illegally, i.e., without valid travel documents, like a visa and passport, or enters India legally, but stays beyond the time period permitted in their travel documents. An illegal migrant can be prosecuted in India, and deported or imprisoned.

Under the Act, an illegal migrant is a foreigner who: (i) enters the country without valid travel documents like a passport and visa, or (ii) enters with valid documents, but stays beyond the permitted time period.
Changes by the Act

- It seeks to grant citizenship to illegal migrants from the abovementioned three countries where they have faced religious persecution.
- The Act allows a person to apply for citizenship by naturalisation, if the person meets certain qualifications. One of the qualifications is that the person must have resided in India or been in central government service for the last 12 months and at least 11 years of the preceding 14 years. For the specified class of illegal migrants, the number of years of residency has been relaxed from 11 years to five years.

Exemptions made by the Act

- It clarifies that the proposed amendments on citizenship to the specified class of illegal migrants will not apply to certain areas (i) the tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura, as included in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution, and (ii) the states regulated by the “Inner Line” permit under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulations 1873.
- Manipur and Dimapur district in Nagaland too have been given protection under the Inner Line Permit regime, which means the provisions of the law will not be applicable in four Northeastern states.
- The Act also amends the provisions on registration of Overseas Citizens of India (OCI). OCI cardholders are foreigners who are persons of Indian origin. For example, they may have been former Indian citizens, or children of current Indian citizens. An OCI enjoys benefits such as the right to travel to India without a visa, or to work and study here. At present, the government may cancel a person’s OCI registration on various grounds specified in the previous Act. In case of a cancellation, an OCI residing in India may be required to leave the country. The Act, 2019 adds another ground for cancelling OCI registration — violation of any law notified by the central government. However, the Act does not provide any guidance on the nature of laws which the central government may notify. The Supreme Court has noted that this guidance is necessary to set limits on the authority’s powers and to avoid any arbitrariness in exercise of powers. Therefore, the powers given to the government under the Act may go beyond the permissible limits of valid delegation.

Sixth Schedule tribal areas include Karbi Anglong (in Assam), Garo Hills (in Meghalaya), Chakma District (in Mizoram), and Tripura Tribal Areas District. Further, the Inner Line Permit regulates visit of all persons, including Indian citizens, to Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, and Nagaland.

How far is it reasonable?

- The Act makes only certain illegal migrants eligible for citizenship. These are persons belonging to the six specified religious communities, from the three specified countries, who entered India on or before December 31, 2014, and do not reside in the Sixth Schedule areas or in the states regulated by the Inner Line Permit states. This implies that all other illegal migrants will not be able to claim the benefit of citizenship conferred by the Bill, and may continue to be prosecuted as illegal migrants.
- Any provision which distinguishes between two groups may violate the standard of
equality guaranteed under Article 14 of the Constitution, unless one can show a reasonable rationale for doing so.

- The Act provides differential treatment to illegal migrants on the basis of (a) their country of origin, (b) religion, (c) date of entry into India, and (d) place of residence in India. The question is whether these factors serve a reasonable purpose to justify the differential treatment.

- The Bill classifies migrants based on their country of origin to include only Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh. While the Statement of Objects and Reasons (SoR) in the Act reasons that millions of citizens of undivided India were living in Pakistan and Bangladesh, no reason has been provided to explain the inclusion of Afghanistan.

- The SoR also states that these countries have a state religion, which has resulted in religious persecution of minority groups. However, there are other countries which may fit this qualification. For instance, two of India’s neighboring countries, Sri Lanka (Buddhist state religion) and Myanmar (primacy to Buddhism), have had a history of persecution of Tamil Eelams (a linguistic minority in Sri Lanka), and the Rohingya Muslims, respectively.

- Further, there are other religious minorities from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, such as the Ahmadiyya Muslims in Pakistan (considered non-Muslims in that country), and atheists in Bangladesh who have faced religious persecution and may have illegally migrated to India.

- Given that the objective of the Act is to provide citizenship to migrants escaping from religious persecution, it is not clear why illegal migrants belonging to other neighbouring countries, or belonging to religious minorities from these three specified countries, have been excluded from the Act.

- The Act also creates further differentiation between the specified class of illegal migrants based on when they entered India (before or after December 31, 2014), and where they live in India (provisions not applicable to Sixth Schedule and Inner Line Permit areas). However, the reasons provided to explain the distinction is unclear.

- Once an illegal migrant residing in these areas acquires citizenship, he would be subject to the same restrictions in these areas, as are applicable to other Indian citizens. Therefore, it is unclear why the Bill excludes illegal migrants residing in these areas.

**Way Ahead**

- The government must heed the call for meaningful changes that would dispel fears gripping the country, especially minorities.

- A first step would be to further amend the Act, even by an ordinance, to drop its religious specific wording, and make it explicit that the benefit would be open to all undocumented migrants who can prove persecution in their home countries.

- For allowing a Hindu, Sikh, Christian, Jain, Buddhist or Parsi to apply for citizenship after staying in the country for 6 years, there is no need to bar Muslims from making a similar claim.

- It is only an enabling law and does not oblige the government to grant citizenship to anyone.

- India should enact a refugee law wherein the right to live a life without fear or confinement can be protected. If the fear is that people may seek permanent asylum, the UNHCR can work with them officially for their voluntary repatriation and without rendering long-term refugees ineligible for applying for citizenship.
National Register of Citizens (NRC)

- This process begins with the compilation of the National Population Register (NPR). This is the first stage of the NRC. The notification for preparing and updating the NPR was issued by the Registrar General of Citizen Registration, on July 31, 2019.
- Union Cabinet has approved a proposal of the Home Ministry to spend Rs 8,754 crore for the Census 2021 and Rs 3,941 crore for updating the NPR on 24 December 2019.
- Simultaneously, on 20 December 2019, West Bengal and Kerala suspended work related to the preparation and update of the NPR in their respective States because of the apprehensions among the general public about the conduct of NPR related activities and this would eventually lead to NRC in the wake of Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019.

About

- For this, house to house enumeration will be conducted throughout the country (except in Assam) for collection of information relating to all persons who are usually residing within the jurisdiction of the Local Registrar. This enumeration will be conducted between the first day of April 2020 and 30 September 2020.
- On the basis of the NPR, the local register of Indian citizens will be finalized after due verification. This is the procedure set out under the “Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules 2003”.
- As per the rules, during the verification process, particulars of such individuals whose citizenship is deemed to be doubtful shall be entered by the local Registrar with appropriate remarks in the Population Registrar for further enquiry and in case of doubtful citizenship, the individual or the family shall be informed in a specified proforma immediately after the verification process is over.
- NPR compilation will also have the biometric data of those listed, as it will be eliciting the details of Aadhaar, which will then be cross checked with the UIDAI for verification of biometrics of the individual.
- The NRC is already part of the Citizenship Act of 1955 through an amendment made during the Aal Bihari Vajpayee government in 2003. For the first time, the concept of a NRC was introduced by making it compulsory to register every citizen of India and to issue a national identity card. Based on this, the rules for registration for citizenship were issued subsequently in which provision was made for a NPR.
- It is the Census authorities who undertake both NPR and Census enumeration for 2021, but both are separate. The NPR is directly linked to the NRC.

Superfluous in NRC process

- The NRC process is being undertaken at a time when the Aadhaar identity card has already covered most of the population. There is also the Electors Photo Identity Card issued by the Election Commission of India. The necessity for another citizenship register and identity card is superfluous.
- It will entail a huge amount of expenditure.
- The NRC process is weighted against the
poorest section of the population - migrant labour, Adivasis living in remote areas and other marginalized communities.

- The CAA and NRC must be seen in tandem. While the former would legitimize non-muslim migrants as citizens, the NRC would target the so called Muslim infiltrators.

DISHA BILL, 2019 OR ANDHRA PRADESH CRIMINAL LAW (AMENDMENT) ACT 2019

Why in news?

- The Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly has passed the Andhra Pradesh Disha Bill, 2019 (Andhra Pradesh Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2019). Disha is the name given to a veterinarian who was raped and murdered in Hyderabad on November 27.

Key features of the Bill

- It envisages the completion of investigation in seven days and trial in 14 working days, where there is adequate conclusive evidence, and reducing the total judgment time to 21 days from the existing four months.
- It prescribes life imprisonment for other sexual offences against children and includes Section 354 F and 354 G in IPC.
- In cases of harassment of women through social or digital media, the Act states two years imprisonment for the first conviction and four years for second and subsequent convictions. For this, a new Section 354 E will be added in IPC, 1860.
- As per the Bill, the Andhra Pradesh government will establish, operate and maintain a register in electronic form, to be called the ‘Women & Children Offenders Registry’. This registry will be made public and will be available to law enforcement agencies.
- The government will establish exclusive special courts in each district to ensure speedy trial. These courts will exclusively deal with cases of offences against women and children including rape, acid attacks, stalking, voyeurism, social media harassment of women, sexual harassment and all cases under the POCSO Act.
- The government will constitute special police teams at the district level to be called District Special Police Team to be headed by DSP for investigation of offences related to women and children.
- The government will also appoint a special public prosecutor for each exclusive special court.

Importance of this Act

- This act will help to rectify the delay in judicial process as the real issue appears to be the time taken in the final disposal of rape and murder cases.
- It will help in reducing crime related to women and children.
- The act will encourage union government as well as other states to enact such type of provisions in the existing law.

SWACHH BHARAT MISSION-URBAN

Why in news?

- According to the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry, the Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban had achieved its goal of making urban India free of open defecation, though urban local bodies in West Bengal had not been declared open defecation free (ODF).
About

- Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban (SBM-U) has achieved its target of creating urban India ODF. Urban areas of 35 states and union territories have become ODF.
- Out of a total of 4,372 cities, 4,320 have declared themselves ODF, of which 4,167 cities have been certified through third party verification.
- Under the SBM launched on October 2, 2014, the government had declared rural India open defection-Free (ODF) on October 2, 2019.
- For Swachh Survekshan 2020, which was launched on August 13, 2019, the ministry has introduced the concept of "continuous Survekshan (survey)" to ensure that the mission outcomes are sustained through a system of continuous monitoring and verification.
- Swachh Survekshan 2020 is scheduled to begin from January 4, 2020 and will continue till January 31.

DIVORCE ON “IRRETRIEVABLE BREAKDOWN OF MARRIAGE”

Why in news?

- The Supreme Court used its extraordinary powers under Article 142 of the Constitution to grant divorce in a case of “irretrievable breakdown of marriage”.

Hindu marriage law

- The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 lays down the law for divorce, which applies to Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs.
- Section 27 of The Special Marriage Act, 1954 provides the grounds for grant of divorce in the case of marriages solemnised under that Act.
- Under Section 13 of the Act, the grounds for divorce include: voluntary sexual intercourse with any person other than his or her spouse; cruelty; desertion for a continuous period of not less than 2 years immediately preceding the presentation of the petition; ceasing to be a Hindu by conversion to another religion; being “incurably of unsound mind”.
- In addition to this, Section 13B provides for “divorce by mutual consent”.
- However, neither of the two Acts provides for “irretrievable breakdown of marriage” as a ground for divorce.
- “Irretrievable breakdown of marriage” refers to a marriage that is totally unworkable, emotionally dead, beyond salvage and has broken down irretrievably.

Recent court’s observation

- In a recent case, divorce was granted on this ground, after examining various judicial pronouncements. The court said that it believed that the continuity of the marriage was fruitless. It also observed that continuance of it would cause further emotional trauma and disturbance to both the parties.
- Thus, the sooner this comes to an end, the better it would be, for both the parties.
- Such powers are exercised in rare cases, in view of the absence of legislation in this behalf.

Article 142:

- Article 142 empowers the Supreme Court to make such order as is necessary for
doing "complete justice" in any matter before it.

- Article 142 is conceived to give the apex court the powers to meet the situation(s) which cannot be effectively tackled by existing provisions of law.
- Over the years, the apex court has often used this provision to ensure justice to ordinary people who, on account of poverty, illiteracy, and ignorance, were unable to seek remedies from the courts.
- Example: Relief for undertrials in jails for long periods.

Concerns with the use of Article 142

- No limitations on its use: Article 142 does not lay down any limitations regarding causes or the circumstances in which the power is to be exercised, and it gives the Court complete discretion
- Doesn't consider impact of judgement: The court has also, in some cases, failed to account for the far-reaching effects of its judgments.

EXPANSION OF SEATS IN LS

Why in news?

- At the Second Atal Bihari Vajpayee Memorial Lecture in New Delhi on 16 December 2019, former President Pranab Mukherjee advocated the number of seats in Lok Sabha should be increased to 1,000 from the present 543, and a corresponding increase in the number of MPs in Rajya Sabha and state legislatures.
- He also cautioned parties in power against "majoritarianism" and stressed on the need for carrying everyone along.

About

- India has a "disproportionately large size" of electorate for elected representatives. Every MP currently represents an average 16-18 lakh Indians, which is too large.
- On the other hand, people have given some party a numerical majority, but a majority of voters has never supported one party in India's electoral history.
- There is a need of an hour that the number of Lok Sabha seats should be rationalised on the basis of population. In fact, the composition of the Lower House has remained more or less the same for four decades.

Composition of Lok Sabha

- Article 81 states that the Lok Sabha shall not consist of more than 550 elected members of whom not more than 20 will represent Union Territories. At present, the strength of the Lok Sabha is 543, of which 530 have been allocated to the states, and 23 to the Union Territories.
  - Article 81 also mandates that the number of Lok Sabha seats allotted to a state would be such that the ratio between that number and the population of the state is same for all states to ensure that every state is equally represented. However, this logic does not apply to small states whose population is not more than 60 lakh. So, at least one seat is allocated to every state even if it means that its population-to-seat-ratio is not enough to qualify it for that seat.
  - As per Clause 3 of Article 81, population, for the purpose of allocation of seats, means population as ascertained in the last published Census.
  - However, as a result of an amendment to this Clause in 2003, the “population” now
means population as per the 1971 Census — and will be so until the first Census that is taken after 2026.

- Under Article 331, the President could nominate up to two Anglo-Indians; however, The Constitution (126th Amendment) Bill passed by Parliament on 12 December 2019, while extending the reservation for SC/STs, did away with the provision for nomination of Anglo Indians to Lok Sabha and state Assemblies. This has brought the strength of Lok Sabha down to 543 now.

GENERAL STUDIES III
(TECHNOLOGY, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, BIO-DIVERSITY, ENVIRONMENT, SECURITY AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT)

NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE PIPELINE FOR 2019-2025

Why in news?

- Finance Minister has released Report of the Task Force on National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) for 2019-2025. She has unveiled a Rs. 102 lakh crore project which is in accordance with the government’s vision to make India a $5 trillion economy by 2024-25.

About

- It is estimated that India would need to spend $4.5 trillion on infrastructure by 2030 to sustain its growth rate.
- The emphasis would be on ease of living: safe drinking water, access to clean and affordable energy, healthcare for all, modern railway stations, airports, bus terminals and world-class educational institutes.
- The endeavour of the NIP is to make this happen in an efficient manner.
- These projects are on top of Rs 51 lakh crore spent by the Centre and the states during the last six years and the new pipeline consists of 39 per cent projects each by the Centre and states and the balance by 22 per cent by private sector.
- Well-developed infrastructure enhances level of economic activity, creates additional fiscal space by improving revenue base of the government and ensures quality of expenditure focused in productive areas.
- During the fiscals 2020 to 2025, sectors such as Energy (24%), Roads (19%), Urban (16%), and Railways (13%) amount to around 70% of the projected capital expenditure in infrastructure in India.
- Irrigation and rural infrastructure projects would account for ₹7.7 lakh crore each. ₹3.07 lakh crore would be spent on industrial infrastructure. Agriculture and social infrastructure would account for the rest.
- Road projects will account for ₹19.63 lakh crore while another ₹13.68 lakh crore would be for railway projects.
- It has outlined plans to invest more than ₹102 lakh crore on infrastructure projects by 2024-25, with the Centre, States and the private sector to share the capital expenditure in a 39:39:22 formulas.
- Port projects would see spending of ₹1 lakh crore and airports another ₹1.43 lakh crore. ₹16.29 lakh crore would be spent on urban infrastructure and ₹3.2 lakh crore in telecom projects.
- ₹42 lakh crore NIP projects which are in the implementation stage now include expressways, national gas grid and PMAY-G.
PERSONAL DATA PROTECTION BILL, 2019

Why in news?

- The Union Cabinet has given its nod to table the Personal Data Protection Bill 2019 in the Parliament. The Bill seeks to lay down laws on processing of personal data by public and private entities.

Highlights of the Bill

- The Bill regulates the processing of personal data of individuals (data principals) by government and private entities (data fiduciaries) incorporated in India and abroad. Processing is allowed if the individual gives consent, or in a medical emergency, or by the State for providing benefits.

- The data principal has several rights with respect to their data, such as seeking correction or seeking access to their data which is stored with the fiduciary.

- The fiduciary has certain obligations towards the individual while processing their data, such as notifying them of the nature and purposes of data processing.

- The Bill allows exemptions for certain kinds of data processing, such as processing in the interest of national security, for legal proceedings, or for journalistic purposes.

- The Bill requires that a serving copy of personal data be stored within the territory of India. Certain critical personal data must be stored solely within the country.

- A national-level Data Protection Authority (DPA) is set up under the Bill to supervise and regulate data fiduciaries.

NEW CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF

Why in news?

- Gen. Bipin Rawat, has been appointed as the country’s first Chief of Defence Staff (CDS).

- As per the notification by the government, the upper age limit for the CDS has been fixed at 65 years. However, the tenure of CDS has not been fixed.

About

- Chief of Defence Staff will be a four-star General, the principal military advisor to the defence minister (as suggested by the Kargil Review Committee in 1999) and head the new Department of Military Affairs to ensure jointness in training, logistics and procurement of the three services.

Background

- The proposal for a CDS has been there for two decades. It was first made by the K. Subrahmanyam or Kargil Review Committee appointed after the Kargil conflict of 1999 to recommend higher military reforms.

- However, lack of consensus and apprehensions among services meant it never moved forward.

- In 2012, the Naresh Chandra committee recommended the appointment of a Permanent Chairman of Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) as a midway to allay apprehensions over the CDS.

- The CDS is also one of the 99 recommendations made by the Lt General D.B. Shekatkar (retd) Committee, which submitted its report.

Role and Responsibilities of the Chief of Defence Staff

- Post of Chief of Defence Staff would come under the ambit of the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

- The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) will administer all tri-services organisations, comprising personnel from the army, air force and navy, but their command will be with the Chief of the service which has a predominant role in their functioning. However, he will head the newly created agencies for cyber and space.

- The tri-service agency of Special Forces could also come under him, but their deployment will
be dependent on ground commanders. The headquarters of the Integrated Defence Staff, comprising representatives from the three services, will come under him.

- The Chief of the Integrated Defence Staff, also known as the CISC, who heads this tri-services organisation will also come under the CDS and be renamed as the Deputy CDS.
- The CDS will also head all tri-services institutions such as the National Defence Academy in Pune, College of Defence Management in Secunderabad and the National Defence College in Delhi. He will also be the Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) and will be supported by the IDS staff in this second role as well.
- The CDS, however, will not have any operational role and military command. But, will ensure coordination in joint operations. He will also not be eligible to hold any government office after demitting as the CDS.

GLOBAL CLIMATE RISK INDEX 2020

Why in news?

- The Global Climate Risk Index 2020 has been released on December 4, 2019 by International Environmental think tank Germanwatch.

Highlights of the Index

- Japan topped the list of the most affected countries in 2018. The country was hit by three exceptionally strong extreme weather events during the year.
- Sri Lanka was also affected by severe monsoon rains in May 2018, which affected almost 20 districts, especially in the south and west coast.
- Among the top ten most affected countries, India, Germany and Japan suffered from extended periods of a heatwave during 2018.
- India was severely affected by the yearly monsoon season between June-September 2018, especially its southern state of Kerala where over 324 people died of drowning or got buried under landslides after one of the country’s worst floods flooded almost the entire state, leaving over 220000 people displaced with 20000 houses and 80 dams destroyed.
- Germany experienced the second hottest year due to a severe heatwave. The period between April and July 2018 was the hottest-ever recorded in the nation with temperatures 2.9°C above average. It resulted in the death of 1234 people. The nation also witnessed severe drought in October 2018 due to less rainfall, which resulted in a massive decline in harvest.
- The Philippines was hit by Typhoon Mangkhut in September 2018, which was categorized as a category 5 typhoon, the most powerful typhoon recorded worldwide in 2018. The typhoon affected more than 250 000 people across the country.
- Kenya and Rwanda ranked 7 and 8 were also affected by severe monsoon rains, resulting in flooding in several areas and displacement of a large number of people.
- Canada saw its lowest temperature in 100 years in the beginning of 2018 and then record high
temperatures in April 2018, which melted heavy snowpacks, causing the rivers to overflow. The nation also saw its worst wildfire season.

- Fiji was affected by three cyclones between February and April 2018- Cyclone Gita, Cyclone Josie and Cyclone Keni. The cyclones caused major flooding, leaving many displaced.

**Scenario in India**

- Besides seeing one of the worst floods in Kerala, India’s east coast was hit by two cyclones - Titli and Gaja in October and November 2018. The cyclones left around 450000 without electricity.

**CLIMATE CHANGE PERFORMANCE INDEX**

**Why in News?**

- The 2019 edition of the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) has been released which illustrates regional differences in climate protection and performance within the 56 evaluated countries and the EU.

**About**

- The 2020 Climate Change Performance Index, prepared by a group of think tanks comprising the New Climate Institute, the Climate Action Network and Germanwatch, looks at national climate action across the categories of emissions, renewable energy, energy use and policy.
- No country performed well enough to reach the ranking ‘very good’ in this year’s index.

**Highlights**

- India has added another feather to its cap by joining the top 10 countries in this year’s Climate Change Performance Index or CCPI for the first time.
- India cut down emission intensity by 21 percent of its GDP. Moreover, it is on track to achieve the goal of 35 per cent emission reduction as promised in the Paris summit in 2015
- More commendable is the fact that while India has stayed true to its commitments on reducing its carbon footprint, advanced nations like the United States have been included in the worst-performing countries for the first time.
- Even rich nations like Australia and Saudi Arabia which are running their economies on the basis of coal industries are also among the countries with high carbon emissions.
- Australia scored the lowest possible rating of 0.0, compared with the highest-scoring country, Portugal, which was ranked best for its climate policy at 97.8%. The report praised Portugal for its ambitious target of net-zero emissions by 2050 and a 55% emissions reduction by 2030.
- The CCPI report was released at the 'COP 25' climate change conference in the Spanish capital Madrid.

**What is CCPI?**

- It is an international observation instrument of climate protection performance by countries.
- It aims to increase transparency in global climate politics and enables the comparability of climate protection efforts.

**HEAVY METAL CONTAMINATION IN INDIAN RIVERS**

**Why in news?**

- According to the reports of Central Water Commission (CWC), samples from two-thirds of the water quality stations spanning India’s major rivers showed contamination
by one or more heavy metals, which have exceeded safe limits set by the Bureau of Indian Standards.

About

- The findings are part of a report, which is the third edition of an exercise conducted by the CWC from May 2014 to April 2018.
- Not all the rivers are equally sampled. Several rivers have only been sampled at a single site, whereas others such as the Ganga, the Yamuna and the Godavari are sampled at multiple sites.
- CWC exercise was restricted to surface water.
- Marked variation was found in contamination levels depending on the season. For instance, iron contamination was persistent through most of the Ganga during monsoon but dipped significantly during the non-monsoon periods.
- Samples were collected in three different seasons: pre-monsoon (June 2012), monsoon (September 2011, October 2012 and August 2013) and post-monsoon (February 2012 and March 2013).

Highlights of the report

- Samples from only one-third of water quality stations were safe. The rest, or 287 (65%) of the 442 sampled, were polluted by heavy metals.
- Samples from 101 stations had contamination by two metals, six stations saw contamination by three metals.
- Iron emerged as the most common contaminant with 156 of the sampled sites registering levels of the metal above safe limits. None of the sites registered arsenic levels above the safe limit.
- Arsenic and zinc are the two toxic metals whose concentration was always obtained within the limits throughout the study period. Arsenic contamination is a major environmental issue that affects groundwater.
- The other major contaminants found in the samples were lead, nickel, chromium, cadmium and copper. The study spanned 67 rivers in 20 river basins.
- Lead, cadmium, nickel, chromium and copper contamination were more common in non-monsoon periods while iron, lead, chromium and copper exceeded ‘tolerance limits’ in monsoon periods most of the time.

Impact of this contamination

- Long-term exposure to the above-mentioned heavy metals may result in slowly progressing physical, muscular, and neurological degenerative processes that mimic Alzheimer’s disease, Parkinson’s disease, muscular dystrophy and multiple sclerosis.
- This is worrying because a majority of Indians still use water directly from rivers for their domestic use. With an increase in population, the pressure on these rivers will only increase.
- Consequently, concentrations of toxic metals in grains and vegetables grown in contaminated soils have increased at alarming rates. This poses a serious threat to humans and the environment because of its toxicity, non-biodegradability and bioaccumulation

Causes of contamination

- population growth and rise in agricultural and industrial activities
The main sources of heavy metal pollution are mining, milling, plating and surface finishing industries that discharge a variety of toxic metals into the environment.

**Heavy Metal**
- Heavy metals are naturally occurring elements that have a high atomic weight and a density of at least 5 times greater than that of water.

**ATAL BHUJAL YOJANA**

**Why in News?**
- The World Bank has approved Rs. 6,000 for AtalBhujalYojana (ABHY) for sustainable management of groundwater resources with community participation on 12 December.
- The funding pattern is 50:50 between Government of India and World Bank.

**About ABHY**
- It is a central sector scheme, announced in the 2016-17 Union Budget.
- The scheme envisages active participation of the communities in various activities such as formation of Water User Associations, monitoring and disseminating ground water data, water budgeting, preparation and implementation of Gram-Panchayat wise water security plans and Information, Education & Communication (IEC) activities related to sustainable groundwater management.
- The identified over-exploited and water stressed areas for the implementation of the scheme fall in the States of Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

**SATAT INITIATIVE FOR STUBBLE BURNING**

**Why in News?**
- Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (STAT) initiative has the potential of addressing environmental problems arising from stubble burning based on techno commercial factors.
- It aims to provide a developmental effort that would benefit vehicle-users as well as farmers and entrepreneurs. Compressed Bio-Gas (CBG) plants are proposed to be set up mainly through independent entrepreneurs.
- CBG produced at these plants will be transported through cascades of cylinders to the fuel station networks of OMCs for marketing as a green transport fuel alternative.
- The entrepreneurs would be able to separately market the other by-products from these plants, including bio-manure, carbon-dioxide, etc., to enhance returns on investment.
- This initiative is expected to generate direct employment for 75,000 people and produce 50 million tonnes of bio-manure for crops.
- CBG networks can be integrated with city gas distribution (CGD) networks to boost supplies to domestic and retail users in existing and upcoming markets. Besides retailing from OMC fuel stations, CBG can at a later date be injected into CGD pipelines too for efficient distribution and optimised access of a cleaner and more affordable fuel.
Benefits from converting agricultural residue, cattle dung and municipal solid waste into CBG on a commercial scale

1. Responsible waste management, reduction in carbon emissions and pollution.
2. Additional revenue source for farmers.
3. Boost to entrepreneurship, rural economy and employment.
4. Support to national commitments in achieving climate change goals.
5. Reduction in imports of natural gas and crude oil.

Stubble burning

- It is a common practice followed by farmers to prepare fields for sowing of wheat in November as there is little time left between the harvesting of paddy and sowing of wheat.
- Stubble burning results in emission of harmful gases such as carbon dioxide, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide along with particulate matter.

Advantages of stubble burning

1. It quickly clears the field and is the cheapest alternative.
2. Kills weeds, including those resistant to herbicide.
3. Kills slugs and other pests.
4. Can reduce nitrogen tie-up.

EMISSION GAP REPORT BY UNEP

Why in news?

- Annual flagship Emissions Gap Report (10th edition) has been released by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).
- The top four emitters (China, USA, EU and India) contributed to over 55% of the total emissions over the last decade, excluding emissions from land-use changes such as deforestation.
- India is the fourth-largest emitter of Green House Gases (GHGs).

About Report

- It assesses the gap between anticipated emissions in 2030 and levels consistent with the 1.5°C and 2°C targets of the Paris Agreement.
- This year, the report looked at the potential of the energy transition such as power, transport and buildings sectors and efficiency in the use of materials such as iron and steel and cement.
- It considers different scenarios, from no new climate policies since 2005 to full implementation of all national commitments under the Paris Agreement.
- It provides the latest assessment of scientific studies on current and estimated future GreenHouse Gases (GHGs) emissions and compares these with the emission levels permissible for the world to progress on a least-cost pathway to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement.

“Emissions Gap”

- The Emissions Gap could also be called the “Commitment Gap”.

"Emissions Gap"

- The Emissions Gap could also be called the “Commitment Gap”.
It measures the gap between what we need to do and what we are actually doing to tackle climate change.

The gap is the difference between the low levels of emissions that the world needs to drop to, compared with the projected level of emissions based on countries’ current commitments to decarbonisation.

Countdown on Health and Climate Change

Why in news?
- The Lancet has published a report titled ‘Countdown on Health and Climate Change’.
- The project is a collaboration between 120 experts from 35 institutions, including the World Health Organisation, the World Bank, University College London, and the Tsinghua University in Beijing.
- The report is a comprehensive yearly analysis tracking progress across 41 key indicators, demonstrating what action to meet Paris Agreement targets — or business as usual — means for human health.

Highlights of the report

- The report notes that as temperatures rise, infants will bear the greatest burden of malnutrition and rising food prices — average yield potential of maize and rice has declined almost 2% in India since the 1960s, with malnutrition already responsible for two-thirds of under-5 deaths.
- Also, children will suffer most from the rise in infectious diseases — with climatic suitability for the Vibrio bacteria that cause cholera rising 3% a year in India since the early 1980s, the study warns.
- Diarrhoeal infections, a major cause of child mortality, will spread into new areas, whilst deadly heat waves, similar to the one in 2015 that killed thousands of people in India, could soon become the norm.
- As temperatures rise, harvests will shrink — threatening food security and driving up food prices. This will hit infants hardest.
- If the world follows a business-as-usual pathway, with high carbon emissions and climate change continues at the current rate, a child born today will face a world on average over 4°C warmer by their 71st birthday, threatening their health at every stage of their lives.

What is a Heat Wave?
- A Heat Wave is a period of abnormally high temperatures, more than the normal maximum temperature that occurs during the summer season in the North Western parts of India between March and June, and in some rare cases even extend till July.

Way Ahead

- India must transition away from coal and towards renewable energy to dramatically reduce emissions by 2050, and to meet multiple Sustainable Development Goals.
- It will also need to enhance public transport, increase the use of cleaner fuels, and improve waste management and agricultural production practices.

FOREST DIEBACK

Why in news?
- In an editorial published in the journal Science Advances on 20 December, researchers have said the Amazon — the world’s largest tropical rainforest — is teetering on the edge of functional destruction.
**Why is the Amazon rainforest in danger?**

- The Amazon basin is the world’s largest repository of biodiversity and produces about 20 percent of the world’s flow of freshwater into the oceans.
- In the recent few years, the rainforest has been under threat from deforestation and burning. Earlier this year, fires in the Amazon that were visible from space made headlines.
- According to Brazil’s National Institute for Space Research (INPE), forest fires in the Brazilian part of the rainforests have doubled since 2013. It estimates an increase of over 84 per cent since last year. Until August this year, over 72,000 fires were recorded. June to December is considered to be burning season when farmers want to clear land for farming.
- Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon, which comprises about two-thirds of the area of the rainforest, started in the 1970s and 1980s when large-scale forest conversion for cattle ranching and soy cultivation began. NASA’s Earth Observatory notes that state policies that encourage economic development, such as railway and road expansion projects have led to “unintentional deforestation” in the Amazon and Central America.
- Furthermore, forest clearing has been encouraged by agricultural subsidies, timber concessions and tax breaks have encouraged forest clearing in the Amazon.

**What is dieback?**

- When the Amazon rainforest reaches its tipping point, which is to say when the level of deforestation has led to there not being enough water for recycling and as a result, moisture to induce rainfall, the rainforests will be unable to sustain themselves. This will lead to a situation when the trees, and in turn, the forest will start to “dieback”.
- In other words, some trees and eventually the forests will reach the physiological limits of dryness probably induced by droughts and heat stress. Because of this dehydration, the affected trees will begin to die from the tip of their leaves or roots backwards.

**MEASLES OUTBREAKS**

**Why in News?**

- According to new estimates by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Center for Diseases Control and Prevention (CDC) on behalf of the Measles and Rubella Initiative, Children under the age of 5 accounted for most of the 1,40,000 people who died from measles in 2018.

**About**

- Reported measles cases continue to rise for the third straight year globally. Five countries — Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Madagascar, Somalia and Ukraine — accounted for nearly half of all measles cases in 2018.
- Children continue to be the worst affected. WHO reports that the Samoa children are the latest victims of 2019 outbreaks.
• By November 2019 in India, more than 324 million children and adolescent between 9 months to 15 years of age have been vaccinated with one dose of MR vaccine.
• India initiated one of the world’s largest measles rubella campaign to eliminate measles and control rubella in the country.
• Even as India successfully carried out the vaccination of over 324 million children between 9 months and 15 years the unprecedented global measles crisis set to enter third year.

GOVERNMENT INSTANT MESSAGING SYSTEM (GIMS)

Why in news?
• The government is testing a prototype of an Indian equivalent of popular messaging platforms, such as WhatsApp and Telegram, for secure internal use.

About
• Codenamed GIMS or Government Instant Messaging System, the platform is in the pilot testing stage across some states, including Odisha — and is learnt to have been released to the Indian Navy to be tried out on a trial basis.
• Designed and developed by the Kerala unit of National Informatics Centre (NIC), GIMS is being packaged for employees of Central and state government departments and organisations for intra and inter organisation communications.
• It is being developed as a secure Indian alternative without the security concerns attached with apps hosted abroad or those owned by foreign entities. Like WhatsApp, GIMS employs end-to-end encryption for one-to-one messaging.
• The launch of the new app comes amid the recent controversy over the WhatsApp breach after some Indian users’ mobile devices were targeted through a spyware called Pegasus.
• According to WhatsApp, the Pegasus spyware was developed by Israel-based NSO Group and it attempted to breach mobile phones of a possible 1,400 users globally, including 121 from India.
• GIMS is being touted as a safer bet as the platform has been developed in India, the server hosting it is installed within the country and the information stored would be in government-based cloud — NIC-operated data centres that are only meant for captive use by the government and its departments.
• The trial started with NIC employees using it internally, before expanding it to some central government agencies, including the finance department of Odisha and the Navy.
• A GIMS Portal is also being simultaneously developed for administration and monitoring of the platform.
• The platform is adaptable to both central and state government organisations, with an iOS version of GIMS released for trial in the first week of September 2019, compatible with iOS Version 11 and above, and an Android version that works with Kitkat (Android 4.4.4) and above.
• Odisha Finance Department had cleared plans to use GIMS in the department on a pilot basis. State officials are learnt to have been asked to install GIMS and start using it since end-September, and NIC is learnt to have formed a group of all Finance department officials of the state so that group interactions can be tested.
• Facebook-owned WhatsApp has been the default instant messaging platform among a majority of government departments and organisations. But tax department officers and those with enforcement agencies are
reported to be more inclined to use Telegram (London-headquartered cloud-based instant messaging and voice over IP service), and now increasingly Signal (Mountain View, California-headquartered cross-platform encrypted messaging service).

- Besides one-to-one messaging and group messaging, there are specific provisions in GIMS for documents and media sharing in keeping with the hierarchies in the government system.

**DRUG PRICES CONTROL ORDER**

**Why in news?**

- National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) has allowed an increase in the maximum retail prices of 21 drugs currently under price control by as much as 50%.
- These formulations include common medicines like BCG vaccines, penicillin, malaria and leprosy medicines (Dapsone), life-saving drugs like Furosemide (used to treat fluid build-up due to heart failure, liver scarring, or kidney disease), vitamin C, some common antibiotics, and anti-allergy medicines.

**Significance of this step**

- The decision has been taken to ensure that the life saving essential drugs must remain available to the general public at all times. This is to avoid a situation where these drugs become unavailable in the market and the public is forced to switch to costly alternatives. This is the first time the NPPA — which is known to slash prices of essential and life-saving medicines — is increasing prices in public interest.

**About**

- In the past two years, pharma industry was complaining over the price rise of Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (API). The prices have gone up by 5% to 88%. These ingredients constitute 40% to 80% of formulation cost.
- However, due to price ceiling of GoI, the sales of these products in the country got affected greatly as the pharmaceuticals hesitated to sell or manufacture these products.

**NPPA**

- NPPA was established on 29th August 1997 as an independent body of experts as per the decision taken by the Cabinet committee in September 1994 while reviewing Drug Policy.
- The Authority, interalia, has been entrusted with the task of fixation/revision of prices of pharmaceutical products (bulk drugs and formulations), enforcement of provisions of the Drugs (Prices Control) Order and monitoring of the prices of controlled and decontrolled drugs in the country.

**WORLD MALARIA REPORT 2019**

**Why in news?**

- According to the World Malaria Report 2019, released by the World Health Organization (WHO), 19 countries in sub-Saharan Africa and India accounted for 85 per cent of the global malaria burden in 2018.

**About**

- Globally, 228 million malaria cases were reported in 2018, which is marginally lower than the number of cases in 2017 (231 million).
While Africa and India saw the maximum dip in malaria cases between 2017 and 2018, they still accounted for 85 per cent deaths. Nigeria accounted for almost 24 per cent of all malaria deaths, followed by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (11 per cent), the United Republic of Tanzania (5 per cent), and Angola, Mozambique and Niger (4 per cent each).

India registered a fall of 2.6 million malarial cases in 2018 as compared to previous year. The country also has one of the lowest funding per person at risk of being inflicted with malaria at just US$0.2.

**Steps taken**

- The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has put together a programme to bring the various stakeholders on a single platform to identify and prioritise research work needed to meet the target to eliminate the disease by 2030. Called Malaria Elimination Research Alliance India (MERA India), the programme took off on April 24.

**Challenges**

- There are critical operational gaps in service access, particularly for vulnerable populations in high transmission areas as well as in the services provided by the private sector.
- There are several research organisations and groups in the country that focus on malaria research but there is little communication and harmonisation in the scientific community, resulting in duplication of efforts.

**World AIDS Day, 2019**

**Why in news?**

- December 1 is celebrated as World AIDS Day every year all over the world.
- This year the theme for the World Aids Day 2019 is "Ending the HIV/AIDS Epidemic: Community by Community".
- The main objective behind celebrating the day is to raise public awareness about AIDS.

**AIDS and related challenges**

- Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), is a pandemic disease caused due to the infection of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), which causes damage to the immune system.
- According to World Health Organisation (WHO), "37.9 million people were living with HIV at the end of 2018, 79 percent received testing, 62 percent received treatment, and 53 percent had achieved suppression of the HIV virus with reduced risk of infecting others."
- World AIDS Day was first observed in 1988. And each year, different organisations across the world bring attention to the HIV epidemic; endeavour to increase HIV awareness and knowledge.
- It gives the opportunity to fight against HIV. People who have been affected by HIV feel motivated and dare to fight against the fatal disease.
- The medical sciences found treatments for HIV, and various formulas have been also taken to fight against discrimination and to safeguard HIV patients with proper treatments.
- Still, there are millions of HIV patients, who still do not have access to tests, treatments and medications for HIV.
- So, it is important to observe the day. It will act as a reminder for all that HIV still exists and we need to fight together to end this the disease.
BILL BANNING E-CIGARETTES PASSED

Why in news?

- The Rajya Sabha passed the Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes (Production, Manufacture, Import, Export, Transport, Sale, Distribution, Storage and Advertisement) Bill, 2019, by voice vote.
- The Bill has already been passed by the Lok Sabha for replacing the ordinance promulgated last September.

E-Cigarette

- An electronic cigarette or e-cigarette is a handheld battery-powered vaporizer that simulates smoking by providing some of the behavioural aspects of smoking, but without burning tobacco.
- It contains potentially harmful substances – such as heavy metals like lead, volatile organic compounds and cancer-causing agents.
- E-cigarettes contain nicotine and not tobacco, they do not fall within the ambit of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 2003 (COTPA), which mandates stringent health warnings on the packaging and advertisements of tobacco products.

Risks involved

- Nicotine (present in E-cigarettes) is addictive and triggers changes in the adolescent brain. It is hazardous during pregnancy as it can affect fetal development.
- The aerosol contains solvents, flavourings, and toxicants, which the Surgeon General describes as either "harmful" or "potentially harmful."
- E-cigarettes expose the lungs to different substances such as dicetyl, which can cause "popcorn lung," a severe and irreversible lung disease.
- Nicotine also activates the brain’s reward circuits and also increases levels of a chemical messenger in the brain called dopamine, which reinforces rewarding behaviours.
- Pleasure caused by nicotine’s interaction with the reward circuit motivates some people to use nicotine again and again, despite risks to their health and well-being.

Way Ahead

- The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has recommended complete prohibition on ENDS or e-cigarettes in India in the greater interest of protecting public health. As there are more than 460 different e-cigarette brands with varying configurations of nicotine delivery available in the market.
- Governments should also mandate plain packaging for vaping devices, ban their use wherever tobacco use is banned and strictly limit the accessibility of sales to youth – placing e-cigarettes behind the pharmacy counter.

INEFFICIENT ANTI-VENOM THERAPY

Why in news?

- A new study conducted by scientists at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) in collaboration with Gerry Martin Project and the Madras Crocodile Bank Trust and Centre for Herpetology shows that commercially available antivenoms in India can be ineffective in treating bites from certain medically important neglected snakes including the Sochurek’s viper, the Sind krait, the banded krait and two populations of monocle cobras, as well as that of big four.
About

- India is the snakebite capital of the world. Annually, about 46,000 people die and 1,40,000 others are disabled in the country because of snakebites.

Problem

- The only scientifically validated treatment for snakebites is the use of anti-venom, for which manufacturing protocols have remained unchanged for over a century.

- In India, a polyvalent antivenom is produced against the so-called ‘big-four’ snakes: the spectacled cobra, the common krait, Russell’s viper, and the saw-scaled viper.

- Moreover, India is home to many other species of venomous snakes that have the potential to inflict deadly, even fatal bites, about 60 of the 270 species are considered ‘medically important’.

- But specific antivenom is not produced to combat the poison of other snakes, and the ‘big four’ antivenom is routinely used to treat bites from all snakes.

Differences in venom

- The results revealed dramatic differences in venom compositions of these snakes, and that venom composition differed between geographically separated populations of the same species.

- Secondly, the team evaluated how effective commercially marketed Indian antivenoms were in treating snakebites from the neglected species, and found that the antivenoms were “highly inefficient” in overcoming the effects of the toxins.

EXTRA NEUTRAL ALCOHOL (ENA)

Why in news?

- Anticipating a shortage of domestic supplies, Alcohol manufacturers have written to NITI Aayog asking for reduction in import duty to make it cost-effective for them to import Extra Neutral Alcohol (ENA) from global markets.

- The alcohol manufacturers have pleaded that there is a massive shortage in domestic supplies of ENA following diversion of ethyl alcohol for bio-fuel blending by oil marketing companies (OMCs) in the country.

About

- ENA is a colourless food-grade alcohol that does not have any impurities. It has a neutral smell and taste, and typically contains over 95 percent alcohol by volume.

- It is derived from different sources like sugarcane molasses and grains.

- It is the primary raw material for making alcoholic beverages such as whisky, vodka, gin, cane, liqueurs, and alcoholic fruit beverages.

- It also serves as an essential ingredient in the manufacture of cosmetics and personal care products such as perfumes, toiletries, hair spray, etc.

- Given its properties as a good solvent, ENA also finds industrial use and is utilised in the production of some lacquers, paints and ink for the printing industry, as well as in pharmaceutical products such as antiseptics, drugs, syrups, medicated sprays.
FUGITIVE ECONOMIC OFFENDER

Why in news?

- Nirav Modi is the second person to be declared a fugitive by a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court under the fugitive economic offender (FEO) act to confiscate his properties in India, the UK and UAE after Vijay Mallya.

Analysis of Fugitive Economic Offenders Act (FEOA)

- FEOA became a law on July 31, 2018, which is aimed at deterring economic offenders from evading the law by remaining outside the jurisdiction of Indian courts.

  - Under the Bill, any court or tribunal may bar an FEO or an associated company from filing or defending civil claims before it. Barring these persons from filing or defending civil claims may violate Article 21 of the Constitution i.e. the right to life. Article 21 has been interpreted to include the right to access justice.

  - Under the Bill, an FEO’s property may be confiscated and vested in the central government. This differs from other laws, such as CrPC, 1973, where confiscation is final two years after proclamation as absconder.

  - The Bill allows the Special Court to exempt properties where certain persons may have an interest in such property (e.g., secured creditors). However, it does not specify whether the central government will share sale proceeds with any other claimants who do not have such an interest (e.g., unsecured creditors).

  - The Bill does not require the authorities to obtain a search warrant or ensure the presence of witnesses before a search. This differs from other laws, such as the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973, which contain such safeguards. These safeguards protect against harassment and planting of evidence.

Why such law is required?


  - Sections of The Indian Penal Code, 1860 and The Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, also cover offences such as forgery and cheating.

  - In 2017, Finance Ministry released a draft Bill to address cases of high-value economic offenders fleeing the country to avoid prosecution. It observed that existing civil and criminal laws did not contain specific provisions to deal with such offenders, and that a new legal framework was needed to prosecute them.

    - In March 2018, the Ministry of External Affairs stated that over 30 businessmen, under investigation by the CBI and the ED, had absconded to avoid facing prosecution before Indian courts.

    - The ministry also argued that procedures under these laws were time-consuming, led to roadblocks in investigation and impacted the financial health of banks.
NATIONAL PENSION SCHEME FOR TRADERS AND SELF EMPLOYED PERSONS

Why in news?

Recently, Minister of Labour and Employment reviewed the progress of the National Pension Scheme for Traders and Self Employed Persons.

About

· The scheme is meant for old age protection and social security of retail traders/shopkeepers and self-employed persons whose annual turnover is not exceeding Rs. 1.5 crore.

· These retail traders/shopkeepers and self-employed persons are mostly working as shop owners, retail traders, rice mill owners, oil mill owners, workshop owners, commission agents, brokers of real estate, owners of small hotels, restaurants and other LaghuVyaparis.

Eligibility Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A retail trader/shopkeeper or self-employed persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entry age between 18 and 40 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual turnover is Rs. 1.5 crore or below</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Provisions

· It is a voluntary and contributory pension scheme, under which the subscriber would receive a minimum assured pension of Rs 3000/- per month after attaining the age of 60 years and if the subscriber dies, the spouse of the beneficiary shall be entitled to receive 50% of the pension as family pension. Family pension is applicable only to spouse.

· Enrolment to the Scheme is done through the Common Service Centre.

· In addition, eligible persons can also self-enrol through visiting the portal www.maandhan.in.

· Under the scheme, 50% monthly contribution is payable by the beneficiary and equal matching contribution is paid by the Central Government.

· As the Scheme has been launched on 12th September, 2019. It envisages coverage of about 50 lakh enrolments under the Scheme for 2019-20.

· In order to achieve this, various measures including celebration of Pension Week/Pension Saptah have been taken. All State/UT Governments were requested for popularizing and bringing more awareness about the Scheme.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT

Why in news?

· United Nations Development Programme released the Human Development Report (HDR) on 9 December 2019 in which India ranks 129 out of 189 countries.

Highlights of the report

· Norway, Switzerland and Ireland occupied the top three positions in that order.

· Germany is placed fourth along with Hong Kong and Australia secured the fifth rank on the global ranking.

· Sri Lanka (71) and China (85) are higher up the rank scale while Bhutan (134), Bangladesh (135), Myanmar (145), Nepal (147), Pakistan (152) and Afghanistan (170) were ranked lower on the list.
South Asia was the fastest growing region in human and development progress witnessing a 46% growth over 1990-2018, followed by East Asia and the Pacific at 43%.

India at HDI

- India’s HDI value increased by 50% (from 0.431 to 0.647), which places it above the average for other South Asian countries.
- The report has also given the Gender Development Index (GDI). With a score of 0.829, India is at the 122nd place out of 162 countries.
- While the country has lifted 271 million people out of poverty between 2005 and 2015, it still accounts for a large number of the world’s ‘multidimensional’ poor.
- This means that in the last three decades, life expectancy at birth in India increased by 11.6 years, whereas the average number of schooling years increased by 3.5 years. Per capita incomes increased 250 times.
- The report finds that despite progress, group-based inequalities persist on the Indian Subcontinent, especially affecting women and girls.
- While Singapore has the region’s lowest incidence of intimate partner violence against women, the report states that a staggering 31 per cent of women in South Asia have experienced intimate partner violence.
- India ranks at a low 122 among 162 countries on the Gender Development Index.

INSOLVENCY AND BANKRUPTCY CODE (SECOND AMENDMENT) BILL, 2019

Why in news?

- The Union Cabinet approved the proposal to make amendments in the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016, through the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Second Amendment) Bill, 2019.
- Later, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla has referred this Bill, which seeks to streamline the corporate insolvency resolution process, to the standing committee on Finance of which former prime minister Manmohan Singh is a member.

About the IBC

- The code applies to companies and individuals. It provides for a time-bound process to resolve insolvency. When a default in repayment occurs, creditors gain control over debtor’s assets and must take decisions to resolve insolvency.
- The Code also consolidates provisions of the current legislative framework to form a common forum for debtors and creditors of all classes to resolve insolvency.

Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Second Amendment) Bill, 2019

- Under the Code, a financial creditor (either by itself or jointly with other financial creditors) may file an application before the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) for initiating the insolvency resolution process. The Bill amends this to provide minimum thresholds for certain class of financial creditors to initiate the insolvency resolution process.
- The Bill clarifies that the following corporate debtors will be allowed to initiate the resolution process against any other corporate debtor. These include: (i) corporate debtors undergoing an insolvency resolution process, (ii) corporate...
debtor's who have completed the resolution process 12 months before making the application, (iii) corporate debtors or financial creditors who have violated terms of the resolution plan, or (iv) corporate debtors in respect of whom a liquidation order has been passed.

- The Bill states that any existing licence, permit, registration, quota, concession, or clearance, given by the government or local authority, will not be suspended or terminated on the grounds of insolvency. However, there should be no default in payment of current dues for the use or continuation of such grants.
- The Bill provides that corporate debtors will have immunity against offences committed by them prior to the commencement of the resolution process.
- In addition, the Bill provides immunity from any action against the property (such as attachment, seizure, or confiscation) of the corporate debtor in relation to such offences. Such immunity will be granted if the resolution plan approved by the NCLT results in the change of promoters, or management of the corporate debtor.
- However, any person in charge of the corporate debtor, or associated with it, will continue to be held liable for such offences.

**KALIA SCHEME**

**Why in News?**
- Odisha government has reduced the financial assistance given to farmers under the KALIA scheme to Rs 4,000 per annum from Rs 10,000.

**About**
- This decision was taken after the Odisha government merged the KALIA scheme with the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN).
- As all the eligible farmers will get assistance from PM-KISAN from 2019-20, no assistance for Rabi-2019 will be given under the KALIA scheme to these farmers, adding that the beneficiaries, who have not yet received financial assistance during 2018-19 under KALIA scheme, will also be provided assistance for Rabi 2018-19.
- The actual cultivators (share croppers) who are landless, if any, will continue to get assistance from KALIA i.e. Rs 10,000 annually, since they are not considered under PM-KISAN.
- Keeping the parity of both the schemes, the small farmers/marginal farmers may be given with Rs 5,000 for 2019-20 and Rs 4,000 per year from 2020-21, so that they will get Rs 10,000 annually i.e. Rs 6,000 from PM-KISAN and Rs 4,000 from KALIA.
- This apart, the state government also made it clear that applications from big/large farmers will be collected through online as the big/large farmers are eligible to get assistance from PM-KISAN scheme which is Rs 6,000 per annum.
- The farmers residing under urban local bodies will not be considered for both the schemes. Both PM-KISAN and KALIA will have common exclusion criteria.
- As the Cooperation department has decided to provide interest free crop loan up to Rs 1 lakh to all farmers, so component i.e. 'interest free crop loan' under KALIA which had a provision to provide interest free crop loan up to Rs 50,000 to all farmers has been subsumed and need not be further considered under KALIA.
- Since the number of beneficiaries under KALIA has increased so that no one will be left out, adding that the component of "financial assistance to vulnerable agricultural households" is dropped from KALIA.
• KALIA scheme has been widely accepted by the farming community, the scheme will be extended till the PM-KISAN scheme continues.

NATIONAL BROADBAND MISSION

Why in News?
• The Ministry for Communications, Law & Justice and Electronics and Information Technology, launched the National Broadband Mission (NBM) to fulfill all aspirations of the people and enables fast track growth of digital communication infrastructure.

About
• The Ministry also launched the Logo of the NBM, a Booklet.
• The vision of the NBM is to fast track growth of digital communications infrastructure, bridge the digital divide, facilitate digital empowerment and inclusion and provide affordable and universal access of broadband for all.
• Some of the objectives of the Mission which is structured with a strong emphasis on the three principles of universality, affordability and quality are:
  1. Broadband access to all villages by 2022
  2. Facilitate universal and equitable access to broadband services across the country and especially in rural and remote areas
  3. Laying of incremental 30 lakhs route km of Optical Fiber Cable and increase in tower density from 0.42 to 1.0 tower per thousand of population by 2024
  4. Significantly improve quality of services for mobile and internet
  5. Develop innovative implementation models for Right of Way (RoW) and to work with States/UTs for having consistent policies pertaining to expansion of digital infrastructure including for RoW approvals required for laying of OFC
  6. Develop a Broadband Readiness Index (BRI) to measure the availability of digital communications infrastructure and conducive policy ecosystem within a State/UT.
  7. Creation of a digital fiber map of the Digital Communications network and infrastructure, including Optical Fiber Cables and Towers, across the country
  8. Investment from stakeholders of USD 100 billion (Rs 7 Lakh Crore) including Rs 70,000 crore from Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF)
  9. Address policy and regulatory changes required to accelerate the expansion and creation of digital infrastructure and services
  10. Work with all stakeholders including the concerned Ministries / Departments/Agencies, and Ministry of Finance, for enabling investments for the Mission.

IIP SHRINKS AGAIN, INFLATION INCREASES

Why in news?
• Industrial activity contracted for the third consecutive month in October by 3.8%, driven by a fall in activity across sectors, according to data released by the National Statistics Office on 12 December 2019.

Highlights of the data
• Vegetable prices surged 36% in November from a year ago.
• Retail inflation surged 5.54% in November as food price inflation measured by the Consumer Food Price Index rose 10% in November from 7.89% in October.
- Pointing to a demand slump in the economy, manufacturing output, which accounts for three-fourths of factory output, contracted 2.1% in October. The contraction in consumer durables deepened in October. Production of items such as cars and household appliances contracted 18% in October, after shrinking 9.9% in the month before.

- Capital goods production that reflects investments in manufacturing continued its sharp contraction in October too. It has now contracted by over 20% for the last three months. Energy generation, seen as a proxy for living standards, too remained muted. Mining output covering mainly coal and crude oil contracted by 8% in October, and electricity generation by over 12%.

Impact

- If economic growth does not show signs of an uptick in the December quarter, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) may come under pressure to give further monetary stimulus to support the economy, given the fact that retail inflation is driven by food prices and is not across the board.

- The government has announced various measures to support the automobile industry, exporters, non-bank lenders and housing financiers in addition to announcing a sharp corporate tax rate cut for domestic companies not availing of any tax breaks and to new manufacturing companies.

- RBI has so far cut its benchmark repo rate five times in a row this year totalling 135 basis points, but kept the rate unchanged at its 5 December monetary policy review as retail inflation remained firm and the impact of the rate cut so far has been muted.

- India’s economy grew 4.5% in the second quarter, its slowest pace since March 2013, due to a sharp contraction in manufacturing output.

**PMGSY PHASE III**

**Why in news?**

- The Union Ministry of Rural Development launched Phase III of Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) to further enhance connectivity of villages with hospitals, schools and agricultural markets.

**About**

- The importance of roads in bringing about all-round positive development and empowering the villages.

- Rural Road Connectivity is not only a key component of Rural Development by promoting access to economic and social services and thereby generating increased agricultural incomes and productive employment opportunities in India, but it is also as a result, a key ingredient in ensuring sustainable poverty reduction.

- The Phase-III of PMGSY aims at consolidation of 1,25,000 Kms Through Routes and Major Rural Links that connect habitations to Gramin Agricultural Markets (GrAMs), Higher Secondary Schools and Hospitals with an estimated cost of Rs. 80,250 crores (Central Share of Rs. 53,800 crores) for the period 2019-20 to 2024-25.

- The funding pattern for the PMGSY-III will be 60:40 between Centre and the States for States other than NE & Himalayan States and 90:10 for NE and Himalayan States as applicable for Central sponsored schemes.
A road length of 36 thousand 63 Kilometres has been constructed using green technologies, a major portion of which includes Waste plastic and cold mix technology.

**PRADHAN MANTRI UJJWALA YOJANA (PMUY)**

**Why in news?**
- LPG coverage grew at a quick pace and reached almost all households by April 2019 since the inception of the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY).

**About**
- Household LPG connections grew at a sedate pace before PMUY was introduced in May 2016. Following the implementation of the scheme, overall household LPG coverage grew swiftly to reach 94.3% as on April 1, 2019.
- But a significant number of the scheme's BPL beneficiaries did not use the service beyond the initial refill, mostly due to economic reasons. As a result, a large number of dormant cylinders have been diverted for commercial use.

**PMUY**
- The initiative aims to create smoke-less villages across the country. It provides LPG connection to women in BPL households as an identity of their own and to lead a smoke-free, less polluted, convenient and healthy life.
- To carry the scheme forward and implement it on mass level, special Ujjwala Melas for distributing LPG connections to identified beneficiaries under PMUY have been organised at all the LPG distribution outlets in 2016.
- The main mantra of this scheme is Swacch Indhan, Behtar Jeevan – Mahilaon ko mila samman.
- The scheme provides a financial support of Rs. 1600 for each LPG connection to the eligible BPL households. The connections under the scheme will be given in the name of women-head of the households. The OMCs will provide EMI facility for meeting the cost of stove and the first refill.
- The scheme is aimed at replacing the unclean cooking fuels used in the most underprivileged households with clean and more efficient LPG (Liquefied Petroleum Gas).
- Ensuring women’s empowerment, especially in rural India, the connections will be issued in the name of women of the BPL households. The identification of eligible BPL families will be made on Social-Economic Caste Census (SECC) data that is being provided by the Union Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.

**Implementation of PMUY**
- Its implementation has resulted in significant increase in national LPG coverage, in general and Eastern States, in particular.
- The scheme has resulted in mass coverage of rural poor households and 48% of the beneficiaries are SC/STs.
- Those beneficiaries, who could not afford to make upfront payment under this scheme for purchase of gas stove and refilling of cylinder, were provided loan facility by the Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs).
● It is significant to mention that under the PMUY, the average per capita consumption is 3.28. This should be seen as a positive change in the lives of these households which were long dependent on the traditional cooking fuels and methods.
● LPG Panchayats were formed to promote learning through peer group interaction - Kuch Seekhein, Kuch Sikhayein, where apart from experience sharing, it also aims at safe and sustained usage of LPG.
● PMUY implementation has been appreciated by the World Health Organization (WHO) and termed it as a decisive intervention to check the indoor health pollution being faced by the women of the country.

GEM LAUNCHES NATIONAL OUTREACH PROGRAMME - GEM SAMVAAD

Why in news?
● A national outreach Programme, GeM Samvaad, was launched by the Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India on 17 December, 2019.

About
● The outreach programme will take place with stakeholders across the country and with local sellers in order to facilitate on-boarding of local sellers on the marketplace while catering to specific requirements and procurement needs of buyers.
● The outreach programme will take place from 19 December 2019 to 17 February 2020 and will cover all the States and UTs of the country.

THE WORLD BANK'S EASE OF DOING BUSINESS REPORT 2020

Why in news?
● Doing Business 2020 acknowledges 22 reforms in the 20 top-ranking economies. Since 2003-04, the 20 best-performing
economies have carried out a total of 464 regulatory changes, suggesting that even the gold standard setters have room to improve their business climates.

About
- More than half of the economies in the top-20 cohort are from the OECD high-income group; however, the top-20 list also includes four economies from East Asia and the Pacific, two from Europe and Central Asia, as well as one from the Middle East and North Africa and one from Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Conversely, most economies (12) in the bottom 20 are from the Sub-Saharan Africa region.
- India ranks 63rd among 190 countries improving by 14 ranks from its rank of 77 in 2019.

Background
- Ease of Doing Business is an annual survey published by the World Bank.
- It has its origin in a paper “The Regulation of Entry” first published in 2002 in the Quarterly Journal of Economics by Bulgarian economist Simeon Djankov.
- First Ease of Doing Business report was published in 2003.

Highlights of EODB 2020
- New Zealand, Singapore and Hong Kong are ranked as top three in ease of doing business rankings 2020. Economies that score highest on the ease of doing business share several common features, including the widespread use of electronic systems. All of the 20 top ranking economies have online business incorporation processes, have electronic tax filing platforms, and allow online procedures related to property transfer.
- Doing Business acknowledges the 10 economies that improved the most on the ease of doing business after implementing regulatory reforms. In Doing Business 2020, the 10 top improvers are Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Togo, Bahrain, Tajikistan, Pakistan, Kuwait, China, India, and Nigeria.
- Only two African economies rank in the top 50 on the ease of doing business; no Latin American economies rank in this group.
- Worldwide, 115 economies made it easier to do business.

Performance of India
- India has improved its rank in 7 out of 10 indicators and has moved closer to international best practices.
- The 2020 edition of the Report acknowledges India as one of the top 10 improvers, third time in a row, with an improvement of 67 ranks in 3 years. It is also the highest jump by any large country since 2011.
- A total of 25,930 startups are now recognised under the Startup India Initiative, of which 7,033 startups have been recognised since 1st June 2019.
- In the past 4 years India’s rank in the GII has improved from the 81st rank in 2015 to the present 52nd rank in GII 2019 report. India became the first developing country to launch the Global Innovation Index (GII) in association with World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) and Confederation of India (CII).