MARCH 2019

IASBABA'S MONTHLY MAGZINE

A BLOW AGAINST ARTICLE 370 & FEDERALISM
OFFICIAL SECRETS ACT
ISSUE OVER VVPAT
DRAFT EMIGRATION BILL 2019
MISSION SHAKTI - A-SAT MISSILE
COUNTERING ISLAMOPHOBIA

PREFACE

With the present shift in examination pattern of UPSC Civil Services Examination, 'General Studies – II and General Studies III' can safely be replaced with 'Current Affairs'. Moreover, following the recent trend of UPSC, almost all the questions are issue-based rather than news-based. Therefore, the right approach to preparation is to prepare issues, rather than just reading news.

Taking this into account, our website www.iasbaba.com will cover current affairs focusing more on 'issues' on a daily basis. This will help you pick up relevant news items of the day from various national dailies such as The Hindu, Indian Express, Business Standard, LiveMint, Business Line and other important Online sources. Over time, some of these news items will become important issues.

UPSC has the knack of picking such issues and asking general opinion based questions. Answering such questions will require general awareness and an overall understanding of the issue. Therefore, we intend to create the right understanding among aspirants – 'How to cover these issues?

This is the **46th edition** of IASbaba's Monthly Magazine. This edition covers all important issues that were in news in the month of **MARCH 2019** which can be accessed from **https://iasbaba.com/current-affairs-for-ias-upsc-exams/**

VALUE ADDITIONS FROM IASBABA
- **Must Read and Connecting the dots.**
- **Also, we have introduced Prelim and mains focused snippets and Test Your Knowledge (Prelims MCQs based on daily current affairs) which shall guide you for better revision.**
- **'Must Read' section**, will give you important links to be read from exam perspective. This will make sure that, you don't miss out on any important news/editorials from various newspapers on daily basis.
- Under each news article, **'Connecting the dots'** facilitates your thinking to connect and ponder over various aspects of an issue. Basically, it helps you in understanding an issue from multi-dimensional view-point. You will understand its importance while giving Mains or Interview.

Must Read Articles: We have not included them in the magazine. Those following DNA on daily basis may follow it- **https://iasbaba.com/current-affairs-for-ias-upsc-exams/**

"Tell my mistakes to me not to others, because these are to be corrected by me, not by them."

Contents

HISTORY/CULTURE/GEOGRAPHY

A.P. villagers yearn to revive historic temple @Motupalli port

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Indian art and heritage; Culture

In news:

- **Motupalli** — where a **historic temple of Veerabhadraswamy**, a **fiery form of Lord Siva**, is located — has been an **important port for centuries** with flourishing trade with South Asian countries, especially during the medieval period.

Why in news?

- Motupalli Veerabhadraswamy temple - This heritage site in Andhra Pradesh presents a picture of neglect now.
- The temple remains closed ever since the Department of Archaeology took it over for conservation and preservation of the archaeological marvel in the **wake of discovery of Panchaloha idols of gods and goddesses** including that of Lord Nataraja in dancing posture and Bhadrakali in the 1970s from nearby farms, after idol-lifters tried to lay their hands on them in view of the demand for such idols overseas.
- Motupally is well connected by road and rail network on the east coast. People of Motupalli now demanding for reviving the past glory of the temple by reinstalling the idols in the historic temple and promotion of temple tourism in a big way.
- Most of the antique idols were shifted either to the State Archaeology Museum or to the Victoria Museum, Vijayawada. The villagers' demand is that they should be brought back and reinstalled.

Key pointers for Prelims:

- Veerabhadra Swamy temple was **constructed during the regime of the Cholas**.
- It has **stone inscriptions in Telugu and Tamil** and awe-inspiring **Panchaloha idols**.
- Sri Rama and Veerabhadra Swamy Temples in Motupalli Village reflect the **rich culture of Satavahana Kings**.
- It is said that this Temple **flourished during the times of Kakatiya rulers** who established sea trade with foreign countries.
- Inscriptions on the temple walls were written in Telugu, Tamil and Sanskrlt Languages.
- Motupalli Village is located in the coastal region of Andhra Pradesh in Chinnaganjam Mandal, Prakasam District.
- During Kakatiyas, Motupalli acted as the major hub for sea transportation.

- Carving on the temple walls and idols in the temple premises shows the architecture and style of Kakatiya Kings.
- This region was ruled by **Satavahanas, Pallavas, Chalukyas and Cholas**.
- Currently, this site is under the maintenance of Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

Early Harappan ritual site: Khatiya village of Kutch

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains I – Indian Heritage and Culture, History

In news:
- Archaeologists unearthed several skeletal remains from a cemetery-like burial site at Khatiya village of Kutch.
- The rectangular graves, each of varying dimensions and assembled using stones, contained skeletons that were placed in a specific manner.
- They were oriented east-west with the heads positioned on the eastern side. Next to the legs on the western side, the archaeologists found earthen pots and pottery shards and other artefacts, including conch-shell bangles, beads made of stones and terracotta, numerous lithic tools and grinding stones.
- The discovery shed light on the custom and burial rituals that were prevalent during the early Harappan phase.

Thakurani Jatra festival

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains I – Indian Heritage and Culture

Key pointers:
- Thakurani Jatra festival - famous biennial festival celebrated in Odisha's Berhampur.
- It includes hoisting of the holy mast or 'shubha khunti'.
- Goddess Budhi Thakurani - traditional deity of silk handloom weavers or the Dera community of Berhampur.
- As homage to the goddess, people of all ages, including children and the elderly, transform themselves into various characters from Indian mythology through body painting.
- The number of devotees in the garb of mythological characters increase towards the last days of the festival. Hundreds of them come out in processions with different themes making the city colourful.

Karnataka has most number of stolen artefacts; none recovered

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains I and II – Indian Art and Culture; Governance issues

In news:
- At least 12 idols have been stolen from protected monuments in Karnataka in the past six years, and none of them has been recovered by the police.
- According to the Ministry of Culture - Karnataka tops the list in the country that has seen 30 idols or artefacts being stolen from Archaeology Survey of India (ASI) sites.

Antiques stolen

Year	From Karnataka	From India
2013	4	9
2014	5*	8
2015	2	7
2016	1	5
2017	0	1
2018	0	0

*Two from the same temple in Hassan

From Hassan ❸
From Kolar and Mysuru ❷
From Shivamogga, Mandya, Ballari, Davangere, Chickballapur ❶
Idols recovered ⓿

https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2019/03/14/DEL/Delhi/TH/5_05/f70b658e_2797097_101_mr.jpg

Do you know?
- The demand for Hoysala and Chalukya idols exist and the three southern States are susceptible as there are hundreds of unprotected or State-protected sites.
- There is demand for an idol wing, much like what exists in Tamil Nadu where idol thefts is a continuing concern.
- At a local level, heritage committees headed by the Deputy Commissioner should keep track of unprotected sites and see if any temples are vulnerable to theft.

Reasons for growing incidents loss of artefacts, historical idols and antiquities:
1. Lack of coordination between departments responsible for custodianship of cultural heritage and law enforcement agencies.
2. Department has not computerised the stock, poor surveillance to keep safe custody of the valuable idols in the Centre and in the temples.
3. Lack of coordination and lack of surveillance measures.

Steps taken by the government
- The parliament of India passed an Act, the **Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972,** focussing mainly the objectives of prevention of smuggling, prevent illegal sale, regulate export trade in antiquities and compulsory acquisition of antiquities and art treasures.
- **National mission on monuments and antiquities (NMMA)** has been launched. One of the main components of this NMMA is to create a national register of these antiquities.
- **Nodal agency** for implementation of NMMA is Archaeological survey of India.
- National register for antiquities must be updated for these valuables artefacts.
- Also, there is a need for timely action to be taken by the concerned government departments for identification and preservation of our cultural heritage.

Martyr's Day: Nation Remembers Bhagat Singh, Rajguru And Sukhdev

Context:

- Bhagat Singh, along with two of his comrades, Sukhdev and Rajguru, were hanged by the British on March 23, 1931, in Lahore Central Jail which was then a part of British India.
- 2019 marks 88th Anniversary of their martyrdom
- It has been well over eight decades, but they continue to inspire us, with their love for India and the sacrifice they made for the country's freedom, at a very young age.

Bhagat Singh, Shivaram Rajguru, and Sukhdev Thapar
- Three most shining icons of the country's freedom struggle
- They were the three unparalleled revolutionaries in history
- The trio, were members of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association

Contributions:
1. **Defined nation and nationalism:** At a young age, Bhagat Singh defined nation and nationalism for us.
2. **On Universal Brotherhood:** At age 17, he published his first article (in 1924) in Matwala, a Hindi magazine from Calcutta. The subject was 'Universal Brotherhood'.
   - He imagined a world where "all of us being one and none is the other. It will really be a comforting time when the world will have no strangers."
   - He emphatically exclaimed that "as long as words like black and white, civilized and uncivilized, ruler and the ruled, rich and poor, touchable and untouchable, etc., are in vogue there was no scope for universal brotherhood".

- He went on to say, "We will have to campaign for equality and equity. Will have to punish those who oppose the creation of such a world."

(Today, when many are busy "othering" and creating strangers out of their own fellow citizens need to grapple with Bhagat Singh's views, instead of merely glorifying him as a martyr.)

3. **Strongest critique of untouchability and communalism:**
   - He wrote series of articles on 'Anarchism' and was fiercely frank and bold enough to critically comment on the politics of senior leaders such as Lala Lajpat Rai and express his differences.
   - He was also conscious of the international revolutionary struggles and ideologies.
   - He was aghast that we claimed to be a spiritual country, yet discriminated against fellow human beings while the materialist West had done away with such inhuman obscenities long ago.

(Even today, untouchability and communalism continue to torment us as a nation.)

4. **On inclusiveness:**
   - Bhagat Singh steadfastly remained committed to the idea of a plural and inclusive India.
   - He founded the **Naujawan Bharat Sabha** in Lahore in 1926, whose manifesto said, "Religious superstitions and bigotry are a great hindrance in our progress. They have proved an obstacle in our way and we must do away with them. 'The thing that cannot bear free thought must perish'."
   - In 1928, Bhagat Singh was acutely conscious of the **divisiveness of mixing religion with politics**.
   - He wrote – "If religion is separated from politics, then all of us can jointly initiate political activities, even though in matters of religion we might have many differences with each other. We feel that the true well-wishers of India would follow these principles and save India from the suicidal path it is on at present."
   - He even had authored masterly essay, **'Why I am an Atheist'.** Bhagat Singh observed: "Our retrogressive thinking is destroying us. We keep ourselves entangled in futile discussions about God and heaven, and remain busy in talking about the soul and God. We are quick to dub Europe as capitalist and don't think about their great ideas or pay any attention to them. We love divinity and remain aloof from the world."

(Even today, many continue to peddle religion to promote political prospects.)

Thus we can see here the evolution of his ideas on politics, society, religion and even faith in god.

Conclusion:
- The lessons from the lives of these revolutionaries remain as relevant today as they were during the independence movement.
- Their lives are proof that one is never too young to be politically aware, to educate oneself about the truth of the world at large, and to actively play a role in shaping the society one wants to live in.
- In these rancorous times, Bhagat Singh's intellectual bequest should be a beacon to build a new India.

Connecting the dots:
- Bhagat Singh the thinker, the revolutionary, and the philosopher continues to be a shining beacon for young people in India, and indeed, the rest of the world.
- Throw light on the significance of the thoughts of Bhagat Singh in the present times.
- Given below are two quotations of moral thinkers/philosophers. For each of these, bring out what it means to you in the present context:
    1. "All of us being one and none is the other. It will really be a comforting time when the world will have no strangers."
    2. "Religious superstitions and bigotry are a great hindrance in our progress. They have proved an obstacle in our way and we must do away with them."

The loss of intellectual autonomy

TOPIC: General studies 1 (SOCIETY)

- *Effects of globalization on Indian society Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism and secularism*
- *Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India*

About Intellectual Autonomy:

- Intellectual autonomy is a '**willingness and ability to think for oneself'**.
- The young are particularly keen to have the **freedom to decide which beliefs to form**.
- Intellectual autonomy is widely considered to be **an important value**.

Do you know?
- In the past, large numbers of people were illiterate, knowledge was produced and stored by a few, and there was wider social legitimacy for submission to those with power and authority.

- However, an intellectually autonomous person is capable of forming her own judgements, initiating reflection and asking probing questions.

Strategy of undermining of Intellectual Autonomy in British Colonialism

- Since the end of the 18th century, as technologies of knowledge production became increasingly available to larger sections of society, intellectual autonomy has been threatened not only by state power, but in other invidious ways.
- The British strategy of intellectual control was implemented by crafting a system of education rather than brute coercion. Although the best of our thinkers outmaneuvered this system. For example, our most original thinker of this period, Gandhi, was a product of this very education.
- However this system created acute anxiety among self-reflexive thinkers. For example, Sri Aurobindo lamented the "increasing impoverishment of the Indian intellect" in the face of new knowledge imposed by European contact. "Nothing is our own, nothing native to our intelligence, all is derived," he complained. "As little have we understood the new knowledge; we have only understood what the Europeans want us to think about themselves and their modern civilization".

What were the impacts of Intellectual Control by British Colonialism?

- It undermined the capacity of critical thinking and non influential decision making.
- Indians (especially the then English-educated Indians and who were in authority) blindly accepted ideas coming either from outside, from Europe. It was as if the only choice before Indian intellectual elites was a hyper-westernised modernism or ultra-traditionalism.
- Cultural subjugation instead of creative assimilation. Our English culture if culture it can be called has increased tenfold the evil of our dependence instead of remedying it.
- Idea of religion and nation: Religion, as a demarcated system of practices, beliefs and doctrines, is largely an early modern European invention and begins its existence in and through the theological disputes of the 16th and 17th centuries.
- In India, people did not think of themselves as belonging to a single system of belief and doctrine in competition with and opposition to all others. Indeed, mobility across communities and multiple allegiances were common. As a result, most people refused to be slotted into rigid, compartmentalised entities.
- They were religious but did not belong to a religion. This has virtually ceased to be the case.
- Thanks to narrow-minded education institutions and now the electronic media, the idea was first disseminated and then unquestioningly accepted by Indians as if it were a long-held indigenous Indian idea.

Conclusion

- In accepting this alien idea of religion and nation without proper comparison or competition with Indian ideas of faith and community, we have sacrificed intellectual autonomy and gone down the road to hell from which Europe has itself yet to recover.
- To define one's identity or community in terms of a single, exclusive religion Hindu, Muslim or any other is a perverse European notion, a mark of our cultural subjugation, a symptom of the loss of our intellectual autonomy.
- To have done so is to have uncritically abandoned our own collective genius for something ill-suited to our conditions. This need to be reversed by building our collective intellectual autonomy and critical analysis.

Connecting the dots:

- What do you mean by 'Intellectual Autonomy'? Do you think intellectual autonomy is smothered by temptations of power. Elucidate your opinion.

Indian museum of natural history

In news:

- India is home to a vast treasury of geological and palaeontological specimens that contain a wealth of scientific information about the planet and its history. But these rare specimens are scattered in different labs all over the country.
- So, to better conserve this prehistoric heritage, the government is planning to house them in one place — an 'Earth Museum'.

Do you know?

- This museum will be modelled on the American Museum of Natural History, or the Smithsonian museum in the U.S.
- The museum, which will be set up as a public-private partnership, would be located somewhere in Delhi, Noida or Gurugram.
- A meeting of experts from the U.S., the U.K, and South Korea to discuss the practical aspects of developing and maintaining such a museum is scheduled to be held in Delhi.

Cloud Seeding: Karnataka set to tap the clouds yet again

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains I and III – Geography; Science and Technology

In news:

- As 176 taluks reel under drought, the Karnataka government is hoping to influence the upcoming monsoon and capture as much water as possible from the rain clouds.
- Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department called for cloud seeding operations to enhance rainfall during the monsoons of 2019 and 2020.
- The project is expected to cost ₹50 crore each year.

Do you know?

- Cloud seeding uses planes to spray clouds with chemicals to condense smaller particles into larger rain droplets.
- The department is aiming to replicate the ₹35-crore **'Varshadhare' project** two years ago that was called a success by an independent evaluation committee.
- The most common chemicals used for cloud seeding include silver iodide, potassium iodide and dry ice (solid carbon dioxide). Liquid propane, which expands into a gas, has also been used.
- This can produce ice crystals at higher temperatures than silver iodide. After promising research, the use of hygroscopic materials, such as table salt, is becoming more popular.

Seeding the clouds

How it works

- Doppler radars (three for State) to keep an eye on cloud movements
- Monitoring/advisory committee identifies suitable cloud formation over areas where there is soil moisture stress or low catchment rains
- Specialised planes spray sodium chloride, potassium chloride and silver iodide
- These condense small moisture particles into larger rain droplets
- Enhancement of rain is captured by 6,000 rain gauges

Previous exercises: 2003, 2009, 2017

Tenders called for 2019 and 2020

Cost: ₹50 crore (estimated) each year

Days for cloud seeding: 90 days each monsoon

Project Varshadhare

Period: August 21 to November 7, 2017

Cost: ₹35 crore

Contracted flying hours: 300 hours in 60 days

Flying hours: 286.51 hours in 37 days

Impact: 27.9% enhanced rainfall and 2.5 tmcft of water into Linganamakki reservoir

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The irrelevance of secularism

Introduction:

- The below article deals with India's unique concept of 'secularism' and how its definition is confusing and clearly unworkable.

Unique definition of Secularism

According to the founding fathers of the Constitution, "the **Indian state must be equidistant from all religions while allowing religions equal space in the public sphere**".

Western concept of secularism defines mutual exclusivity between state and religion. **Indian concept of secularism believes in equality of all religions and respect for all religions by state**.

In other words, unlike western notion of secularism, here in India the state is not separated from religion rather the government is obliged to take steps so that all religions are treated equally.

- For several reasons this **definition of secularism has created a lot of confusion** as to what the term stands for.
- The framers of the Constitution, Nehru and B.R. Ambedkar included, **failed to erect an unbreachable firewall between state and religion** that would clearly prevent the intrusion of religious idioms, practices and agendas into the political arena and insulate the state from the religious sphere.
- The innate religious nature of Indian society and the after-effects of Partition on religious grounds precluded this option.

Issues:
Secularism is one of the fundamental principle meant for uniting the society, given huge religious cultural diversity. However, inspite of uniting it has led to animosity between different religious groups in following ways:

- **No clear distinction between state and religion**- State interferes in religious issues when they involve human rights, for example banning untouchability, Sabarimala judgment and passage of triple talaq bill.
- **Vote bank politics**– propounding the religious beliefs of one community over other. Ban on caw slaughter has been envisaged under DPSP, but the way it has been implemented, not keeping in mind the livelihood of many, especially the Muslims has resulted into violence. Eg- The Mohammad Akhlaq incident- he was beaten to death by

a mob. Vote bank politics has resulted in minority appeasement at the cost of basic pillars of democracy.

- **Appeasement policy of the government**– Petty matters converts into riots as in Muzaffarpur because of administrative negligence.
- **Rise of communalism-** Riots, Mandir-Masjid issues keep cropping up every now and then.
- **Uneven development among different religious groups-** Political mileage has prevented necessary interventions in some communities resulting in their backwardness.
- The **Uniform civil code debate** rather than being an informed one, with an objective of improving lives of Muslim women, the debate took a turn which made it seem as **majoritarianism dominating over minorities**.
- The **social gap** between the OBCs, SCs and STs on one hand and the communities like Jat(Haryana), Patidars(Gujarat) **has widened further** because of the reservation policy.

Conclusion:

From above analysis it can be concluded that it is not the concept of secularism per se but the misconception around it which has resulted into polarization of Indian society hurting the growth and development of those alienated.

However, in this context, to call the ideological foundation of the Constitution secularism, although the term was not explicitly included in the document until 1976, has done great harm to the concept.

The formula that the state must remain equidistant from all religions, the unique Indian definition of secularism, is clearly unworkable.

Connecting the dots:
- The formula that the state must remain equidistant from all religions is proving to be unworkable. Do you agree? Elucidate.
- Instead of uniting our society, secularism in India it has fomented fragmentation and alienation among our diverse religious communities. Critically Comment.
- "Secularism is all about erecting a wall of separation between State and Religion and thereby devaluing religion". Critically analyze this statement in the Indian context.

POLITY/GOVERNANCE

Cabinet clears voluntary use of Aadhaar as identity proof

Part of: GS Mains II – National issue; Right to Privacy; Governance issues

In news:

- Cabinet approved the promulgation of an Ordinance to allow voluntary submission of Aadhaar as identity proof for use by private entities such as banks, telcos and fintech firms.
- The Ordinance also gives a child an option to exit from Aadhaar on attaining 18 years of age.
- The amendment also provides for civil penalties for violations of the Aadhaar Act and provisions by entities in the Aadhaar ecosystem.
- It permits the entities to perform authentication only when they are compliant with the standards of privacy and security specified by the authority.

Do you know?

- No individual shall be compelled to provide proof of possession of Aadhaar number or undergo authentication for the purpose of establishing his identity unless it is so provided by a law made by Parliament.
- The amendments will enable UIDAI to restrain the misuse of Aadhaar.

Order on surveillance meant to protect privacy, govt. tells SC

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II and III – Fundamental Rights; Constitution and Polity; Security issues

In news:
- The Centre told the Supreme Court that its December 20, 2018 notification allowing 10 central agencies to snoop on people is in fact a measure to protect citizens' privacy.
- The Order on surveillance allows central agencies, from the Intelligence Bureau to the Central Board of Direct Taxes to the Cabinet Secretariat (RAW) to the Commissioner of Delhi Police, to intercept, monitor and de-crypt "any information" generated, transmitted, received or stored in "any computer resource".

- The order is based on Section 69 (1) of the Information Technology Act of 2000 and Rule 4 of the Information Technology 2009 Rules (Procedure and Safeguards for Interception, Monitoring and Decryption of Information) Rules, 2009.

For public order

The *Centre says its December 20 order derives statutory justification from Section 69 of the Information Technology Act of 2000*

- Section 69 gives the govt. the power to intercept, monitor or decrypt any information through any computer resource

- It says surveillance can be done if authorities are "satisfied that it is necessary or expedient to do so in the interest of the sovereignty or integrity of India, defence of India, security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states or public order or for preventing incitement to the commission of any cognizable offence or for investigation of any offence"

- The reasons for surveillance have to be recorded in an order in writing

- The subscriber or intermediary or any person in-charge of the computer resource shall provide access to the computer resource to the government. Lack of co-operation shall be punished with a prison term which may extend to 7 years and a penalty

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What the government says?

- Government has said that the very purpose of the order is to ensure that surveillance is done as per due process of law – any interception, monitoring, decryption will be done only by authorised agencies and with approval of competent authority
- Right to privacy of citizen will not be violated as it prevents unauthorized use of these powers by any agency, individual or intermediary
- Surveillance is necessary "in the modern world where modern tools of information communication, including encryption, is used
- Surveillance is done only in the defence of India, to maintain public order, etc.
- There are grave threats to the country from terrorism, radicalisation, cross border terrorism, cyber-crime, drug cartels and these cannot be ignored or under-stated.
- There is a need for "speedy collection of actionable intelligence" to counter threat to national interests.

Citizens protest against threat to use Official Secrets Act

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Government schemes and policies; Fundamental Rights; Freedom of Press

In news:
- Eminent personalities across different fields staged a protest and criticised the Central government for threatening to act against N. Ram, Chairman, The Hindu group of publications, and The Hindu for publishing investigative stories surrounding the controversies over the Rafale deal.
- The Centre had recently threatened to book The Hindu and others under the Official Secrets Act for publishing stories based on Defence Ministry documents.

To serve the governed: on Official Secrets Act

Context:

- Recently in the Supreme Court, the government threatened to invoke the Official Secrets Act against two publications that had run reports on the Rafale deal, on the basis of documents which, the government claimed, had been stolen from the Defence Ministry.

About Official Secrets Act (OSA)
- Official Secrets Act (OSA) has its roots in the British colonial era.
- The original version was The Indian Official Secrets Act (Act XIV), 1889. This was brought in with the main objective of muzzling the voice of a large number of newspapers that had come up in several languages, and were opposing the Raj's policies, building political consciousness and facing police crackdowns and prison terms.
- It was amended and made more stringent in the form of The Indian Official Secrets Act, 1904, during Lord Curzon's tenure as Viceroy of India. In 1923, a newer version was notified. The Indian Official Secrets Act (Act No XIX of 1923) was extended to all matters of secrecy and confidentiality in governance in the country.

OSA mainly deals with spying or espionage
- OSA broadly deals with two aspects — spying or espionage, covered under Section 3, and disclosure of other secret information of the government, under Section 5.
- Secret information can be any official code, password, sketch, plan, model, article, note, document or information.

- Under Section 5, both the person communicating the information, and the person receiving the information, can be punished.
- It is the government's discretion to decide what falls under the ambit of a "secret" document to be charged under OSA. It has often been argued that the law is in direct conflict with the Right to Information Act, 2005.

RTI Act and OCA

- Between the RTI Act and OSA, RTI Act has its primacy.
- Section 22 of the RTI Act provides for its primacy vis-a-vis provisions of other laws, including OSA.
- This gives the RTI Act an overriding effect, notwithstanding anything inconsistent with the provisions of OSA.
- So if there is any inconsistency in OSA with regard to furnishing of information, it will be superseded by the RTI Act.
- However, under Sections 8 and 9 of the RTI Act, the government can refuse information. Effectively, if government classifies a document as "secret" under OSA Clause 6, that document can be kept outside the ambit of the RTI Act, and the government can invoke Sections 8 or 9. (Legal experts see this as a loophole)

Do you know: Major instances when OSA has been invoked

One of the oldest and longest criminal trials involving OSA is the **1985 Coomar Narain spy case**.

- Twelve former staff members in the Prime Minister's Office and Rashtrapati Bhavan Secretariat were sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment in 2002.
- They were found guilty of entering into a criminal conspiracy with officials of the French, Polish and German embassies, communicating secret official codes, classified documents and information pertaining to defence, shipping, transport, finance, planning, and R&AW and Intelligent Bureau reports.

The other high-profile case was the **ISRO spy case** targeting **scientist S Nambi Narayan**.

- Before his recent acquittal, he had faced a criminal trial under OSA, and was accused of passing on rocket and cryogenic technology to Pakistan for illegal gratification.

In another high-profile case, then **Kashmir Times journalist Iftikhar Gilani** was arrested in 2002 and charged under OSA.

Madhuri Gupta case

- The most recent conviction under OSA came in 2018, when a Delhi court sentenced former diplomat Madhuri Gupta, who had served at the Indian High Commission in Islamabad, to three years in jail for passing on sensitive information to the ISI.

Past effort to change provisions of OSA

- In **1971**, the **Law Commission** observed that "it agrees with the contention" that "merely because a circular is marked secret or confidential, it should not attract the provisions of the Act, if the publication thereof is in the interest of the public and no question of national emergency and interest of the State as such arises". The Law Commission, however, did not recommend any changes to the Act.

- In **2006**, the **Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC)** recommended that OSA be repealed, and replaced with a chapter in the National Security Act containing provisions relating to official secrets. Observing that OSA was "incongruous with the regime of transparency in a democratic society", the ARC referred to the 1971 Law Commission report that had called for an "umbrella Act" to be passed to bring together all laws relating to national security.

- In 2015, the present government set up a committee to look into provisions of the OSA in light of the RTI Act. It submitted its report to the Cabinet Secretariat on June 16, 2017, recommending that OSA be made more transparent and in line with the RTI Act.

Concern over Official Secret Act:

1. It is against the Constitutional Freedom to Use and Publicise information (Article 19)
2. Arbitrary discretionary powers: It is the government's discretion to decide what falls under the ambit of a "secret" document to be charged under OSA.
3. Press, which is considered as the 4th pillar of the governance, had played effective role in cases such as irregularities in Bofors defence deal (during 1980s); 2016 Panama Papers leaks etc. OSA might curb its effective role.
4. Conflict with RTI Act, 2005: As RTI is for transparency whereas OSA is for confidentiality, it gives rise to opacity.
5. Chances of Misuse in Name of National Security: Governments is being accused for misusing the law against journalists and whistleblowers. For instance, ISRO spy case which targeted scientist S Nambi Narayanan. There is high chance of misuse the act by corrupt officials in name of national security.

Conclusion:

As suggested by 2nd ARC, OSA must be replead and should replaced by a National Security Act where "Security" must be defined objectively so that it cannot be misused.

If government is indeed for the people, it has a solemn obligation to keep the people well informed.

Connecting the dots:

- Do you think Official Secrets Act (OSA) should be repealed from our statute books? Critically examine whether the Act has become archaic and irrelevant in recent times.
- The Official Secrets Act has no place in a democracy. Critically comment.

The role of finance commissions in sustainable development

Context:

- Government expects the 15th Finance Commission (FC) to play a key role in fostering sustainable development in India.
- Its constitutional status and the ability to suggest far-reaching reforms – on financing, allocation and use of funds by three tiers of governance – makes the central and state FCs completely capable to discharge this role of fostering sustainable development.
- However, effective implementation will be the responsibility of the three tiers, which is an issue of good governance.

Path to sustainable development

Importance of Social Sector Expenditure

- **Education and health expenditure** by states play a key role in improving developmental outcomes.
- Additional financing requirements of ₹12.1 trillion and ₹53.6 trillion have been estimated for health and education, respectively, to meet the sustainable development goal, or SDG targets, by 2030.
- Aware of the importance of social sector expenditure, many poor states have increased their expenditures in social services.

Concerns:

- Despite such increase in education and health spending, experts indicate that **efficiency of education spending has deteriorated** in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha between 2002 and 2015.
- In other words, even though some of these states spent most out of their budget on capital expenditure, health and education sectors remained impoverished.
- There is no evidence of poorer states "catching up" with richer states in **quality of human capital formation** and health-related expenditure.
- Several of these states now **lack sizeable funds to consistently invest in human development**. **Reasons** - Declines in grants-in-aid and their own revenues; Inefficient spending; fiscal deficits due to takeover of debt of distribution companies under the UDAY scheme and farm loan waiver announcements.

- Achieving long-run sustainability of debt and deficits continue to be a major challenge for such states.

The way ahead:

- **Good governance**, **coupled with growth**, is key in **achieving spending efficiency** in education, health and social sectors.
- The **role of local governments** has often been ignored in human development, despite them being closest to ground and having the ability to make investment choices based on evidence and consistently monitor outcomes.
- **Bottom up approach:** State FCs should take into account the requirements of local governments and inform the central FC. Constitution also envisages for bottom up approach in determining resource allocations among the three tiers of governance.
- **Increase local government expenditure: Local government expenditure** as a percentage of total public sector expenditure is only around 7% compared with 24% in Europe, 27% in North America and 55% in Denmark.
- **Coordination between central and state FCs:** There is no coordination between central and state FCs to understand a consolidated account of the reality at the sub-state level.
- **Realistic assessment of ground realities and course correction:** FCs will need to look within and improve internal processes for better coordination, making realistic assessment of ground realities and improving outcomes.
- **Implement suggestions recommended by experts and committees on Fiscal Federalism:**
  - o **Swaminathan A. Aiyar** recommended that central FCs propose substantial rewards for states that are serious about decentralisation, and penalties for those that are not.
  - o **Noted econocrat Vijay Kelkar** recommended creating a consolidated fund for municipalities and panchayats to ensure that revenue allocated by central and state FCs flow directly to it.
  - o **Kelkar** also advocated that states and the Centre should share an equal percentage of their respective goods and services tax collection with the third tier. This will lead to creation of better public goods resulting in growth of economic activities, resident citizens' incomes and consumption which, in turn, will provide high fiscal resources to the local governments.
  - o Suggestions have also been made to create market-based mechanisms for financing government expenditures and fixing accountability.
- **Monitor performance through appropriate index:**

- o An index of debt sustainability and fiscal prudence performance indicators for measuring performance can be created, wherein fiscally strong governments can get themselves rated to get better rates in auction of bonds.
- o Cash surplus state governments can be allowed to lend to those in deficit at a market-linked rate.

Conclusion:

FCs need to become agents of change. To this end, they must examine these suggestions, and make appropriate recommendations to empower local governments, enable good governance and play their part in fostering sustainable development.

Connecting the dots:
- Examine how Central and states' finance commissions can play an important role in fostering sustainable development in India.
- Analyze how empowerment of local governments and good governance can lead to sustainable development.

The imperial cabinet and an acquiescent court

Context:

In the last six months, the Supreme Court has frequently found itself in the headlines.
It handed down many landmark judgments on fundamental rights:
- Decriminalising same-sex relations and adultery
- Opening up Sabarimala to women of all ages, and
- Upheld Aadhaar (though partially)

However, some of its judgments related to Rafale and Central Bureau of Investigation were subjected to intense scrutiny, and continue to be debated.

The below article deals with – balance of power between the different organs of the state, the federal character of the Republic, and fundamental questions of democratic accountability.

We know that Constitutionalism puts limitation on the authority to check against totalitarianism tendencies by following ways:

- Fundamental rights to enjoy rights and freedom and the Independent judiciary to enforce it against the state;

- By dividing and distributing political power between state organs in order to avoid concentration of authority, and
- To ensure that these different organs act as checks and balances upon each other.

However, recent majority judgment in the Aadhaar case, which, allowed the Act to stand as a money bill (after taking out a provision allowing private party use), may undermine the Rajya Sabha's role in the democratic process and increase the concentration of power in the hand of executive, because in future, governments wanting to bypass Rajya Sabha scrutiny on a range of important issues can simply insert a provision specifying that money for a project is to come from the Consolidated Fund.

Importance of Rajya Sabha:
- Bicameralism, in our parliamentary democracy, requires that a bill must be scrutinised and passed by both Houses of Parliament before it becomes law. The Lok Sabha represents the voice of the democratic majority.
- The Rajya Sabha represents the interests of the States, as well as perspectives free of immediate, electoral interests. The basic idea is that law-making is a balanced and deliberative process, not an exercise in pure majoritarianism.
- The crucial purpose of the Rajya Sabha is to act as a check and a balance upon the Lok Sabha, by scrutinising bills in a more deliberative and reflective manner, and raising concerns that may have been glossed over or evaded in the Lower House.
- The role of the Rajya Sabha becomes even more important when we consider a unique Indian innovation: anti-defection, which effectively undermine the intra-party democracy as individual MPs could no longer vote according to their conscience, and had to follow the diktats of the cabinet.
- With the Lower House no longer able to check the government, the only remaining legislative forum that can then do so is the Rajya Sabha.

How Passing of Aadhar Bill undermine Bicameralism Structure?
- Aadhar act is passed as a money bill and money bill takes the Rajya Sabha out of the equation, it only needs Lok Sabha approval.
- And in combination with the anti-defection law, this places absolute power in the hands of the executive, and skews the democratic process.
- Hence, its use must be restricted to the most limited of circumstances as enshrined in Constitution (Article 110) mandated that money bills be narrowly limited to those that fell exclusively within the categories set out in Article 110.
- The Aadhaar Act, which established a biometric database and set up an authority (the UIDAI) to administer it, raises question mark to passing it as a "money bill" simply because the funds for the Authority came from the Consolidated Fund of India.

- The verdict on Aadhar case, may motivate the governments, which does not enjoy majority in the upper house to bypass Rajya Sabha scrutiny on a range of important issues by simply inserting a provision specifying that money for a project is to come from the Consolidated Fund.

Conclusion:

- In 1973, the American historian Arthur M. Schlesinger coined the term "Imperial Presidency", to characterise the increasing concentration of power in the office of the President, at the cost of other democratic institutions (such as the U.S. Congress and the Senate).
- Over the last few decades, many scholars have noticed this drift towards the increased powers of the political executive, across liberal democracies.
- The Supreme Court's decisions on Articles 110 (money bills) have concentrated greater power in the hands of the executive. By expanding the scope of what counts as money bills, the court has set the cabinet down the road of transforming itself into a Roman-style imperator.

Connecting the dots:

- The doctrine of separation of powers is imperative for the smooth functioning of a vibrant democracy. Substantiate.
- Separation of powers is not a possibility in Indian governance. Comment.
- The doctrines of 'separation of power' and 'checks and balances' enshrined in the Indian Constitution are dotted by contradictions. Do you agree? Substantiate by taking suitable examples.

EC's new norms laudable, now to implement them well

Introduction:

- Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora announced that Elections to the 17th Lok Sabha will be conducted in seven phases across the country from April 11 to May 19. The counting will be on May 23.
- The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) came into effect immediately on the announcement of the schedule.

Do you know?

- The MCC lays down a list of do's and don'ts for leaders and parties ahead of elections. Amongst other things, the code bars the government from announcing policy decisions.

- It is a set of guidelines issued to regulate political parties and candidates prior to elections.
- The rules range from issues related to speeches, polling day, polling booths, portfolios, content of election manifestos, processions and general conduct, so that free and fair elections are conducted.
- The MCC contains eight provisions dealing with general conduct, meetings, processions, polling day, polling booths, observers, the party in power, and election manifestos.
- The party must also avoid advertising at the cost of the public exchequer or using official mass media for publicity on achievements to improve chances of victory in the elections.

Is the Model Code of Conduct legally binding?
- The fact is the MCC evolved as part of the ECI's drive to ensure free and fair elections and was the result of a consensus among major political parties. It has no statutory backing.
- Simply put, this means anybody breaching the MCC can't be proceeded against under any clause of the Code. Everything is voluntary. The EC uses moral sanction or censure for its enforcement.
- The ECI can issue a notice to a politician or a party for alleged breach of the MCC either on its own or on the basis of a complaint by another party or individual. Once a notice is issued, the person or party must reply in writing — either accepting fault and tendering an unconditional apology or rebutting the allegation.

New regulations:
- All the election management related news would be monitored vigorously on all the major national and regional news channels for immediate action against any violation.
- Various social media platforms shall also remain under the close and stringent vigil of the Commission for any content aimed at vitiating the electoral process or designed to disturb peace, tranquility, social harmony and public order.
- The Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) responded and confirmed its eagerness to cooperate with the EC to uphold the integrity and legality of the political campaigns conducted on the platforms of the intermediaries.
- The intermediaries have already started awareness campaigns for users highlighting the EC activities.
- The exercise will cover awareness campaigns regarding unlawful conduct during election, particularly the prohibited period of 48 hours under Section 126 of the Representation of the People Act.

- The platforms have appointed grievance officers and will deploy fact checkers to identify fake news and other malpractices.

Conclusion:
- The above MCC just announced by the ECI and the Government decision earlier to make it compulsory for candidates in polls to submit details of I-T returns for the past five years and disclose details of wealth held overseas, are a resounding vote for **transparency and accountability**.
- ECI also requires candidates with criminal charges against them to declare the particulars of the charges thrice in newspapers and news channels should give voters an idea about the antecedents of the person hoping to represent the public interest in Parliament.
- The ECI will now require all EVMs to carry pictures of the candidate along with the party symbol. This will help the voter be sure that her **electoral choice is not tampered with**.
- The new norms draw up an environment in which the voter is able to **make an informed choice**.

Connecting the dots:
- What is the model code of conduct during elections? Does Election Commission have adequate powers to enforce it? Discuss.
- What do you understand by the Model Code of Conduct. Discuss its significance and drawbacks.
- Many Indian states are undergoing assembly elections. Analyse the role of Election Commission in organising fair and peaceful elections. Can you discuss some of the landmark achievements of this constitutional body?

Repeat MPs' assets rose 142%

Part of: GS Paper II and III – Corruption in Politics; Social issue; Polity

In news:
- The average financial assets of 153 re-elected Lok Sabha MPs grew by 142%, from ₹5.5 crore in 2009 to ₹13.32 crore in 2014, according to an analysis by National Election Watch and the Association for Democratic Reforms.
- Financial details of 153 sitting re-elected MPs fielded by various political parties have been taken from the recently filed affidavits by these MPs and the values of these financial assets have been compared to the corresponding values of the assets that the MPs showed in their affidavits from the previous elections.

Pic: https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2019/03/19/CNI/Chennai/TH/5_07/f35bdcaa_2
808643_101_mr.jpg

Political parties yet to comply with RTI Act

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Polity; Governance issues

In news:

- Despite a June 2013 ruling from the Central Information Commission (CIC) that they fall within the ambit of the transparency law, parties insist that they cannot be considered public authorities under the Act.
- Six years on, with another Lok Sabha election in the offing, the Supreme Court is set to adjudicate on the issue, with a petition filed jointly by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and RTI activist Subhash Chandra Agrawal coming up for hearing on March 26.
- Most political parties refused to comment publicly on the issue, saying it was sub judice.

Do you know?

- The issue goes back to October 2010, when ADR filed an RTI request seeking information on donations and contributions received by political parties.

- Of the six parties then recognised by the Election Commission as national parties, only one, the CPI, accepted that it was a public authority under the Act. (It later changed its stance.)
- ADR complained to the CIC, the highest appellate body under the RTI Act.
- In June 2013, a full bench of the CIC ruled that the national parties are public authorities under Section 2(h) of the Act, and directed them to make voluntary disclosures, appoint public information officers and respond to RTI applications.

Important value additions:
Central Information Commission (CIC) has passed order for bringing political parties under the purview of RTI act declaring them as public authorities. CIC has based its order on following reasons
- Political Parties are substantially financed by the Central Government.
- Public Character: The criticality of the role being played by these Political Parties in our democratic set up and the nature of duties performed by them.
- Elections are contested on party basis and Political Parties affect the lives of citizens, directly or indirectly and are continuously engaged in performing public duty.

However, political parties are reluctant come under RTI and have cited following reasons
- Political parties are not public authorities as they are not set up under the Constitution or any law enacted by Parliament – they can't be treated as an institution or establishment.
- If political parties come under the RTI it will affect their smooth internal functioning.
- Political rivals will start using RTI tool with malicious intent.
- There are already provisions in the Income Tax Act, 1961, and Representation of the People Act, 1951, which demand necessary transparency regarding financial aspects of political parties. These mechanisms ensure transparency in financial dealings of parties.
- Information about a political body is already in the public domain on the website of the Election Commission.

Bringing political parties under RTI would help in following ways
- Internal democracy in political parties.
- Bring financial transparency given 75% of funds received by political parties today are from anonymous sources. This would help check corporate-politician nexus, role of black money and foreign influence.
- Check corruption and nepotism within the political parties.
- This will be in line with the recommendations of ECI and Law commission for bringing Transparency in the political parties.
- Informed citizen and thus better decision making by voter.

Key cases dealing with death penalty and its application

- In **1980 verdict** (**Bachhan Singh v State of Punjab**) – the Supreme Court said that death penalty is constitutional but should be given only in the rarest of rare cases.
- In **1996 verdict** (**Ravji v. State of Rajasthan**) – the Supreme Court had ruled that while determining whether to award the death penalty "it is the nature and gravity of the crime" alone that demand consideration.
- **In 2009 verdict**, the Supreme Court, however, declared its earlier ruling in Ravji incorrect. The court held that even in those cases where the crime is brutal and heinous the criminal's antecedents, including his economic and social background, must have a bearing on the award of the death sentence.

In recent verdicts (while dealing with three different death penalty cases)
- In two of those cases, the court entirely absolved the accused from wrongdoing.
- While in the third the court not only found the accused guilty of murder, but also deserving of capital punishment.

Collectively, from the above cases, we can draw the following –
- How arbitrary the death penalty is?
- How its application is mired by a belief in conflicting values? and
- How the fundamental requirement of precision in criminal law has been replaced by a rhetorical cry for avenging crime by invoking the "collective conscience" of society?

Why retention of the death penalty utterly undermines India's moral foundations?
1. India's broken criminal justice system cannot support the death penalty:
- In many instances, the courts found several innocent men guilty of a heinous crime, brought them to the brink of execution. However, were later found to be innocent and acquitted. (Example - Ankush Maruti Shinde case)
- Such grave errors must trigger the moral honesty to accept that we are playing with fire by keeping the death penalty in such a system.

2. There's almost **no empirical evidence available showing that the death penalty actually deters crime**.
3. The **decision-making process of a Judge**:
- Life of the person depends on the reasons articulated by such honorable Justices.
- In this aspect, concerns over judge-centric variations of arguments have been raised in the past.
- There are several instances of "extremely uneven application" of the norms.

4. Public outrage and capital punishment
- In recent times, public outrage, the need for deterrence, and the clamor for a befitting punishment to render substantial justice have dominated the general discourse.

5. Disproportionate application of the sentence
- In India, the most economically and socially marginalized are the ones who suffer the most.
- According to Death Penalty India Report (DPIR) 74% of prisoners on death row, at the time of the study, were economically vulnerable, and 63% were either the primary or sole earners in their families.
- 76% of those sentenced to death belonged to backward classes and religious minorities, including all 12 female prisoners.

Conclusion
Thus, the question of capital punishment needs to be debated away from the general public discourse and on a higher moral plane where there shall be no death penalty in law, regardless of the nature, circumstances and consequences of an offence.

Connecting the dots:
- It is not the just the execution but the method that questions capital punishment. Comment.
- Irreversible miscarriage of justice in cases involving death penalty is one of the principal arguments put forward against capital punishment in India. Keeping in mind the dismal record of the judiciary in maintaining consistency in death penalty jurisprudence, do you think the time is ripe to abolish capital punishment in India? Examine.

SC issues notice to EC on plea to verify at least 50% VVPATs

In news:

- Supreme Court directed the Election Commission to respond to a petition filed by 21 Opposition parties demanding the random verification of at least 50% electronic voting machines (EVMs) using Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) in every Assembly segment or constituency.
- The petitioners said 'free and fair elections' were part of the basic structure of the Constitution.

Important Value Additions:

About VVPAT and its working

- Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) machines are used during election process to verify that the vote polled by a voter goes to the correct candidate.
- VVPATs are a second line of verification particularly and are particularly useful in the time when allegations around Electronic Voting Machines' tampering crop up.
- Parties have been making regular demands for VVPATs to be used during elections after alleging EVMs may not be completely secure and tamper proof.
- VVPAT system gives instant feedback to the voter showing that the vote polled has in fact been allotted against the candidate chosen.

Working procedure of VVPATs

- After a voter presses the button on the EVM against the chosen candidate, the VVPAT prints a slip containing name of the candidate and the election symbol and drops it automatically into a sealed box.
- The machines give the chance for the voter to verify their vote. The machine is placed in a glass case in a way that only the voter can see it.
- The slip is displayed to the voter for seven seconds after which the VVPAT machine cuts it and drops in into the storage box with a beep.
- The machines can be accessed, though, by the polling officials and not by the voter.
- The Election Commission of India has not conceded to any allegation that the EVMs used for polling can be tampered with. However, VVPATs have been used in some elections in a bid to counter all allegation of tampering.
- The Supreme Court of India, meanwhile, has for long held a supportive and extra cautious stand when it comes to voting. It had directed the EC in 2013 to introduce VVPAT in Lok Sabha Elections 2014 to improve voter confidence and ensuring transparency of voting. It was used in some phases but not in the entire polling process.

Statistical institute submits report on VVPAT to EC

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Polity; Constitution

In news:

- The Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) submitted the recommendations of an expert committee on the Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) slip verification to the Election Commission.
- The report titled "Random Sampling for Testing of EVMs via VVPAT Slip Verification" was handed over to Chief Election Commissioner.

- The Commission will examine the report to determine the course of action.
- In view of demands from various political parties to increase the percentage of the VVPAT slip counted during elections, the Commission had engaged the ISI to examine the issue of matching the slips with the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) results.

About VVPAT
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SC asks EC to increase the VVPAT count

Part of: GS Mains II – Polity; Constitutional bodies; Role of Judiciary

In news:
- Supreme Court held that VVPATs were "working absolutely right" and everything that the ECI did was based on expert statistical data.
- SC said it was in favour of **increasing the random physical verification of Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT)** in the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections.
- However, the EC said the current practice of physically checking the VVPAT paper slips of one randomly selected polling station in an Assembly constituency and each Assembly segment in the case of the Lok Sabha election was "all that is needed."
- The court directed the Election Commission to explain why it seemed to be "fully satisfied" with restricting the counting of VVPATs to one polling station.

Do you know?
- **Swamy case** – In 2013, in the Subramanian Swamy case, the Supreme Court held that the paper trail through VVPAT of votes cast was an indispensable requirement of free and fair elections.
- It was the SC which pushed EC into introducing the VVPATs in the first place. Supreme Court had faced stiff opposition from the Election Commission while brining in VVPATs.

India's First Lokpal: Pinaki Chandra Ghose

Why in news?

- Pinaki Chandra Ghose is set to be **India's first Lokpal**. (or first anti-corruption ombudsman)
- Pinaki is a former Supreme Court judge and current member of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)
- Recommended by High-level selection committee chaired by Prime Minister

Do you know?
- The Lokpal Act, which was passed in 2013 after a nationwide anti-corruption movement, provides for setting up of Lokpal at the centre and Lokayuktas in the States to probe corruption complaints against top functionaries and public servants, including the Prime Minister and the Chief Ministers.
- The government was prompted to make the selection after the Supreme Court set the February-end deadline.

Important Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act-2013
- It was notified on January 1, 2014.
- It provides for establishing a body to be called the Lokpal and headed by a Chairperson, who is or has been a Chief Justice of India, or is or has been a judge of the Supreme Court, or an eminent person who fulfils eligibility criteria as specified.
- Of its other members, not exceeding eight, 50% are to be judicial members, provided that not less than 50% of the members belong to the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs, minorities, and women.
- For states, the Act says: "Every State shall establish a body to be known as the Lokayukta for the State, if not so established, constituted or appointed, by a law made by the State Legislature, to deal with complaints relating to corruption against certain public functionaries, within a period of one year from the date of commencement of this Act.
- Lokpal will have an "Inquiry Wing, headed by the Director of Inquiry, for the purpose of conducting preliminary inquiry into any offence alleged to have been committed by a public servant punishable under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988.
- It will also have a "Prosecution Wing headed by the Director of Prosecution for the purpose of prosecution of public servants in relation to any complaint by the Lokpal under this Act". These are to deal with complaints against public servants; the chairperson and members of the Lokpal too come under the definition of "public servant".

Jurisdiction of Lokpal
- The Lokpal Act covers a wide range of public servants — from the Prime Minister, ministers and MP, to groups A, B, C and D officers of the central government.
- However, it does not allow a Lokpal inquiry if the allegation against the Prime Minister relates to international relations, external and internal security, public order, atomic energy and space.
- Also, complaints against the Prime Minister are not to be probed unless the full Lokpal bench considers the initiation of inquiry and at least 2/3rds of the members approve it. Such an inquiry against the Prime Minister (if conducted) is to be held in camera and if the Lokpal comes to the conclusion that the complaint deserves to be dismissed, the records of the inquiry are not to be published or made available to anyone.

Lokpal and its functions

In news:

- In previous day DNA, we read about Justice Pinaki Chandra Ghose, is to become the first Lokpal (or first anti-corruption ombudsman).
- P.C. Ghose, Chairman of national anti-corruption ombudsman selected.
- This comes five years after the President had given assent to the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013.
- The government was prompted to make the selection after the Supreme Court set the February-end deadline.
- Now that the Lokpal has been chosen, victims of corruption have a viable avenue of redress.

Do you know?
- The concept of an institutional mechanism, or an anti-corruption ombudsman, has been around for over 50 years.
- It (Lokpal) was finally enacted as a law in 2013, and came into effect on January 16, 2014. (Thanks to Anna Hazare's movement)
- Under the 2013 Act, the Lokpal should consist of a chairperson and such number of members, not exceeding eight, of whom 50% should be judicial members.

Appointment system: two-stage process
- A **search committee** has to be formed, which will recommend a panel of names to the high-power selection committee.

- **High-power selection committee** comprises the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, the Leader of the Opposition, the Chief Justice of India (or his nominee) and an eminent jurist.
- The selection panel has to choose from a short-list consisting of names for the posts of Lokpal chairperson, and judicial and non-judicial members.

What happens after these selections to anti-corruption ombudsman?
- Lokpal helps to fight corruption in high places, as it probes corruption complaints against top functionaries and public servants, including the Prime Minister and the Chief Ministers.

The Lokpal will set about creating its various wings:
- It will have an "**Inquiry Wing**, headed by the **Director of Inquiry**, for the purpose of conducting preliminary inquiry into any offence alleged to have been committed by a public servant punishable under the **Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988**".
- It will also have a "**Prosecution Wing**, headed by the **Director of Prosecution**, for the purpose of prosecution of public servants in relation to any complaint by the Lokpal under this Act".
- Once the other members of the Lokpal are appointed, the process for more appointments will start: Secretary, Director of Inquiry and Director of Prosecution and other officers and staff of the Lokpal.

What kind of public servants will come under the purview of these wings?
- Wide range of public servants — from the Prime Minister, ministers and MPs, to groups A, B, C and D employees of the central government.
- The Act does not allow a Lokpal inquiry if the allegation against the Prime Minister relates to international relations, external and internal security, public order, atomic energy and space.
- Also, complaints against the Prime Minister are not to be probed unless the full Lokpal bench considers the initiation of an inquiry and at least two-thirds of the members approve it.
- Such an inquiry against the Prime Minister (if conducted) is to be held in camera and if the Lokpal comes to the conclusion that the complaint deserves to be dismissed, the records of the inquiry are not to be published or made available to anyone.
- The Act also includes the Lokpal's own members under the definition of "public servant".
- It shall apply to public servants in and outside India, the Act states.
- It clarifies that "a complaint under this Act shall only relate to a period during which the public servant was holding or serving in that capacity."

Connecting the dots:

- Is the office of the Lokpal independent of the government and others whom it is mandated to scrutinise? Examine.
- What is an ombudsman? Discuss its efficacy as an institutional measure to curb corruption.
- What are the institutional mechanisms to curb corruption? Are they effective? What role can Lokpal play in curbing corruption? Analyse.

RBI governor bats for permanent status to Finance Commission

According to RBI governor Shaktikanta Das –

- While it is important to adhere to fiscal deficit targets (fiscal consolidation roadmap), it is equally important to undertake robust expenditure planning to address the socio-economic challenges.
- Geopolitical risks have necessitated higher expenditure on defence and internal security. Natural calamities and disasters have called for higher expenditure on relief and rehabilitation. However, in order to fulfill the aspirations of people and the country as a whole, the government needs to spend more on developmental programmes.

RBI governor on Finance Commission

- According to Das, finance commissions have over the past several decades adopted different approaches with regard to principles of tax devolution, grants to be given to states and fiscal consolidation issues.
- He called for framework where the focus is on fresh and innovative thinking by every finance commission.
- There is a need to ensure broad consistency between finance commissions so that there is some degree of certainty in the flow of funds, especially to the states.
- RBI Governor also said that there is a need to give permanent status to the Finance Commission and constitution of State Finance Commissions every five years.
- According to him, a commission can function lean till the next finance commission is set up in a full-fledged manner.

Conclusion:

India's great wealth rests in its diversity. To recognise this diversity is also to recognise that States will follow diverse paths of development.

The Finance Commission must facilitate diversity and a democratic path of development by respecting principles of equity and fairness in allocating resources between the Centre and States in India.

Connecting the dots:
- Examine the significance of Finance Commission in the post GST era.
- The concept of cooperative federalism has been increasingly emphasised in recent years. Highlight the drawbacks in the existing structure and extent to which cooperative federalism would answer the shortcomings. (UPSC mains 2015)
- There must be recognition of the potential of State Finance Commissions in building regional equity. Critically examine the present status of fiscal federalism at state-local government level.

Code of Ethics for social media

Context:

- Ever since the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, new media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp, have become political battlegrounds.
- These spaces of electioneering have remained unregulated because the Representation of People Act (RPA), 1951, does not cover social media.
- However, recently, the Election Commission (EC) and Internet and Mobile Association of India — the body that represents social media firms — took a decisive step towards plugging this gap.

Code of Ethics
- The two agencies – EC and Internet and Mobile Association of India – agreed on a Code of Ethics for social media.
- Social media outfits are expected to follow this code during the Lok Sabha elections.
- The 'Çode of Ethics' is a voluntary mechanism to help conduct transparent and fair elections in India.
- The Code emphasises transparency and stresses on measures to "prevent abuse of social media platforms".
- However, adherence to the Code is voluntary and much will depend on the measures taken by individual social media outfits to put the document's guidelines into practice.

Section 126 of the Representation of People Act (RPA)

- Section 126 of the RPA prohibits political parties and candidates from campaigning in the two days before voting.
- EC panel suggested to bring social media platforms under the Act's ambit so that voters are "afforded a period of reflection".
- The EC panel suggested that these new media platforms should abide by the EC's guidelines about taking down "objectionable content" within three hours of a notice. However, social media outfits did not agree with this recommendation.

Code plugs the gap:
- But the Code addresses the above EC's concerns: "Valid legal orders will be acknowledged and/ or processed within three hours for **violations reported under Section 126**".
- Also welcome is the Code's insistence on **"transparency in paid political advertisements".** Any political advertisement posted without the EC's certification and notified as such by the EC will be acted upon expeditiously, the Code says.
- The **Code asks social media firms to train the EC's nodal officers** on how their "platforms work and on mechanisms for sending requests on dealing with offensive material".
- These companies will also **develop a "reporting mechanism"** through which the poll watchdog can inform the platforms about "potential violations of Section 126".

Conclusion:

Considering that over one-third of India's 1.3 billion population has access to an internet connection, warding off political bias on online platforms in primarily going to depend on the capability of social media companies to monitor content.

The Code's success will depend, in large measure, on how these channels of communication work. In the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections, the conduct of the social media firms — and the EC — will be watched.

Connecting the dots:
- Examine how social media can alter the outcome of an election. Discuss the recent measures taken by the Election Commission to prohibit the social media influence on elections.
- Write an Essay; "Social media: An Enabler or Polarizer".

CAG Report unearths anomalies in border area development programme

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II and III – Governance issues; Government schemes and policies; Corruption; Infrastructure; Security challenges and their management in border areas

In news:
According to CAG report on implementation of **Border Area Development Programme (BADP)** from 2012-2017 along Mizoram's border with Myanmar –

- Mizoram's Rural Development department and block development officers of Champhai and Lungsen Blocks hired **"earth excavators"** for 67 road projects along the border.
- A cross-check of the registration numbers of the "earth movers" mentioned in money receipts with the State Transport Department revealed they were two-wheelers, three-wheelers, and small cars.
- The report criticised the Myanmar government for wasteful and doubtful expenditures and creating idle assets under the BADP.

Do you know?
- Earlier in Feb 2019, CAG had slammed Arunachal govt for anomalies in border dev plan (BADP)

About Border Area Development Programme (BADP)
- The BADP was started in the country during the 7th Plan period (1985-1990) for two reasons - balanced development of sensitive border areas through adequate provision of infrastructure facilities, and promoting a sense of security among the local population residing in border areas.
- The BADP has been implemented through 17 States (viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and West Bengal) which constitute the International Land Borders.
- The main objective of the BADP is to meet the special developmental needs and wellbeing of the people living in remote and inaccessible areas situated near the international border and to saturate the border areas with the entire essential infrastructure through convergence of Central/ State/ BADP/ Local schemes and participatory approach.
- The funds under BADP are provided to the States as a 100% non-lapsable Special Central Assistance.
- The BADP schemes include construction of primary health centres, schools, supply of drinking water, community centres, connectivity, drainage to enable sustainable living in border areas.

- It also covers schemes or activities relating to Swachhta Abhiyan, skill development programmes, promotion of sports activities in border areas, promotion of rural tourism, border tourism, protection of heritage sites, and construction of helipads in remote and inaccessible hilly areas, which do not have road connectivity.

About Comptroller and Auditor General of India
- Article 148 provides for an independent office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG).
- He is the head of the Indian Audit and Accounts Department.
- He is the guardian of the public purse and controls the entire financial system of the country at both the levels the Centre and the state.
- His duty is to uphold the Constitution of India and laws of Parliament in the field of financial administration.

'Politics and Society' Survey

In news:

- A public opinion survey in 12 States has found that **political parties are the most distrusted political institutions** in the country.
- The survey, Politics and Society between Elections 2019, found that **political parties had a negative net trust rate** of -55%. (They are the only institutions with a negative net rate.)
- Army is the most trusted institution in the country, with an effective trust rate of 88%.
- Judiciary — including the Supreme Court, High Courts and district court — enjoys an effective trust rate of more than 60%.

Do you know?
- Apart from measuring institutional trust, the survey attempts to provide a glimpse into people's views on governance, sexuality, gender, nationalism, populism, caste and religious identities.
- One in five among those surveyed felt that unemployment was the single biggest issue facing the country today.
- Other issues cited include development, growth and poverty (15%) and law, governance and corruption (13%).

A blow against Article 370 and Federalism

The below article deals with –

- Constitutional relationship between J&K and the Indian Union
- Gradual Erosion of J&K special status under Article 370

Context:
On March 1, 2019, the **77th** and **103rd constitutional amendments** were extended to Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) **by a presidential order**, with the concurrence of the J&K Governor.

- **77th constitutional amendment –** relates to reservations in promotions for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the State services
- **103rd constitutional amendment –** relates to special provisions for the advancement of economically weaker sections (10% reservation in education and government jobs to EWS)

However, a petition was been filed in the Jammu and Kashmir High Court challenging the extension of above amendments of the Indian Constitution to the J&K state through a presidential order.

The above issue has rekindled the long-standing debate on the continued relevance of Article 370.

Do you know?

- As in Article 370, the provisions of the Indian Constitution do not automatically apply to J&K.
- To extend constitutional provisions and amendments to the State, **a presidential order to that effect has to be passed**.
- This order **requires the concurrence of the State government**, where the subject matter does not relate to the subjects specified in the Instrument of Accession (defence, external affairs, and communications). For other cases, **only consultation is required**.

Background

- Various provisions of the Indian Constitution were extended to J&K through presidential order. (First such order was passed in 1954)
- The 1954 order was made with the concurrence of the State government and also ratified by the State Constituent Assembly.
- After the J&K Constitution came into effect in 1957, the State Constituent Assembly was dissolved.
- Since then, more than 40 such orders have been made, through which most constitutional provisions have been extended to the State.

A slow death

- The sheer number of such orders, as well as the circumstances under which they were made, have considerably eroded J&K's special status under Article 370.
- From the 1950s there has been a **gradual dilution of the procedural norms** followed by these presidential orders.
- While passing the 1954 order, procedural propriety was followed in the fullest possible sense with concurrence from an elected State government and also State Constituent Assembly.
- However, the presidential orders made after the dissolution of the State Constituent Assembly — except a **1986 order extending Article 249**, and the **present 2019 order** — can be seen as the first level of dilution. (**Reason** – Though concurrence of an elected State government was obtained, the State Constituent Assembly did not exist and, therefore, could not give its ratification.)

(**Article 249** deals with **Power of Parliament to legislate with respect to a matter in the State List** in the national interest.)

- The **1986 order** represents a second level of dilution. This is because it was made when J&K was under **Governor's rule** as per Section 92 of the J&K Constitution. (Governor acting without a popularly elected government can be considered as a "state government" for the purposes of concurrence)
- In the absence of an elected council of ministers, the Governor could not have validly given the requisite concurrence to the presidential order.
- 1986 order was challenged in the J&K High Court and is still pending.

The recent 2019 order can be considered third level of dilution.

- In December 2018, the **President assumed all the functions of the State government** and the Governor through a **proclamation under Article 356**.
- In an order passed on the same day, the **President directed that all powers assumed by him would be exercisable by the Governor** as well, "subject to the superintendence, direction, and control of the President".
- During Governor's rule, as was the case in 1986, the Governor is at least on paper expected to act independently.
- However, in the present case involving President's rule, the Governor is reduced to a mere delegate of the Centre and is expected to act as per the aid and advice of the Central Government.
- A presidential order made through obtaining such a Governor's concurrence is tantamount to the Centre talking into a mirror and makes a mockery of Article 370.

In crux, we can sum up that there is gradual erosion of J&K status under Article 370, due to –

1. No Ratification from State Constitutional Assembly
2. No Concurrence of State Government (extended through Governor's Rule)
3. Presidential Rule instead of Governor's Rule

2019 Order: Against the spirit of Federalism –
- The manner in which the 2019 order was made also goes against the spirit of federalism, which is a salient constitutional principle.
- President's rule is an exception to the general constitutional scheme that envisages representative government at the State level to accommodate regional aspirations.
- Extending constitutional provisions to the State during this exceptional state of affairs is suspicious.
- If the Centre had legitimate intentions, it should have waited until the formation of an elected government in J&K. In the absence of popular will backing it, the 2019 order clearly falls foul of the principles of constitutional and political morality.

Connecting the dots:
- The recent 2019 Presidential order extended to Jammu and Kashmir against federalism and the spirit of Article 370. Do you agree? Critically evaluate.

SOCIAL ISSUE/WELFARE

Manipur 'considering' ST status for Meiteis

Do you know?

- The Meitei people are the majority ethnic group of Manipur and because of this they are sometimes referred to as Manipuris.
- Generally speaking, Meitei is an endonym and Manipuri is an exonym.
- The Meitei people are made up of seven clans, who trace their written history back to 33 AD.
- The Meitei people speak the Meitei language, a Tibeto-Burman language.
- Meiteis believe that the ancestor of one of their clans manifested himself as Pakhangba, a mythical dragon.

Mukti, an alliance to combat bonded labour

Part of: GS Mains II – Role of NGOs or Civil Society Organizations; Social/Welfare issue

In news:
- Over 60 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from across Karnataka came together to form Mukti.
- Mukti is an alliance to end bonded labour and human trafficking.
- The alliance is an excellent example of how various institutions of government, civil society, and concerned citizens have come together to collaborate and address the issue.

Ayushman Bharat cover for Uber cab drivers

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Health issue; Welfare/Social issue

In news:
- The Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) has joined hands with Uber to extend health cover to their driver and delivery partners.
- The facility will not be available in Delhi, Odisha and Telangana — States that have not joined AB-PMJAY.

Ayushman Bharat National Health Protection Scheme (AB-NHPS)
- The scheme aims to provide coverage of ₹5 lakh per family annually and benefiting more than 10 crore poor families in the country.
- AB-NHPM will subsume the on-going centrally sponsored schemes — Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) and the Senior Citizen Health Insurance Scheme (SCHIS).

Salient features of the AB-NHPM scheme:
- This scheme has the benefit cover of Rs. 5 lakh per family per year. The target beneficiaries of the proposed scheme will be more than 10 crore families belonging to poor and vulnerable population based on SECC database.
- The Rs. 5 lakh per family a year cover will take care of almost all secondary care and most of tertiary care procedures. To ensure that nobody is left out (especially women, children and elderly) there will be no cap on family size and age in the scheme.
- The benefit cover will also include pre- and post-hospitalisation expenses.
- All pre-existing conditions will be covered from day one of the policy.
- A defined transport allowance per hospitalisation will also be paid to the beneficiary.
- Also, benefits of the scheme are portable across the country and a beneficiary covered under the scheme will be allowed to take cashless benefits from any public/private empanelled hospital across the country.
- AB-NHPM will be an entitlement based scheme with entitlement decided on the basis of deprivation criteria in the SECC database.

A systematic approach to reform education

Context:

- Despite enormous and well-meaning efforts, the policy makers have failed to deliver quality learning outcomes to the children.
- Concerted efforts like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, and initiatives like mid-day meals have ensured to solved the problem of access to school education for our children.
- With gross enrolment crossing 100%, the focus now has to shift to improving learning outcomes.

How to improve learning outcomes?
- **Effective Assessment Mechanism** – Timely assessment by National Achievement Survey (NAS) and other studies like Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), will help to sustain quality.

- **Shift in the thinking of policymakers** – Learning outcomes depends on various factors such as good infrastructure, quality teachers, books, uniforms, etc. Therefore, it is important to track all these educational inputs to understand the overall outcomes of the system.
- **Active role by both state and non-state actors** – States should undertake various initiatives to revamp the quality of school education, often bringing on board the services of non-state actors to support interventions like improving classroom pedagogy, teacher training, and tech-enabled learning.

However, above piecemeal initiatives won't help to improve student learning in any meaningful way, unless accompanied with administrative reforms aimed at creating a new systemic approach to reforming education.

Need for a new systemic approach:
- **A clear comprehensive road map:** The new systemic approach involves **aligning all stakeholders** and orienting their collective efforts **towards following a single and "comprehensive transformation road map"** towards better learning outcomes.
- **Academic interventions:** adoption of grade competence framework instead of just syllabus completion, as well as other initiatives like effective delivery of remedial education for weaker students rather than earlier stand-alone interventions.
- **Administrative reforms:** Administrative reforms such as enabling and incentivizing teachers to perform better through data-driven insights, training, and recognition.
- **More time to teachers:** Interventions are need to ensure that teachers have more time available in the classrooms and are empowered to tailor their content to the learning needs of their students, resulting in improved quality of "in-classroom transactions". Implementing both systemic (tech platforms) and human enablers will help.
- **Robust accountability system:** A robust accountability system is required wherein there is a clear articulation of the roles and responsibilities of all relevant stakeholders, and the administration is empowered to act where necessary.
- **User-friendly dashboards:** User-friendly dashboards that assist education officials and the state leadership in decision-making.

Conclusion:
- Apart from enabling and aligning incentives of all stakeholders, there is a need to hold them accountable. Only then we can shorten the distance between the nation's current state of education and its aspirations.

Connecting the dots:

- Highlight the challenges and the reforms needed in Indian education policy with respect to primary and higher education.
- An unacceptably large number of Indian children are attending school but not learning enough. The issue of low learning trap is not just with Indian but is a global epidemic. The need of the hour is planned action and evidence-based policymaking. Discuss.

Transforming education outcomes

Context:

- The education department has the **largest share of employees**. Besides the frontline service providers (teachers), there are a number of other officials and administrators who form an important part of the educational set-up.
- Therefore, given the size of the education department, any effort to introduce education reforms must **ensure that the incentives of all stakeholders are aligned throughout the system** to ensure their participation.
- A successful example of implementing such a road map can be seen in Haryana, which has created a race among its administrative blocks to be declared as 'Saksham' (which means abled/skilled) i.e. have 80% or more students who are grade level competent.

The Haryana Case Study: Saksham programme

- After a string of poor results in the board exams, the Annual Survey of Education Report (ASER) and the National Assessment Survey (NAS), **Haryana decided to go for systematic transformation** and a **Quality Improvement Programme** was launched from 2014 to 2017.
- The **Saksham Haryana programme** was started in **2017** on a mission mode.

How Saksham scheme has brought transformation?

Student assessment tests

- In the new scenario, the state conducts student assessment tests (SAT) for all classes every two months. The State Council of Education Research and Training prepares the tests.
- The performance at the level of a school and a teacher can be **monitored online through a dashboard** to which District Education Officers, teachers, and school heads have access. The tests are both objective and subjective.

Saksham Ghoshna

- Under this campaign, State officials nominate their block for the 'Saksham Ghoshna' once they are reasonably confident that their block has achieved the 80% target — as a result of remedial programmes, teacher training and internal assessments.
- This self-nomination is then followed by rigorous rounds of third party assessments to vet their claims.

Third party assessment
- On the basis of the performance in SAT, schools are nominated for the Saksham test conducted by a third party, again every two months.
- A scientific sampling method is used to choose schools, which offer best representation of rural, urban, boys, girls, primary and secondary schools.

Remedial teaching
- Under the **Learning Enhancement Programme (LEP)**, remedial teaching is done for all classes for an hour in the morning.
- Under the **Digital Learning Enhancement Programme (DigiLEP)**, 28,000 primary teachers have been connected through 145 WhatsApp groups. Videos of subject experts are shared on these chat groups.

Monitoring
- The Saksham programme is reviewed by the SDM at the block level and by the Deputy Commissioner at the district level every month while at the state level it is reviewed by the Chief Minister quarterly.
- Then the Additional Chief Secretary Education conducts a bi-monthly check with Deputy Commissioners every month.

Do you know?
- According to the latest third party assessment in February 2019, 94 blocks out of a total of 119 in Haryana have been declared 'Saksham' and overall grade competence has been assessed at 80%, which is a giant leap in learning outcomes when compared to the overall grade competence of 40% in 2014.
- Given these early successes, many other States are also embarking on such programmes.
- **NITI Aayog** has developed the State-level **'School Education Quality Index' (SEQI)**. It gives scores to States based on their educational performance and puts this data out in the public domain.

About 'School Education Quality Index' (SEQI)

- The SEQI is a composite index that will report annual improvements of States on key domains of education quality, conceptualized and designed by NITI Aayog and the MHRD.
- SEQI seeks to make improvements in learning outcomes a focal point of governance.
- The SEQI uses three data sources – including the National Achievement Survey (NAS)
- In order to precisely report the quality of education imparted across India, the SEQI is divided into two categories: Outcomes and Governance & Management.

NITI Aayog's Aspirational Districts programme
- It was launched in early 2018
- This landmark programme recognises the disparities in development across states and districts
- It focuses on transforming 115 districts across 28 states that have witnessed the least progress along certain development parameters.
- Here, 112 under-served districts across the country compete with each other in order to achieve targets in five crucial sectors; these include education, which has among a weightage of 30%.
- These districts are monitored real-time and ranked on the basis of their progress.

Conclusion:
The valuable lesson from all this is that inducing competition among administrative units helps invigorate key stakeholders to work in tandem in order to achieve intended outcomes.

Competition also makes abstract goals such as 'learning outcomes' more real.

Further, with encouragement from above, such campaigns lead to a shift in the mindset of a State's education administrators, many of whom otherwise believe that high learning outcomes are almost unachievable.

Political commitment to improving the quality of education backed by strong review and monitoring mechanisms can spur meaningful activity in States.

Improvement in learning outcomes is an immediate goal for India to fulfil its aspirations of playing a greater role in the global economy and a systemic transformation is the best solution that we have so far.

Connecting the dots:
- The Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP) is a radical departure from the country's previous development strategies in its scale, scope and ownership. Analyze.

- Improvement in learning outcomes is an immediate goal for India. Discuss recent measures taken by the government to meet that goal.

The flawed unit of academic quotas

Introduction:

- Recently, the Union government promulgated an ordinance to undo the Allahabad High Court's judgment in Vivekanand Tiwari (2017) which had relied on a number of other High Courts and a few apex court judgments such as Suresh Chandra Verma (1990), Dina Nath Shukla (1997) and K. Govindappa (2009) that had made **'department' rather than 'university' as the unit of reservation in universities.**

Ordinance to restore the 200-point system
- The Cabinet cleared an ordinance to change the formula for implementing reservations in teaching posts in universities.
- The ordinance seeks to bring back the older system of taking the entire college/university as the unit for implementing reservations (the so-called '200-point roster'), rather than the individual department ('13-point roster' system), as prescribed by the Allahabad High Court and the Supreme Court.

Rational of Judiciary for Department rather than University as Unit of Reservation:
- Judiciary criticised the UGC for applying reservation in teaching jobs in a "blanket manner".
- The Judiciary held that – "If the University is taken as a 'Unit' for every level of teaching and applying the roster, it could result in some departments/subjects having all reserved candidates and some having only unreserved candidates. (This) would be discriminatory and unreasonable (and)... violative of Article 14 and 16".

Our courts have used the differences between 'cadre', 'service' and 'post' to arrive at the conclusion that 'department' should be unit of reservation.

So though lecturers, readers and professors in a university have the same scale and allowances in their respective cadres, they cannot be clubbed together. Since there is no scope for interchangeability of posts in different disciplines, each single post in a particular discipline is be counted as a separate post.

Issues with Reservation based on Department:

- Reservation based on department or subject as unit means the number of reserved posts at the level of, say, assistant professor, will be determined separately for each department — based on the total assistant professor posts in each department.
- Therefore, a department that has only one professor cannot have reserved posts — which will have the effect of drastically reducing the number of SC, ST, and OBC teachers in higher education.
- Also, departments with two or more faculty posts, but fewer than 15 in a cadre, will have only one reserved for an SC candidate at serial number 7, and for an ST candidate at serial number 14.
- So, if a department has only six associate professor-level posts, none will be reserved for SC and ST candidates. Reservation will only be implemented by rotation, which experts say could take years.
- A projection presented by BHU to the HRD Ministry last year showed that if the university were to use the 13-point formula, the posts reserved for SCs would be reduced by half, those for STs by almost 80%, and those for OBC teachers by 30%.
- The government used this projection before the Supreme Court, and argued that the Allahabad HC judgment "drastically reduces, and, in many departments completely wipes out, the representation of members of SC/ST community".

According to data compiled by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment on teaching posts generated across several universities since the UGC order of March 2018 (13 point formula), of the 706 vacancies advertised by 11 central universities, only 2.5% posts were for SCs and none for STs. It is to change this situation that the present ordinance has been brought.

If SC/ST candidates do not become professors, they cannot become vice-chancellors as only a professor with 10-year experience is eligible for this. In 2018, out of some 496 vice-chancellors of Central and State universities, there were just six SC, six ST and 48 OBC vice-chancellors.

Moreover even with the 'university' as the unit, in over 40 Central universities we have huge under-representation of SCs and STs especially at the level of professor and associate professor.

Do you know?
Judiciary and Legislature Tussle over reservation in History:
- The 77th constitutional amendment of 1995, which was recently extended to Kashmir, restored reservation in promotions as a nine-judge bench of the Supreme Court in Indra Sawhney (1992) while upholding Other Backward Classes reservation based on Mandal Commission recommendations had prohibited Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe (SC/ST) reservation in promotions.

- The 81st constitutional amendment was made to overturn the Supreme Court's decision against the 'carrying forward' rule, which permitted the filling of unfilled reserved seats in subsequent years.
- Similarly, the 85th constitutional amendment was passed in 2001 to restore consequential seniority to promote SC/ST employees as a 'catch-up' rule introduced by the court in Ajit Singh (1999) was causing hardship to SC/ST employees.

Conclusion:
- The government deserves appreciation for the ordinance, though brought in belatedly on the eve of the elections to garner Dalit votes.
- But more needs to be done to improve diversity, with more SCs, STs, OBCs, Muslims, persons with disabilities and sexual minorities being recruited as faculty.
- The score on the diversity index should be given a major criterion while giving grants to universities.

Connecting the dots:
- The representation of SCs, STs, and OBCs among teachers in higher education is abysmal. Discuss what measures need to be taken to overturn this situation.

Cabinet Okays ECHS facilities for veterans

Part of: GS Mains II - Social/Welfare issue; Government schemes and programmes

In news:
- The Cabinet approved the grant of **Ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme (ECHS)** facilities to Second World War veterans, Emergency Commissioned Officers, Short Service Commissioned Officers and premature retirees.
- This would benefit over 43,000 individuals who were so far not covered under the ECHS.

About ECHS facility:
- The facility allows them to get **cashless medical treatment** through a network of over 425 ECHS polyclinics, 2,500 empanelled private hospitals and all government hospitals throughout the country, subject to certain conditions.
- Also, as a special dispensation, war-widows will be exempt from one-time contribution to join the ECHS.
- Launched by the NDA government in April 2003, the facility **provides quality medicare** to 54 lakh ex-servicemen pensioners, their dependants and a few other categories.

10% economic reservation law

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Social/Welfare issue; Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population

In news:
- Supreme Court decided to consider the question of whether the challenge to the 10% economic reservation law should be heard by a Constitution Bench.
- The court refused to pass any interim order to stay or hamper the implementation of the Constitution (103rd Amendment) Act that provides for 10% reservation in government jobs and educational institutions to the economically backward in the unreserved category.

The 10% economic reservation law was considered (by the petitioners) to be violating the basic features of the Constitution. 50% quota limit was part of the Basic Structure of the Constitution and the new amendment tinkered with it.

Under scrutiny

The 10% economic reservation law is being challenged for its constitutional validity

- The Act (103rd Constitutional amendment) allows the States to provide 10% quota for unreserved category exclusively with reference to their economic backwardness

- However, in 1992, a nine-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court in the famous Indra Sawhney case had ruled that "a backward class cannot be determined only and exclusively with reference to economic criterion"

- "It may be a consideration or basis along with and in addition to social back-wardness, but it can never be the sole criterion. This is the view uniformly taken by this court..." said the majority judgment authored by Justice (retired) B.P. Jeevan Reddy

- Further, the Indra Sawhney judgment had declared 50% quota as the rule unless extraordinary situations "inherent in the great diversity of this country and the people" happen

Compiled by Krishnadas Rajagopal

https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2019/03/12/DEL/Delhi/TH/5_01/50ea3011_2793288_101_mr.jpg

Migration in Bengal delta driven by livelihood issues, social factors

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains I and II – Society; Social issue; Migration issues

In news:
According to study titled **Deltas, Vulnerability and Climate Change: Migration and Adaptation (DECMA).**
- Economic reasons are the precipitating factor for migration in the Indian Bengal Delta that comprises the Sunderbans.
- There is huge gender disparity when it comes to those migrating from the region.

The study which covers 51 blocks of districts of South and North 24 Parganas also revealed that:
- 64% people migrate because of economic reasons, unsustainable agriculture, lack of economic opportunities and debt.
- 28 % of the migration from the region is for social reasons.
- About 7% for environmental reasons like cyclones and flooding.

Do you know?
- The study, held between 2014 and 2018 focused on three deltas Ganga Brahmaputra Meghna Delta (India and Bangladesh) Volta (Ghana) and Mahanadi (India) and looked into the aspect of climate change, adaptation and migration in these deltas.

On Gender disparity
- Men outnumbering women by almost five times. It shows that of the people migrating 83% are men and only 17 % are women. While most of the men migrate due to economic reasons, women do so, driven by mostly social factors.
- The DECMA report also finds that most migrants both in case of men and women are young, in the age group of 20-30 years.

Destination of migrations
- In terms of the destination of migrations, the study finds that 51% of migration from the Indian Bengal Delta is to other areas of the State particularly to the city of Kolkata, 10% to Maharashtra, 9% to Tamil Nadu, 7% Kerala and 6% to Gujarat.
- It shows that 57% of migration is seasonal, where people move once or twice a year; 19% is circular where those migrating move thrice a year irrespective of reasons and 24% permanent where people intend to stay for at least six months in the place they are migrating to.
- According to experts behind the study, one of the reasons for migration is failed adaptation in the areas which are under stress due to climate change.

Vulnerable areas

- In the study, experts also map the climate change hot spots and highest risk areas of Sunderbans based on an analysis of climate change hazards. The areas of Gosaba, Basanti, Kultali, Sagar, Kakdwip, Namkhana, Canning and Mathurapur (all in South 24 Parganas) have high levels of agriculture dependency and so are sensitive to climate hazards such as flood and salinity.

WOMEN ISSUE

A strange paradox for Indian women

Context:

- The very success of India's economic transformation brings with it a stark realization that it has not paid particular care and attention to women.
- The most promising sign of the improving conditions of Indian women lies in declining inequality in education.
- Almost all girls go to primary school and, according to the India Human Development Survey (IHDS) of 2011-12, 70% of girls aged 15 to 18 are still studying, only five percentage points less than boys. They frequently outperform boys.
- In 2018, in the Class xII C8SE examination, 88.31% girls passed, compared to 78.99% boys.
- However, in spite of rising education and rising aspirations, labour markets and social norms constrain women, almost as if they are all dressed up for a party with nowhere to go.

Issues in transformation of Education to Employment:

U-shaped relationship between Education and Employment
- Data from the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) and the IHDS show that education and employment have a U-shaped relationship.
- Illiterate women are most likely to participate in the workforce.
- Work participation drops sharply for women with primary and secondary education and rises only with college education.

Lack of white-collar jobs and inhospitable job environment for women
- White-collar jobs are either not available or demand long hours and offer little job security in this time of a gig economy.
- NSSO data for 25- to 59-year-old workers in 2011-12 show that among farmers, farm labourers and service workers, nearly one-third are women, while the proportion of women among professionals, managers and clerical workers is only about 15%.
- Young men with Class 10 or 12 education find jobs as mechanics, drivers, sales representatives, postmen and appliance repairmen. Few of these opportunities are available to women. (because of difficult working conditions and inhospitable environment). Sometimes employers avoid hiring women in these positions.

Marriage: major barrier

- Young women's lives are also circumscribed by social norms that shape their family situation.
- Marriage remains the only acceptable fate for young women in India. Whereas a third of Japanese women and 11% of Sri Lankan women aged 30-34 are single, less than 3% of Indian women are single at that age.
- Moreover, women's education does not seem to carry the same value in the 'marriage market' as caste, the family's economic status and horoscope.
- Research from other countries shows that educated women marry similarly educated men. But in India, women frequently marry men with lower education than themselves.

Therefore, we can conclude that for most of the women, rising education does not offer increasing income-earning opportunities or better marriage prospects.

Does it at least give women greater autonomy in other areas of their lives?
- Based on recent National Family Health Survey data, there seems to be little evidence that a moderate level of education offers women a greater say in household decisions or freedom of movement outside the home.
- College graduates fare slightly better, but even for them, the difference is relatively small.
- 48% of women with no schooling do not go to a health centre alone; the proportion for college graduates is only slightly lower at 45%.

Conclusion:
- Parents make tremendous sacrifices to educate their daughters, and young women joyously work hard at school in search of a better life, only to have their aspirations frustrated by economic and social barriers that restrict their opportunities.
- Another major concern is the way the political process sees women. Our political process sees women as an extension of the men in their households and assumes that no special effort is needed to win their hearts and minds.
- India needs to take gender segmentation as an opportunity. We need to increase women entrepreneurship. Thus women will be creating jobs and opportunities for themselves, and bringing other women on board. In short, if India's growth story has to translate into shared prosperity for all its people, then it cannot afford to have one half of its population sit out.

Connecting the dots:
- India is still a land of missing women. Do you agree? Examine how empowered is India's surviving female population in terms of access to basic rights?

Combating Sexual harassment at the workplace

Context:
- March 8 - International Women's Day
- Important to achieve women empowerment and gender equality

Key issues which needs top priority –

1. Sexual harassment at the workplace
2. Obstacles to women's participation at all levels of the workforce, including political representation

Sexual harassment at the workplace
- Much remains to be done in this area
- Year 2017-18 witnessed explosion of the #MeToo movement across social media
- Countless cases of unreported sexual harassment and assault were uncovered
- It led to the resignations or firing of dozens of prominent men, mostly politicians, actors and journalists.
- It also prompted a range of public and private organisations to examine the internal institutional cultures surrounding sexual harassment, gender parity, and gender equity. (including the UN)

UN strategies to deal with sexual harassment
- UN Secretary-General António Guterres has been a staunch supporter of women's rights and had stated for the need for "benchmarks and time frames to **achieve gender parity** across the system, well before the **target year of 2030**".
- In September 2017, the UN released a **System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity** to transform the UN's representation of women at senior levels. (Today the UN's Senior Management Group compromises of 23 women out of 44 top employees.)
- In response to the MeToo movement, the UN recently conducted a system-wide survey to gauge the prevalence of sexual harassment among its more than 200,000 global staff.

UN Survey pointed out that –
- Only 17% of UN staff responded and one in three UN women workers reported being sexually harassed in the past two years.
- The inter-governmental UN is affected by prevalent national cultures and UN has to find a way through contending blocs of countries that support or oppose women's rights' goals.
- Tracking performance on the Sustainable Development Goals will provide useful pointers for policymakers and advocates going forward.

Bringing the issue of gender inside the organisation, to reform its practices, will enable the UN to stand as an example of the rights it advocates.

Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013
- It lays down that every office in the country must have an internal complaints committee to investigate allegations of sexual harassment.
- However, with thousands of offices across the country, and barely any employee trained to handle sexual harassment, the Act suffers from certain infirmities.
- Indian political parties are proposing for broader structures, such as district or regional complaints committees, to play the role of office ones. (on the lines of UN Secretariat's single window structure for such complaints)
- However, UN Secretariat's single window structure does not apply across the organisation, UN agencies, including the multi-institute UN University that aims to achieve gender parity at the director level by end 2019.

In India, despite a large jump in complaints recorded, convictions have not shown a proportionate rise, largely due to poor police work.

Therefore, clearly both UN and India need further research. Gender reforms begin at home, not only in the family but also in the workplace.

Connecting the dots:
- The #metoo campaign is a reflection moral decline of Indian society. Comment.
- The Verma committee report noted that an internal complaints committee as laid down under the then proposed law would be "counter-productive" as dealing with such complaints in-house could discourage women from filing complaints. Do you agree? In your opinion what measures are needed to make Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act effective?

Women Safety still a distant dream

Context:

- In previous day's DNA we read about issues with Sexual Harassment at the Workplace Act and UN strategies to deal with sexual harassment.
- In below article, we will see why women safety is still a distant dream.

According to a study conducted by Thomson Reuters Foundation (in 2018) –

- India is ranked as the most dangerous place because of its high incidences of sexual violence, lack of access to justice in rape cases, child marriage, female feticide and human trafficking.
- India outranked countries like Syria (2nd) and Afghanistan (3rd) that are currently at war.
- India had topped the list because its government has done little to protect women since the controversial rape and murder of a young student in 2012 which prompted widespread outrage and changes in the country's rape laws.
- Gang rapes are reported day in, day out.
- India has miserably failed to provide the most basic right to women and girls — the right to live in a safe environment.

Concerns:
- **Physical mobility** is the primary and first capability that enables an individual to avail opportunities, enhancing his/her chances of moving ahead in life. Studies have confirmed that in comparison to boys, our girls have extremely low access to these opportunities, be it in education, technology, employment or life skills.
- A number of girls after being sexually violated by their close relatives or strangers **fail to lead a 'normal' life**, both sexual and social. Such is the **damage caused by these heinous acts that it is often irreparable**, leaving the victim mentally paralysed for life.
- Not only the poor victim, but also her parents and siblings **get labelled and stigmatised** by the community at large for generations to come.
- The moment a girl is sexually violated, the process of 'shaming' her and her family begins, making it often unbearable for them, too intimidating to fight the case.
- Ironically, the victims or their relatives commit suicide, while it is the rapists who should be killing themselves.
- A rape trial happens to be more traumatic for the victim and her family than for the offender and his kin.

Crux – Failure with gender sensitization
- It indicates that masculinity continues to draw its meaning from holding power over the female body, either within the home or outside.
- Our legal deterrents have failed to scare away the rapists.
- The Criminal Amendment Act of 2013 has failed to make people realise that 'staring' and 'stalking' a girl amount to threatening her, which is a criminal offence.
- Focus should be on boys and men, who continue to live with a feudal mindset, with the rotten ideas of masculinity and femininity, which have become obsolete.
- A society that tolerates persistent sexual violation of its daughters can certainly not be called developed, nor can it claim to be a great society with a rich cultural heritage.

We have terribly failed in providing a safe environment to our girls and women, and that is a reality which negates all the tall claims of gender equality in education, employment and politics.

Connecting the dots:
- The status of women in India had been declining from ancient to medieval times – before promotion of equal rights by various reformers. But even today, women face inequality and subjugation. Do you agree? Critically comment.
- Discuss the provisions in the Indian Constitution to safeguard women's rights. Also examine why there is a need for a National Policy for Women?

Fresh hope for more women in Parliament

Introduction

- This year, there is a trend of political parties throwing their weight behind the cause of a better gender balance in Parliament.
- Many political parties have announced that it would commit to the Women's Reservation Bill (108th Amendment Bill), which proposes that one-third of all Indian lawmakers be female.
- Some parties have also promised a 33% quota for women in government jobs if the Congress is voted to power.
- While the idea of affirmative action in favour of women dates back to the 1920s, so little has been done so far.

Do you know?
- According to the Election Commission's voter enrolment figures for 2019, women constitute 48.1% of the electorate.
- Also, the female turnout at ballot booths—66% in the general election of 2014—is now close to that of men.
- Yet, of eight South Asian countries, India ranks a poor fifth on women's representation in Parliament, with Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal doing better.
- In India, only one of every 10 Members of Parliament and every 15 legislators is a woman. Also, women who do get elected are often from families of politicians.

Changing trend
- Between 1957 and 2014, the count of women Lok Sabha contestants has increased from 45 to 668 (15-fold leap). Males saw only a 5-fold increase over that span.

- More and more women want to take the political plunge and frame public policies.
- Main factor which changes the trend – panchayati raj system (which has encouraged female political participation at the village level)

Do you know?
- In panchayati raj, a third of all seats are reserved for women, but they actually occupy nearly half these positions of local representation across the country. In many states, they make up more than half the local bodies.

Why do we need women in power?
As representatives, we need women –
- To eliminate the systemic biases and structural barriers that keep our girls out of the tech industry, our victims of gender-based violence in fear and our women's sports teams under-funded.
- To dismantle structural barriers, the responsibility falls on working women who have successfully overcome constraints to open the gates for other women.
- To design laws that encourage better education for girls.
- To secure financial independence and formal employment for women.
- To push up our abysmal female labour force participation rates.
- To ensure that female hygiene products are not taxed as luxury goods.
- In addressing systemic biases, exposure to women in office weakens stereotypes about gender roles. Watching women in leadership positions reduces the negative perceptions men have about their effectiveness as leaders. It also induces men to dream better dreams for their daughters, and that is no mean feat.

Conclusion:

Over the past few decades, women have made their mark as effective managers, bankers, professors, corporate leaders, lawyers, doctors and civil servants. These are women who know how to solve problems, get things done and manage multiple responsibilities. Electing able women professionals will help us simultaneously achieve better representation and expertise.

If inclusion and diversity are to go beyond platitudes in the political arena, then far more women need to be elected for legislative roles at higher levels of governance.

Connecting the Dots
- Socio-economic disadvantages and poor female political participation create a vicious cycle that needs to be broken. Discuss.
- Women in India haven't got a fair deal from either the government or the judiciary as far as protection of their individual liberties are concerned. Comment. Also examine the

ways in which women are changing the traditional gender discourse in India by taking suitable examples.

HEALTH ISSUE

Swine flu cases on the rise in Gujarat

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Health issue; Welfare/Social issue

In news:
- With more than 3000 cases and 99 deaths in two months, Swine Flu in Gujarat has become an epidemic as almost 100 new cases are reported from across the state per day.
- As per data released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP), several States are on alert.
- The high H1N1 flu toll points to a failure to put necessary systems and precautions in place.

Feeling the heat

In 2019, Rajasthan has recorded the maximum cases of swine flu, known for being a highly contagious and potentially fatal disease

SOURCE: INTEGRATED DISEASE SURVEILLANCE PROGRAMME

State	2018	2019*
Andhra Pradesh	402	24
Delhi	205	168
Gujarat	2,164	210
Haryana	61	128
Maharashtra	2,593	17
Punjab	47	46
Rajasthan	2,375	789
Tamil Nadu	2,812	48
Telangana	1,007	107

* till January 13

https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2019/01/23/CNI/Chennai/TH/5_09/71e527d2_268 2817_101_mr.jpg

Important Value Additions:

About H1N1 influenza (or swine flu)
- H1N1 virus is the subtype of influenza A virus that was the most common cause of human influenza in 2009. H1N1 flu is also known as swine flu caused by swine influenza virus that is endemic in pigs.
- The 'H' stands for hemagglutinin and 'N' for neuraminidase – both proteins on the outer layer of the virus.

- It is a pandemic outbreak – Means Disease outbreak occurs over a wide geographic area and affects a very high proportion of the population.
- Swine influenza is a respiratory disease that occurs in pigs that is caused by the Influenza A virus.
- It's a highly contagious disease that can easily spread from person to person.

About Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP)

- IDSP was launched with World Bank assistance in November 2004 to detect and respond to disease outbreaks quickly, for a period up to March 2010.
- The project was restructured and extended up to March 2012.
- The project continues in the 12th Plan with domestic budget as Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme under NHM for all States with Budgetary allocation of 640 Cr.
- Under IDSP data is collected on epidemic prone diseases on weekly basis.

Kyasanoor Forest Disease (KFD) or Monkey Fever

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Health issue

In news:

- For the first time, the virus causing Kyasanur Forest Disease, also known was monkey fever, has been found in tick pools from Hassan district in Karnataka.

Key pointers:

- Kyasanoor Forest Disease (KFD) is tick-borne viral hemorrhagic fever endemic to South Asia. The virus is transmitted to human beings through parasitic ticks which latch on to monkeys.
- KFD was first detected in the Kyasanur forest in Karnataka in 1957. Since then, between 400 and 500 human cases are reported each year in South Asia, mainly India.
- The disease is caused by Kyasanur forest disease virus (KFDV), a member of the virus family Flaviviridae, which also cause yellow fever and dengue.
- Rodents, shrews, and monkeys are common hosts for KFDV after being bitten by an infected tick. KFDV kills most primates it infects.
- The symptoms in humans include fever for more than 12 days, accompanied by cough, headache, diarrhoea and vomiting. The fever is followed by mental disturbances, tremors and vision deficits.
- Vaccination against monkey fever is used in endemic areas of India.

- Additional preventative measures include using insect repellents and wearing protective clothes in areas where ticks are endemic.

West Nile Virus

In News:
- As per the media reports, a seven-year-old boy from Malappuram District of Kerala is suffering from a West Nile Virus (WNV), a mosquito-borne disease, mostly reported in the continental United States.
- West Nile fever is spread by Culex mosquitoes and the infection could be confirmed only if the second samples test positive.
- Symptoms include fever, headache, tiredness, and body aches, nausea, vomiting, occasionally with a skin rash on the trunk of the body, and swollen lymph glands.
- The World Health Organisation (WHO) says West Nile virus transmits to humans through bites from infected mosquitoes. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds.

Do you know?
- West Nile virus can cause a fatal neurological disease in humans.
- Approximately 80% of West Nile virus infections in humans have few or no symptoms.
- WNV is found in temperate and tropical regions of the world.
- The virus was discovered in Uganda in 1937 and was first detected in North America in 1999.

Pic: https://iasbaba.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/PIB.jpg
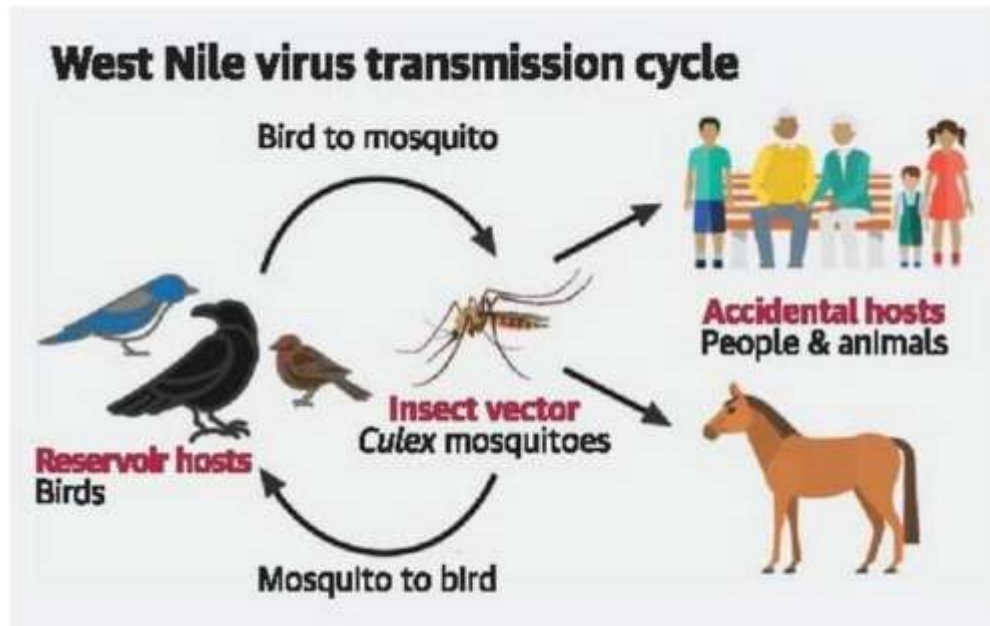
Nipah virus alert in Tripura

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II- Government internventions in key sectors; Health issue
In news:

- The Tripura government sounded an alert after the death of five members of a family in Nipah virus attack in a Bangladesh village bordering West Bengal.

Key pointers: About Nipah virus

- Nipah Virus is an emerging infectious disease that broke out in Malaysia and Singapore in 1998 and 1999.
- It first appeared in domestic pigs and has been found among several species of domestic animals including dogs, cats, goats, horses and sheep.
- The infection is also known to affect human beings.
- The organism which causes Nipah Virus encephalitis is an RNA or Ribonucleic acid virus.
- Nipah virus infection gets its name from the village in Malaysia where the person from whom the virus was first isolated succumbed to the disease.
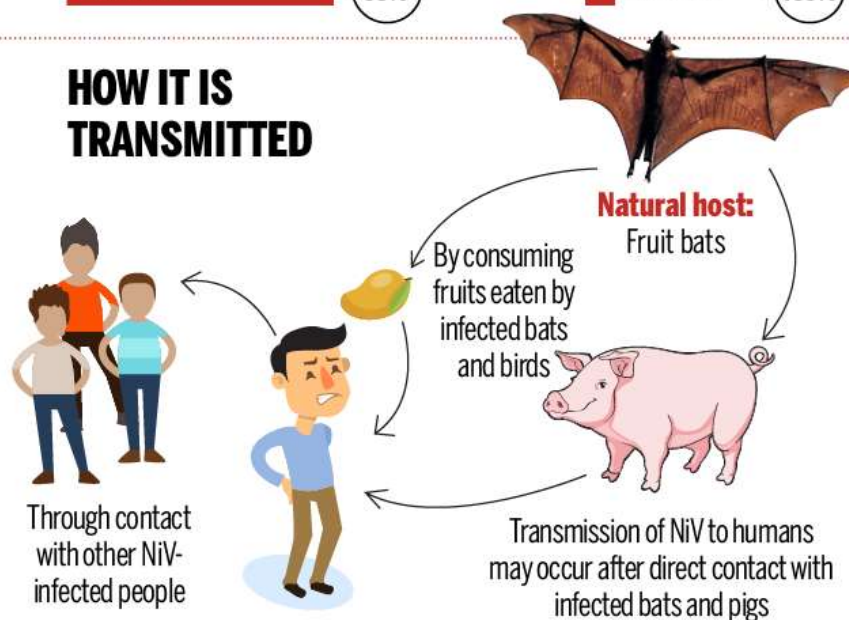
How does Nipah spread or get transmitted?
- The disease spreads through fruit bats or 'flying foxes,' of the genus Pteropus, who are natural reservoir hosts of the Nipah and Hendra viruses.
- The virus is present in bat urine and potentially, bat faeces, saliva, and birthing fluids.

- Nipah Virus, which is a zoonotic disease, was known to affect humans in Malaysia and Singapore after coming in direct contact with the excretions or secretions of infected pigs.

Symptoms of the Nipah infection:
- The human infection presents as an encephalitic syndrome marked by fever, headache, drowsiness, disorientation, mental confusion, coma, and potentially death.
- There is no specific treatment for Nipah Virus. The primary treatment for human cases is intensive supportive care.

India on the brink of a dry eye disease epidemic, says study

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II - Social Justice/Health

In news:
- For the first time, a large-scale, hospital-based study in India involving over 14.5 lakh patients had found the incidence (number of new cases occurring each year) of dry eye disease to be 21,000 (1.46%).
- At over 12,500 cases, the incidence in urban areas was higher than in rural areas (over 8,700 cases).
- With a large ageing population, growing middle-class and chronic nature of the disease, India is on the verge of a dry eye disease epidemic, says the study.
- The prevalence of dry eye disease will be about 40% of the urban population by 2030.
- Since the disease tends to be progressive with age, once corneal damage becomes irreversible it can lead to visual impairment and even blindness.
- Early diagnosis and treatment is therefore important.

Do you know?
- The disease is hugely underdiagnosed in India.
- The study was undertaken across 200 locations in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Karnataka between 2010 and 2018. The results were published in The Ocular Surface.
- The study found the onset of dry eye disease is early in men than in women. In men, the age of disease onset is early 20s and 30s compared with 50s and 60s in women. Hormonal imbalance could be a likely reason for higher cases in women in their 50s and 60s.
- This is first study that has shown an age-based gender risk for the disease.

Low tear production
- Age, urban residence, occupation and socio-economic affluence were found to be high risk factors for developing the disease.
- Dry eye disease could occur due to inadequate tear production (aqueous deficient), tear film instability due to evaporation or mixed type. Over 20.5% had dry eye disease caused by inadequate tear production, 35.5% due to tear film instability (evaporative) and 40% being mixed.
- As tears are not produced sufficiently in people who are aqueous deficient, it is a more dangerous form of dry eye disease. They have severe clinical disease.
- There is a possible underlying autoimmune disease, which is causing inadequate tear production and this has to be investigated.

'For Healthy India': The basics are vital

Context:
- We had earlier noted in many editorials and analysis dealing with Health Care that why **Strengthening of Primary Health Care** is important and also major concern for poor health conditions in India is due to **Lack of Government Funding**.
- According to **high-level expert group on universal health coverage**, nearly 70% of government health spending should go to primary health care.
- **National Health Policy (NHP) 2017** also advocated allocating resources of up to two-thirds or more to primary care.

Major concern: Lack of Government Funding to Primary Health Care
- The current outlay of ₹1,600 crore by the government to transform existing sub-health centre into a health and wellness centre, which provide a wider range of primary care services, is less than half the conservative estimate.
- Government has proposed to transform 1.5 lakh sub-health centres into Primary health and wellness centres by 2022 and with the current estimates at the given rate, it can fulfil not even half the proposed target of 1.5 lakh health and wellness centres till 2022.

This is in contrast to several recommendations to increase the primary health care government expenditure.

Dismal situation of National Health Mission:
The overall situation with the NHM, India's flagship programme in Primary health care, continues to be dismal.

- The NHM's share in the health budget fell from 73% in 2006 to 50% in 2019 in the absence of uniform and substantial increases in health spending by States.
- Ministry of Finance had projected a 17% increase in allocation for the NHM in 2019-20. However, there has only been only an increase of 3.4% this year.
- NHM budget for this year (₹31,745 crore) barely crosses the actual spending on the programme in 2017-18 (₹ 31,510 crore).

Dominance of private players:
- Centre has committed to increase access to hospitalisation care, predominantly through private players.
- There has been an increase in allocation this year by 167% for the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) — the insurance programme.
- PMJAY aims to cover 10 crore poor families for hospitalisation expenses of up to ₹5 lakh per family per annum.
- Government has also taken steps to incentivise the private sector to open hospitals in Tier II and Tier III cities.
- The increase in the PMJAY budget is a welcome step and should be increased further every year, however the same coming at the expense of other critical areas is ill-advised.

Shortage of PHCs and staffs
- There is a shortage of PHCs (22%) and sub-health centres (20%)
- Only 7% sub-health centres and 12% primary health centres meet Indian Public Health Standards (IPHS) norms.
- Numerous primary-level facilities need complete building reconstruction.
- They are operated out of rented apartments and thatched accommodations; lack basic facilities such as toilets, drinking water and electricity.
- There is a staggering shortage of medical and paramedical staff at all levels of care.

Importance of Primary Health Care:
- Vital for effective and efficient health system.
- Instrumental in reducing the out of pocket expenditure.
- Vital for achieving "distress-free and comprehensive wellness system for all"
- Crucial for the success of PMJAY

Conclusion:
- Adequate emphasis should be given on primary health care and there is a need to depart from the current trend of erratic and insufficient increases in health spending and make substantial and sustained investments in public health over the next decade.

- Without this, the ninth dimension ('Healthy India') of "Vision 2030" will remain unfulfilled.

Connecting the dots:
- Why India's health achievements are very modest and has poor health indicators compared to its neighbours? Examine. Also suggest ideas to improve the status of public healthcare in India.
- Can increase in scope of private financing to fund public health care be a rational option? Evaluate.

WHO strategy to fight flu pandemics

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Health issues; Role of International Organizations - WHO

In news:
- The World Health Organization launched a strategy to protect people worldwide over the next decade against the threat of influenza, warning that new pandemics are "inevitable".
- Influenza epidemics, largely seasonal, affect around one billion people and kill hundreds of thousands annually, according to WHO, which describes it as one of the world's greatest public health challenges.

WHO's strategy
- WHO's new strategy, for 2019 through 2030, aims to prevent seasonal influenza, control the virus's spread from animals to humans and prepare for the next pandemic.
- The new strategy called for every country to strengthen routine health programmes and to develop tailor-made influenza programmes that strengthen disease surveillance, response, prevention, control, and preparedness.
- WHO recommends annual flu vaccines as the most effective way to prevent the spread of the disease, especially for healthcare workers and people at higher risk of influenza complications.
- It also called for the development of more effective and more accessible vaccines and antiviral treatments.
- Due to its mutating strains, vaccine formulas must be regularly updated and only offer limited protection currently.

Indians face age-related issues earlier than Swiss

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Health issues

In news:
- People living in India experience the health problems associated with ageing at an early stage than those living in Japan or Switzerland, according to a first-of-its-kind study published in The Lancet Public Health.
- People living in India experience age-related health problems sooner than other countries.
- Age-related health problems can lead to early retirement, a smaller workforce, and higher health spending.
- Government leaders and other stakeholders influencing health systems need to consider when people begin suffering the negative effects of ageing.
- These negative effects include impaired functions and loss of physical, mental, and cognitive abilities resulting from the 92 conditions analysed, five of which are communicable and 81 non-communicable, along with six injuries.

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

Poverty Alleviation through an Assured Minimum Income

Context:

We earlier had covered many articles on universal basic income (UBI)
To know about
- UBI
- Positives of UBI
- How UBI works?
- UBI policies in other countries
- Criticisms

Visit the link here – Universal Basic Income

Introduction:
- We know that the idea of a universal basic income (UBI) is gaining ground globally.
- Concept – A UBI requires the government to pay every citizen a fixed amount of money on a regular basis and without any conditionalities.

Why do we need such mechanism? Or Why there is demand for UBI?
- Millions of people remain unemployed and are extremely poor, despite rapid economic growth in the last three decades. (**Especially the landless labourers, agricultural workers and marginal farmers)**
- Vulenerable groups have not benefited from economic growth. UBI is considered a viable way to reform social security to address the shortcomings that the current system is rife with – targeting and delivery.
- To address the behavioural, design, and implementation downsides in the currently used systems of unemployment and social security benefits.
- It is proposed as a solution to high inequality and job loss caused by increased automation in the developed countries.
- Various welfare schemes have also failed to bring them out of penury.

We also read about **Pradhanmantri Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana (PM-KISAN)**
- PM Kisan is a limited version of the UBI launched by the current government.
- It promises ₹6,000 per annum to farmers who own less than 2 hectares of land.

However, there are some concerns.

Do you know?

- **UBI is neither an antidote to the vagaries of market forces nor a substitute for basic public services**, especially health and education.
- There is no need to transfer money to middle- and high-income earners as well as large landowners.
- **Institutional credit:** Less than 15% of the total borrowing by landless agricultural workers and the figure for marginal and small farmers is only 30%.
- **Subsidies for well-off**: The benefits of subsidised fertilizers and power are enjoyed largely by big farmers.

The way ahead:

Assured Minimum Income

- An income support of, say, ₹15,000 per annum can be a good supplement to their livelihoods.
- Additional income can reduce the incidence of indebtedness among marginal farmers, thereby helping them escape moneylenders and adhatiyas.
- It can go a long way in helping the poor to make ends meet.
- Several studies have shown that even a small income supplement can improve nutrient intake and increase enrolment and school attendance for students coming from poor households.
- In other words, income transfers to the poor will lead to improved health and educational outcomes, which in turn would lead to a more productive workforce.

Transfer the money into the bank accounts of women

- Women tend to spend more of their income on health and the education of children.
- It will help bring a large number of households out of the poverty trap or prevent them from falling into it in the event of exigencies such as illness.

However, an income transfer scheme cannot be a substitute for universal basic services.

- The direct income support to the poor will deliver the benefits mentioned only if it comes on top of public services such as primary health and education.
- In other words, direct transfers should not be at the expense of public services for primary health and education.
- Budgetary allocation for these services should be raised significantly.
- Programmes such as the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme should also stay.

How to make income transfer scheme feasible with limited fiscal space?

1. By better targeting, especially through SECC data, Agricultural Census combined with Aadhar:

- Direct income support will have to be restricted to the poorest of poor households.
- Therefore, the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011 can be used to identify the groups suffering from multidimensional poverty.
- Small and marginal farmers who are missing from the SECC can be identified through Agricultural Census.
- The Aadhaar identity can be used to rule out duplications and update the list of eligible households.

2. By aligning other direct income transfer scheme to it:

- For instance, PM-KISAN Yojana can be aligned to meet a part of the cost.

3. Sharing fiscal space with States:

- The required amount is beyond the Centre's fiscal capacity at the moment. Therefore, the cost will have to be shared by States.

4. Innovating new ways to improve revenue:

- The tax space can be expanded by reintroducing wealth tax and introducing other innovative tax where tax should not be felt burden to tax payer and at the same time tax collection should be affordable.

Conclusion:

The income transfer scheme is costly. However, the cost of persistent poverty is much higher.

Connecting the dots:

- Do you think replacing the existing public distribution system and other benefits for the BPL families with a Universal Basic Income (UBI) will be a fiscally prudent decision? Critically analyse.
- The idea of a Universal Basic Income is gaining traction across the world. Do you think India is prepared to adopt this scheme? Critically evaluate.
- Discuss the merits and challenges associated with 'Universal Basic Income'.
- Why a simple universal basic income will not solve the fundamental problems of the economy?

PM launches 'One Nation One Card'

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II and III - Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors; Indian Economy – Digitalization of Economy

In news:
- PM launched the indigenously-developed **National Common Mobility Card** to enable people to streamline payments of multiple kinds of transport charges.
- Dubbed as 'One Nation One Card', the inter-operable transport card would allow the holders to pay for their bus travel, toll, parking, retail shopping and money withdrawal.
- This card **runs on RuPay card** and it will eliminate all travel related problems.

Do you know?
- The **Indigenous Automatic Fare Collection System** based on One Nation One Card Model i.e. National Common Mobility Card (NCMC) is the first of its kind in India.
- People can also withdraw money using this Common Mobility Card.
- RuPay card can be used for travelling in metros in any part of the country.

Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Mandhan (PM-SYM) Yojana

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Government schemes and policies; Welfare/social issue

In news:
- Prime Minister launched the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Mandhan (PM-SYM) Yojana.
- The **national pension scheme for workers and labourers of the unorganised sector** was announced in the interim Budget in February this year.
- It provides for a **monthly pension of ₹3,000** to employees in the unorganised sector after **60 years of age.**
- PM also distributed the PM-SYM pension cards to select beneficiaries, and said that for the first time in independent India, workers of the unorganised sector would be entitled to a monthly pension.

Swachh Survekshan 2019

In news:

According to Centre's 'Cleanliness Survey' - Swachh Survekshan

- Indore - India's cleanest city for the third year in a row
- The second and third positions were bagged by Ambikapur in Chhattisgarh and Mysuru in Karnataka.
- New Delhi Municipal Council was given award for the 'Cleanest Small City' award.
- The 'Cleanest Big City' award has been bagged by Ahmedabad.
- Raipur is the 'Fastest Moving Big City'.
- Ujjain has been the adjudged the 'Cleanest Medium City'.

Do you know?
- The Swachh Survekshan awards 2019 were conferred by President Ram Nath Kovind in New Delhi.
- Top-ranked cities received a statue of Mahatma Gandhi as a memento for their work towards cleanliness.
- Swachh Survekshan covered all urban local bodies in the country, making it the largest such cleanliness survey in the world.

Key prelims pointers:
- Swachh Survekshan survey is released by Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.
- The performance evaluation of the Swachh survekshan is conducted by Quality Council of India (QCI), an autonomous body established by Government of India in 1997 for Quality assurance in all spheres of activities including Governance.

Only 26% of rural toilets use twin-leach pits: survey

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Health issue; Rural Development

In news:
- Centre's flagship sanitation scheme Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is on the verge of completing toilet construction for all rural households.
- However, a government-commissioned survey shows that just over a quarter of rural toilets use this twin-pit system.
- Twin-pit latrines were expected to create valuable farm manure from human excreta.
- However, the waste from the remainder of rural toilets harmful to health and the environment, and even pushing a new generation into manual scavenging.

Do you know?
- Under the twin-pit system, two pits are dug with honeycombed walls and earthen floors which allow liquid to percolate into the surrounding soil.

- When one pit is filled and closed off, waste flow is transferred to the second pit, allowing waste in the first pit to be converted into manure after a year or two.
- However, data from the National Annual Rural Sanitation Survey 2018-19, shows that just 26.6% of rural households use the recommended twin-pit system to dispose of excreta from their toilets.
- Septic tanks are the most popular option, with 28% of toilets connected to a septic tank with a soak pit and 6% to a tank without a soak pit.

Two pit theory
The highest ratio of twin pits is found in States which have recently taken up toilet construction

% OF DOUBLE LEACH PITS	
U.P.	64.22
JHARKHAND	57.81
MANIPUR	33.33
ASSAM	32.62
BIHAR	32.41
GUJARAT	7.49
KERALA	5.20
NAGALAND	0.77
SIKKIM	0.00
TRIPURA	0.00
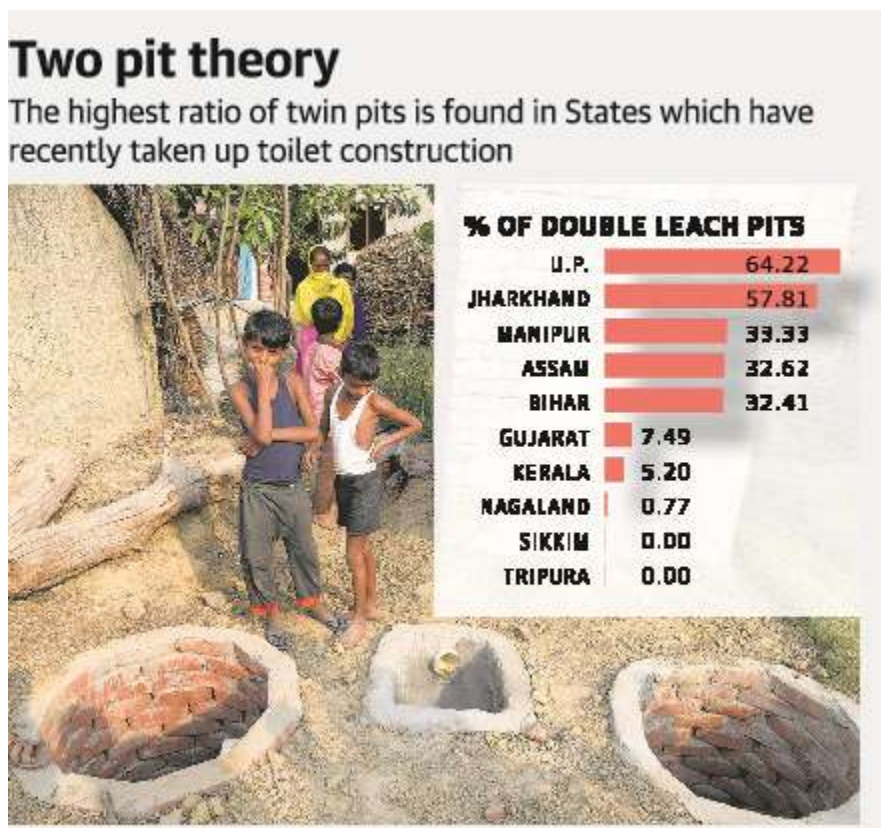
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Garibi Hatao 2.0: Rahul Gandhi promises to wipe out poverty (About NYAY)

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Government schemes and policies; Welfare/Poverty issue

In news:

- Congress president Rahul Gandhi announced that 20% of the poorest families in the country would be **annually** given **Rs. 72,000** each under the **Nyuntam Aay Yojana (NYAY)** or minimum income guarantee, if his party was voted to power.

- Mr. Gandhi asserted that five crore families and 25 crore people would be lifted out of poverty under NYAY – the acronym to convey a sense of 'justice' for the poor.

The shape of an urban employment guarantee

Key pointers:

- We had read that the unemployment rate has reached a 45-year high (6.1%) in 2017-18, as per leaked data from NSSO's Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) report.

According to the PLFS report –
- Unemployment problem is especially aggravated in India's cities and towns
- India is in the midst of a massive jobs crisis
- Aside from unemployment, low wages and precarity continue to be widespread.
- Majority of the population work in the informal sector.
- Hence, India cannot ignore the crisis of urban employment.

To handle the Urban Employment, Government Policy Framework should –
1. **Focus on skills:** Both State and Central governments tend to treat towns as "engines of growth" for the economy but ignore the people who toil to make a living. Urban wage employment can be increased by properly skilling and implementing skill development schemes effectively.
2. **Focus on small and medium towns:** India's small and medium towns are particularly ignored in the State's urban imagination. National-level urban programmes such as the Smart Cities Mission and the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) only benefit a fraction of them.
3. **Focus on Funds, Functions and Functionaries:** Most ULBs are struggling to carry out basic functions because of a lack of financial and human capacity.
4. **Focus on ecology:** There are many challenges associated with degradation of urban ecological commons due to untrammelled urbanization.
5. **Focus on Sustainable Employment:** Government policy framework should focus on strengthening towns through sustainable employment.

Solution: Employment guarantee programme (EGP)
In the context of the present employment crises, it is worthwhile considering introducing an employment guarantee programme (EGP) in urban areas.
- EGP will help to address the concerns of underemployment and unemployment, as it can bring in much-needed public investment in towns to improve the quality of urban

infrastructure and services, restoring urban commons, skilling urban youth and increasing the capacity of ULBs.

- EGP would give urban residents a statutory right to work and thereby ensure the right to life guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution.
- Given the State's relative neglect of small and medium towns and to avoid migration to big cities, EGP can cover all ULBs with a population less than 1 million.
- Urban informal workers with limited formal education would benefit from EGP as they can undertake standard public works such as building and maintenance of roads, footpaths and bridges for a guaranteed 100 days in a year, at ₹500 a day.
- Including "green jobs" under EGP would help to create, restore, rejuvenate and maintain urban commons such as green spaces and parks, forested or woody areas, degraded or waste land, and water bodies.
- EGP will benefit educated youth as it can focus on creation of skilling and apprenticeship programme for unemployed youth with higher education who can sign up for a contiguous period of 150 days (five months), at ₹13,000 a month for five months to assist with administrative functions in municipal offices, government schools, or public health centres, and for the monitoring, measurement, or evaluation of environmental parameters.

Conclusion:
- An urban employment guarantee programme not only improves incomes of workers but also has multiplier effects on the economy.
- It will boost local demand in small towns, improve public infrastructure and services, spur entrepreneurship, build skills of workers and create a shared sense of public goods.
- Hence, the time is ripe for an employment guarantee programme in urban India.

Connecting the dots:
- Discuss the merits and challenges associated with urban employment guarantee programme.
- Do you think introducing urban employment guarantee programme can solve India's massive jobs crisis? Critically analyse.

Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) and Poverty

Context:

- The idea of a minimum income guarantee (MIG) has caught up with political parties.

- A MIG requires the **government to pay the targeted set of citizens a fixed amount of money on a regular basis**.

Why MIG in news?
- Congress party recently promised MIG programme called **Nyuntam Aay Yojana (NYAY)**, if the party was voted to power.
- A limited version of the MIG in the form of the **PM KISAN Yojana** is already being implemented by the NDA government at the Centre.
- State governments in Odisha and Telangana have their own versions of the MIG.

About Nyuntam Aay Yojana (NYAY)
- NYAY promises **annual income transfers of ₹72,000 to each** of the poorest five crore families comprising approximately 25 crore individuals.
- If implemented, it will cost the exchequer ₹3.6 lakh crore per annum.

Even though the case for additional spending of such a large sum on the poor is good and required, such schemes are not a good way of spending money on the poor.

Why there is a strong case for MIG?

1. **Multi-dimensional poverty:** Many landless labourers, agricultural workers and marginal farmers suffer from multi-dimensional poverty. According to the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011, around six crore households suffer from multidimensional poverty.
2. **Benefits of growth not percolated:** Benefits of high economic growth during the last three decades have not percolated to these groups.
3. **Failure of welfare schemes:** Welfare schemes have also failed to bring them out of destitution. They have remained the poorest of Indians.

(Contract and informal sector workers in urban areas face a similar problem.)
4. **Unemployment:** Due to rapid mechanisation of low-skill jobs in the construction and retail sectors, employment prospects for them appear increasingly dismal.
5. **Informal credit:** Poor people are forced to borrow from moneylenders and adhatiyas (middlemen) at high rates of 24-60% per annum. For example, institutional lending for marginal and small farmers accounts for only about 30% of their total borrowing. Figure for landless agricultural workers is even worse at 15%.
6. **Improve nutrient intake and health:** Studies show that even a small income supplement can improve nutrient intake at high levels of impoverishment. It will make the working population more productive.
7. **Improve education:** It can increase school attendance for students coming from poor households.

Therefore, there is a strong case for direct income transfers to these groups. The additional income from MIG can reduce their indebtedness and help them get by without falling into the clutches of the moneylender.

Concerns:
- **Concerns over the fiscal burden**: Government finances cannot afford such high additional spending, as the fiscal space is limited.
- **Withdrawal of provisions of the basic services**: No government can afford MIG unless several existing welfare schemes are converted into direct income transfers, or the fiscal deficit is allowed to shoot up way above its existing level, 3.4% the GDP. No income transfer scheme can be a substitute for universal basic services.
- **Withdrawal of beneficiaries from the labour force:** Large cash transfers can result in withdrawal of beneficiaries from the labour force.

Conclusion:

Income transfers will **surely reduce income inequalities** and **help bring a large number of households out of the poverty trap** or prevent them from falling into it in the event of shocks such as illness or death of an earner.

However, the form of an income transfer scheme should be decided carefully. The scheme should be launched in incremental steps.

The poor spend most of their income, and a boost in their income will provide a boost to economic activities by increasing overall demand. On the other hand, large income transfers can be inflationary, which will hurt the poor more than the rich.

Connecting the dots:
- Discuss the merits and challenges associated with Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG).
- Serious consideration must be given to the idea of a minimum income guarantee (MIG) as a more effective way to address mass poverty concern. Comment.
- Do you think replacing the existing public distribution system and other benefits for the BPL families with a Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) will be a fiscally prudent decision? Critically analyse.

INTERNATIONAL

On future of the Islamic State

Context:

- Credible reports point to the **Islamic State (IS) nearing extinction**. Once described as a formidable 'Caliphate' of enormous wealth and with huge potential for expansion is now just a dot on the soil of Syria and Iraq.
- Ever since it lost control last year over two major cities, **Raqqa (Syria)** and **Mosul (Iraq)**, it has lost its sheen.
- Thanks to the U.S.'s strategy of forming a coalition of forces, styled the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and, determined and dedicated Kurdish fighters.

However, though on the verge of being wiped out territorially, the Islamic State still poses a big challenge to intelligence apparatuses.

IS is down, but definitely not out
- A small number of hardened IS men is likely to be still hiding in some areas of Syria (esp. Baghouz area) to offer a semblance of resistance.
- The temptation to dismiss the IS, considering it as just one of those upstarts which make an appearance once in a while in modern history and offer no lessons for the future, has to be resisted. Because the pull internationally for the IS was undeniably greater than for al-Qaeda.
- This model of organising people solely to unleash terror after acquiring formidable human and material resources — oil and government treasuries in the IS's case — could be expected to inspire all those playing the card of Islamic extremism.

Many IS followers who migrated to Syria and Iraq have expressed their desire to return to their home countries. (Obviously after being disillusioned with the IS). However, they have been denied permission to re-enter the country, because of the hard stance of their governments against their repatriation. For example, the story of Shamima Begum.

However, these governments, mostly in Europe and nations with a Muslim minority, such as UK, Germany, France and Belgium, have attracted criticism for its disregard of the human rights and lack of compassion.

Lessons from IS saga

From the IS saga, one can draw some of the following lessons –

- How terrorist ideology can gain strength, expand and then evaporate at equally fast speed.
- How extremism of any kind — including Naxalism in India — is a magnet for some young minds.
- How spirit of adventure and frustrations early on in life can spur youngsters such as Begum to join such extremist groups.
- How no amount of censorship or counselling, either online or in forums such as places of worship, can wean such youngsters away.
- How an unstable internal security situation contributes greatly to the growth of terrorism.
- How a civil war such as the one in Yemen is conducive for even a small group to showcase its philosophy. Afghanistan is another example of a disturbed scenario that lends fodder to groups such as the Taliban. Pakistan is in the same boat, with the active assistance of its own variant of the Taliban and organisations such as the Jaish-e-Mohammad and the Lashkar e-Taiba.

Connecting the dots:
- What led to the rise of the Islamic State in the Middle East? Explain.

Seven Indians confirmed dead in attack on New Zealand mosques

Part of: GS Mains II – International affairs; Indian diaspora; Linkages between development and spread of extremism; Security issues

In news:
- Seven Indians confirmed dead during the brutal killing of 50 people by a gun-wielding white supremacist in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Do you know?
- The gunman had live-streamed his dastardly act on Facebook and social media users were busy forwarding them thoughtlessly.
- The quick spread of both the video and the manifesto tells us how inadequate moderation is on the Internet.
- The attack on mosques is a wake-up call on the anti-immigration, according to the white supremacist cult.
- The gunman was influenced by far-right terrorists and their anti-Muslim, anti-immigration and anti-Semite ideology.

- Right-wing racist terror, which has largely been on the fringes in the post-War world, is emerging as a major political and security threat, especially in white-majority societies.
- In recent years, mosques in Germany and France have been targeted; in Britain an MP was stabbed to death; and in the U.S. a synagogue was attacked, leaving 11 people dead.
- In most cases, the attackers were obsessed with immigration and the far-right ideas of Euro-Christian white racial purity, which is fundamentally not different from the ideology of the Nazis.

Syria vows to take back Golan Heights from Israel

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – International Affairs

In news:
- The Syrian government vowed to take back the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights as its allies and enemies alike condemned U.S. President Donald Trump for moving to recognise Israeli sovereignty over the territory seized in war.
- Mr. Trump's statement marked a dramatic shift in U.S. policy over the status of a disputed area that Israel captured from Syria in the 1967 conflict and annexed in 1981 — a move not recognised internationally.

Observe from the figure/map below the following –
- Sea of Galilee
- Jordan River and Yamuk river
- Surrounding countries –

https://i.pinimg.com/originals/7e/bb/8b/7ebb8b5eda782c38857f988f85e54f15.jpg
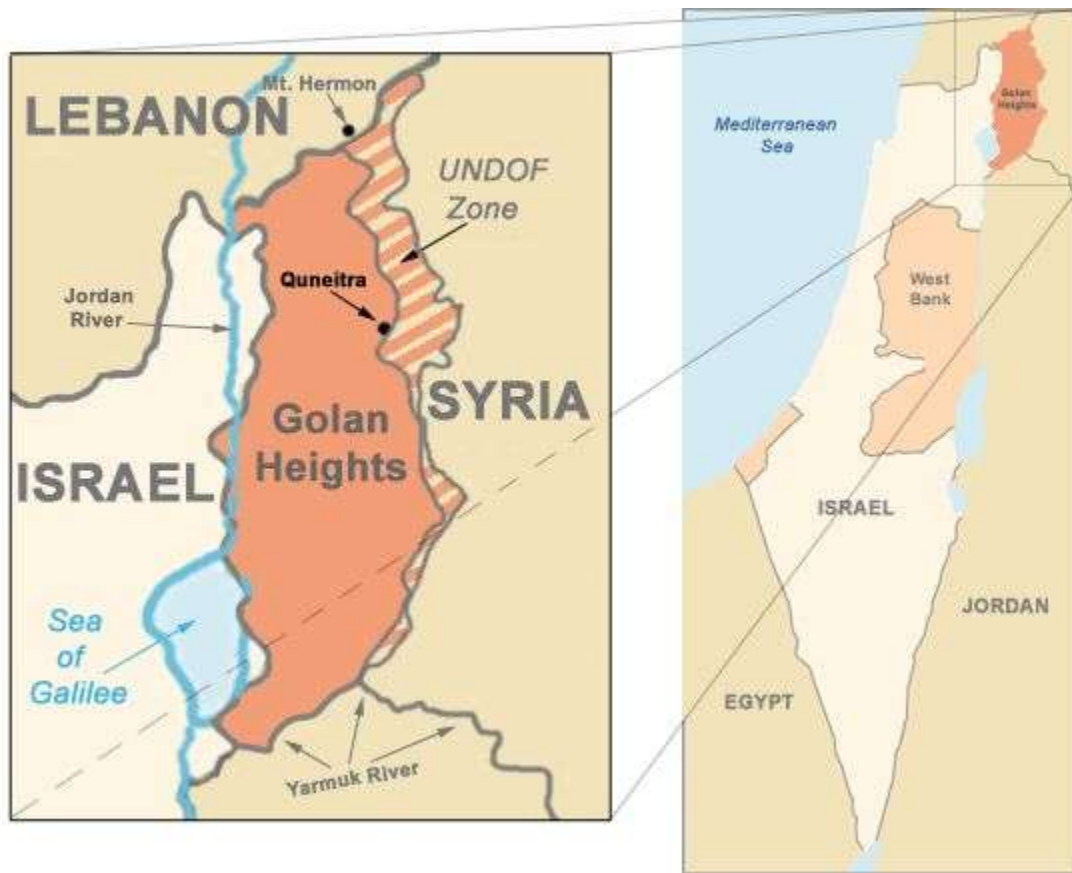
Important Value Additions:

About Golan Heights
- The Golan Heights, a rocky plateau in south-western Syria, has a political and strategic significance which belies its size. Whoever controls this area has a major strategic advantage.
- Golan Heights is the area captured from Syria and occupied by Israel during the Six-Day War, territory which Israel annexed in 1981.
- Israel unilaterally annexed the Golan Heights in 1981. The move was not recognised internationally.

Why Golan Heights is important?
- Having control of the Golan gives Israel a vantage point from which to monitor any Syrian military movements towards Israel.
- The area is a key source of water for an arid region. Rainwater from the Golan's catchment feeds into the Jordan River. The area provides a third of Israel's water supply.

- The land is fertile, with the volcanic soil being used to cultivate vineyards and orchards and to raise cattle. The Golan is also home to Israel's only ski resort.

Do you know?
- United Nations peacekeepers have been in the Golan Heights since 1974 supervising a ceasefire between Israel and Syria.
- The United States considers the Golan Heights to be Syrian territory held under Israeli occupation subject to negotiation and Israeli withdrawal.
- The United States considers the application of Israeli law to the Golan Heights to be a violation of international law, both the Fourth Geneva Convention's prohibition on the acquisition of territory by force and United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 (adopted under Chapter VI of the UN Charter).

Italy set to become first G7 country to join 'Belt and Road'

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – International Relations

In news:
- Italy and China want to revive the spirit of the ancient Silk Road by deepening their trade and investment ties.
- Chinese President Xi Jinping is set to sign a deal that will see Italy become the first member of the Group of Seven (G7) major industrialised nations to join China's "Belt and Road" infrastructure project (BRI), which is inspired by historic, centuries-old trade routes.
- Besides the BRI accord, various deals worth up to €7 billion ($7.9 billion) are expected to be agreed, including agreements opening up the northern ports of Trieste and Genoa to Chinese containers.

China's rocky road | Despite objections, Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative – which aims to create a network of ports, bridges and rail lines linking China with Africa and Europe – is chugging along. But some countries have voiced concerns over the project, while cracks have started to appear in the programme in various nations

The Belt and Road Initiative is an umbrella term for mostly China-financed and usually China-built projects in more than 60 countries. Graphic shows maritime and overland trade routes under the project

CRACKS IN THE NETWORK

- The initiative has run into some roadblocks in the past year, as the Chinese economy cooled and the U.S. and others accused Beijing of saddling developing countries with too much debt. Some countries, including Thailand, Tanzania, Sri Lanka and Nepal, have scrapped, scaled back or renegotiated projects amid complaints that they are too costly and give too little work to local contractors

- Last year, Malaysian PM Mohamad cancelled projects, including a $20 billion railway, he said his country cannot afford. And in 2017, Sri Lanka sold control of its port of Hambantota after falling behind in repaying $1.5 billion in loans from Beijing

CHINA VS OTHERS

- China says some 150 countries have signed Belt and Road-related agreements since the programme's launch more than five years ago
- China's official position is that it is solely an economic initiative with no political motives. President Xi Jinping said in a speech late last year that China would never seek hegemony
- Some countries, including the U.S., Japan and India, worry that Beijing is trying to build a China-centered sphere of influence that would undermine their own sway, pulling developing nations into so-called "debt traps" that would give China even-more control over their territories

Silk Road Economic Belt — Maritime Silk Road

TEXT SOURCE: AFP, AP; MAP SOURCE: GRAPHIC NEWS

https://www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/3rzjdh/article26619795.ece/ALTERNATES/FREE_960/BRI

MPs reject Brexit deal for third time

Part of: GS Mains II – International affairs

In news:
- British MPs rejected Prime Minister Theresa May's EU divorce deal for a third time.
- It is yet another blow to a Prime Minister who has all but lost control of her government and the Brexit process particularly after she offered to quit if MPs backed the deal.
- MPs fear it could leave Britain tied to the EU indefinitely with no say over its rules and no ability to strike trade deals with other countries.

Background:
- Brexit denotes shorthand way of saying the UK leaving the EU
- A referendum was held on Thursday 23 June, 2016, to decide whether the UK should leave or remain in the European Union. Leave won by 51.9% to 48.1%.

- Theresa May triggered this process on 29 March, 2017, meaning the UK was scheduled to leave on 29 March 2019.

About European Union
- EU is an economic and political partnership involving 28 European countries. It began after World War II to foster economic co-operation, with the idea that countries which trade together were more likely to avoid going to war with each other.
- It has since grown to become a "single market" allowing goods and people to move around, basically as if the member states were one country.
- It has its own currency, the euro, which is used by 19 of the member countries, its own parliament and it now sets rules in a wide range of areas – including on the environment, transport, consumer rights and even things such as mobile phone charges.
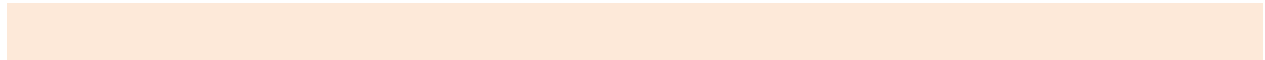
INDIA AND THE WORLD

Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and India

Why in news?

- The 46th Session of the OIC's Council of Foreign Ministers will be held in Abu Dhabi from March 1 to 2.
- For the first time, India has been invited to an Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) meeting as guest of honour.

About OIC:
- The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is the **second largest inter-governmental organization after the United Nations** which.
- It has **membership of 57 states spread over four continents.**
- It is an organisation of the **collective voice of the Muslim world**.

Objectives:
- The main motive of the organisation is to the safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony among various people of the world.
- The Organization was established upon a decision of the historical summit which took place in Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco 25 September 1969 as a result of criminal arson of Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied Jerusalem.

Governing Bodies of OIC

1. The Islamic Summit, composed of Kings and Heads of State and Government of Member States, is the supreme authority of the Organization. It convenes once every three years to take policy decisions and provide guidance on all issues pertaining to the realization of the objectives and consider other issues of concern to the Member States and the Ummah.

2. The Council of Foreign Ministers, which meets once a year, considers the means for the implementation of the general policy of the Organization by, inter alia:
- Adopting decisions and resolutions on matters of common interest in the implementation of the objectives and the general policy of the Organization;
- Reviewing progress of the implementation of the decisions and resolutions adopted at the previous Summits and Councils of Foreign Ministers;

3. The General Secretariat, which is the executive organ of the Organization, entrusted with the implementation of the decisions of the two preceding bodies.

Do you know?
- Invitation comes when India has been mounting diplomatic pressure to isolate Pakistan internationally following the Pulwama terror attack in which 40 CRPF personnel were killed.
- The OIC has usually been supportive of Pakistan and, often sided with Islamabad on the Kashmir issue.
- OIC had denied India a seat when the grouping started.

India and Islamic World
- In the last few years, India has improved ties with the Islamic world from Saudi Arabia to Indonesia, while building on good relations with countries like Qatar and Oman.
- While it was Bangladesh that floated the idea of India becoming an observer at the OIC in 2018, the UAE invite offered India an opportunity to address the forum.
- The Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan (MBZ), was a very special Chief Guest at the 68th Republic Day celebrations in 2017, the first time that India laid out the Republic Day red carpet for a leader who was neither a Head of State nor Head of Government.
- The Crown Prince MBZ had earlier visited India in February 2016, following a visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the UAE in August 2015.
- Recently, Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman visited India.

Conclusion:

All these are indication of India's improved ties with both Saudi and the UAE, and the Gulf region as a whole.

The increased engagement is also rooted in the shared interest between India and the Arab conservatives in blunting the edge of religious extremism and terrorism.

Equally important has been the region's growing economic and energy interdependence with India, which is emerging as the world's third-largest economy and one of the biggest hydrocarbon importers and labour exporters.

Connecting the dots:
- Have you witnessed a transformation in India's Middle East strategy in recent years? Analyse.

- What is Organisation of Islamic Cooperation? Discuss its objectives and also discuss the significance of OIC's first-time invitation to India.

Foreign Ministers Meet at OIC

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – India and the World; International Organizations and their mandate.

In news:
- In a major diplomatic move, India hit out at Pakistan during a meeting of Foreign Ministers at the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).
- The 46th Session of the OIC's Council of Foreign Ministers was held in Abu Dhabi from March 1 to 2.
- For the first time, India was invited to an Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) meeting as guest of honour.

Highlights:
- India stressed that the anti-terror fight was not a clash among civilisations.
- In order to save humanity, it urged to all the states who provide shelter and funding to the terrorists to dismantle the infrastructure of the terrorist camps and stop providing funding and shelter to the terror organisations based in their country.

Do you know?
- India is not a member of the OIC, but was invited to the Abu Dhabi meeting as the guest of honour.
- The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation is an international organization founded in 1969.
- Consisting of 57 member states, with a collective population of over 1.8 billion as of 2015 with 40 countries being Muslim Majority countries.
- The organisation states that it is "the collective voice of the Muslim world" and works to "safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony".
- The OIC has permanent delegations to the United Nations and the European Union.
- The official languages of the OIC are Arabic, English, and French.
- Despite India having the second largest population of Muslims next to Indonesia in the world, it has not yet found a desirable position within the organisation.
- For more on OIC, Objectives etc, visit - Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and India

ICC rejects request to 'isolate' Pakistan

In news:

- The appeal of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) for 'isolation' of nations supporting terrorism, without naming Pakistan, did not find support at the International Cricket Council (ICC) board meeting.
- The BCCI CEO Rahul Johri raised the issue of security at the next World Cup and received an assurance from the ICC in this regard.
- Since Pakistan was a permanent member of the ICC, it would not be possible to "isolate" it unless it is supported by all Test playing countries.

Do you know?
- India has been raising the issue of terror emanating from Pakistan at various international forums for a long time.
- India, supported by France, is preparing a fresh proposal to place Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) chief Masood Azhar on the ban list operated by the UNSC's 1267 committee.

Pakistan bans UNSC designated outfits

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II and III – India and its neighbouring countries – Bilateral ties; International Relations; Security issues

In news:
- Facing severe pressure from the Financial Action Task Force, and calls from several countries to crack down on terror groups, the Pakistan government passed an order to effectively ban Lashkar-e-Taiba offshoots Jamat-ud Dawa and Falah-i-Insaniyat Foundation.
- However, India is sceptical about the move, given Pakistan's attempts to ban these groups in the past, only to drop the ban over a period of time.
- In February 2018, Islamabad passed a similar order as a Presidential Ordinance, but then allowed it to lapse six months later.

Tracing the roots

- In 1986/87, Markaz al-Dawah Irshad (MDI) came into being after Zaki ur Rehman Lakhvi's Ahl-e-Hadees militant group merged with Jamaat-ud Dawa (JuD) founded by Hafiz Saeed (in photo) and Zafar Iqbal

- Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) was set up in 1989/90 by Hafiz Saeed as the armed wing of MDI

- LeT was designated as a terrorist organisation by the U.S. in December 2001

- Pakistan announced a ban on JuD and its charity wing in February 2019

https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2019/03/05/DEL/Delhi/TH/5_01/4897be14_2776847_101_mr.jpg

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India-Pakistan and Gulf Countries: The Gulf as a channel of peace

Context:

The below editorial focuses on following issues –
- India's and Pakistan's relations with Gulf countries in the past and present.
- How Pakistan succeeded to mobilise significant support within the Middle East especially during 1990s?
- How Undivided-India enjoyed better relationship with Middle-East? How India lost its influence (especially after its independence) in the region and provided Pakistan an edge?

Pakistan and India's relation with Gulf Countries
- We all know that **Pakistan has a long-standing history with the Arab Gulf countries**, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE.
- Many Gulf countries and Middle East countries tended to **act as Pakistan's strategic depth.**
- For decades, **shared religious identity and common approach to regional affairs** gave Pakistan a political edge over India in the region.

Ties during undivided India

- In the colonial era, the Gulf and other locations in the Middle East were **critical links in the larger architecture of Great Britain's Imperial defence system** in the eastern hemisphere centred on undivided India.
- The armies of India had to embark on repeated expeditionary operations in the Gulf and the Middle East through the 19th and early 20th centuries. The Indian army played a key role in the Middle Eastern theatre in both the World Wars.

Post-Independence Ties

- After Independence, **India pulled out of any security role in the Gulf and the Middle East (opting NAM policy)**. Pakistan, however, joined the Anglo-American effort (Central Treaty Organisation -CENTO) to replace the security vacuum created by the Indian withdrawal.
- CENTO had regional members which included Pakistan, Iran, Iraq and Turkey. **Pakistan embraced conservative and pro-Western regimes**, while **India aligned with the nationalist and non-aligned governments** like Egypt.
- **CENTO provided the basis for Pakistan's external and internal security cooperation** with a number of countries in the Gulf region. Some of them like Jordan, Iran and Turkey backed Pakistan during its wars with India in 1965 and 1971.
- **As the Arab nationalist regimes steadily weakened** in relation to the regional conservatives, **India steadily lost political ground** to Pakistan in the 1970s.
- Matters got worse in the 1980s as **India remained silent on the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan** and the **Gulf regimes joined Pakistan in promoting jihad** against the Soviet Union.
- On trade and commerce front, India's energy and economic dependence on the Gulf grew. But on political front, ties were vulnerable.
- The 1990s also saw **Pakistan mobilise significant support within the Middle East**, including at the **OIC and other international forums**, to castigate India's internal policies. The attack on the Babri Masjid and India's troubles in the Kashmir valley gave ample political ammunition to Pakistan.
- Paradoxically, the nuclear tests by India and Pakistan in May 1998 and the Kargil crisis in the summer of 1999, opened the possibilities for **restructuring South Asia's relations with the Gulf**.
- The US mobilised Saudi Arabia during the Kargil War to encourage Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to accept the Indian demand to pull Pakistan's army back to the Line of Control.

Contemporary Relations

- After Kargil, the then Indian government brought a new self-confidence and intensity to the engagement with the Gulf and the Middle East.
- It was during the late 2000, Indian foreign minister first visited Saudi Arabia and underlined how far India and Saudi Arabia had drifted in the decades before.
- The bilateral relationship with Saudi Arabia steadily improved thereafter and has now acquired a fresh momentum under Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- Today the House of Saud is becoming a valuable partner for Delhi **in promoting regional security in the Subcontinent and beyond**.
- Many Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE, has developed **stronger economic and security bonds** with India. There has been a significant activism from the Gulf countries **to help defuse the current tensions between India and Pakistan**.
- For instance, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) pressed Pakistan to release Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman who was downed after a dogfight in the air with Pakistan Air Force.
- Some of the Gulf countries could become potential allies in nudging Pakistan towards political moderation and regional accommodation in the Subcontinent.
- Pakistan's uncertain state of economy and dependence on financial bailouts from the UAE and Saudi Arabia has made Pakistan more amenable to such an outcome.

Connecting the dots:
- Examine how Middle East has been crucial for India for decades.
- Discuss India's historical ties with Middle East countries.
- Examine India's "Look West" policy in context of modern day geopolitical realities.
- India's "Link West" policy has seen both continuity and change. Comment.

India asks Saudi to invest in strategic oil storage

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – India and the World; International Relations; Bilateral ties

In news:
- India invited Saudi Arabia to invest in its strategic oil storage even as it looks to resurrect a $44 billion refinery project with the world's largest oil producer after the Maharashtra government denied land at the initial site.
- Saudi Oil Minister Khalid Al Falih, on his second visit to India, discussed with his Indian counterpart the 60-million-tonne (MT)-a-year mega oil refinery-cum-petrochemical complex.

- India has built 5.33 MT of emergency storage, enough to meet its oil needs for 9.5 days, in underground rock caverns in Mangalore and Padur in Karnataka and Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh.

Pakistan Govt. cracks down on terror outfits

Part of: GS Mains II and III – India and its neighbours; Security issues; Role of International Organisations

In news:
- Pakistan has taken 44 members of banned organisations, including Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar's son and brother, into preventive detention, and put Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) offshoots Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) and Falah-i-Insaniyat Foundation (FiF) on its proscribed list.
- Pakistan had earlier failed to ban the JuD and the FiF, which are banned by the UN Security Council.
- Both organisations were subsequently put on the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA)'s list under the Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997.

Pullback after Pulwama? Here's what game theory suggests

Introduction:

India's muscular approach towards Pakistan, especially post-Uri, post-Pulwama has underpinnings in game theory.
- India launched its "surgical strike", after the jihadi attack on the Uri army camp in 2016.
- Last month Indian Air Force struck a terrorist camp in Balakot deep inside Pakistan, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

The below article deals with the question – **"Will tit for tat work in the Pakistani context?"**

What Game Theory suggests?
- Game theory suggests that **tit for tat strategy** should work better than any other strategy India has followed in the past.

- India had adopted strategies that involve **strategy of restraint or non-retaliation** in response to a provocation. In other words, India accepted mistreatment without retaliating or seeking revenge.
- For 30 years, Indian decision makers were paralysed when it came to responding to terror emanating from Pakistan. India is perhaps the only country in the world which did not respond militarily when its Parliament was attacked and when its financial capital was brutalised.
- Such soft strategies have not prompted even small changes in Pakistani behaviour. Therefore, according to Game Theory, if tit for tat is a consistent policy for India, the chances are it will deliver better results.

Do you know: About Game Theory?
- Game theory is a theoretical framework for conceiving of social situations among competing players.
- In some respects, game theory is the science of strategy, or set of concepts aimed at decision making in situations of competition and conflict (as well as of cooperation and interdependence) under specified rules.
- Any time we have a situation with two or more players that involves known payouts or quantifiable consequences, we can use game theory to help determine the most likely outcomes.

Tit for tat strategy
- Tit for tat as an effective strategy originated in the 1980s. It was first introduced by Anatol Rapoport in Robert Axelrod's two tournaments, held around 1980.
- An agent using this strategy will first cooperate, then subsequently replicate an opponent's previous action. If the opponent previously was cooperative, the agent is cooperative. If not, the agent is not.
- For example, if provoked, a player subsequently responds with retaliation; if unprovoked, the player cooperates.

In the India-Pakistan context, India has been following the strategy of restraint, even non-retaliation. However, under current regime, we have seen a variation of the tit-for-two-tats strategy.
- After the Pathankot air force station attack by the Jaish-e-Mohammed, India tried to get Pakistani cooperation in identifying who the attackers were.
- It was only after Uri followed that India retaliated with the surgical strike.

Earlier, India was okay with even a tit-for-several-tats non-strategy, which failed miserably in getting Pakistan to behave better. The only lesson Pakistan learnt from our tepid response was

that we have a high threshold for pain and punishment, and thus their "death-by-a-thousand-cuts" plan was working.

Under current regime, this strategy is being reworked to become a true tit for tat, and if India persists with this over the long term, it should improve Pakistan's behaviour.

If we accept tit for tat as a more moral and workable strategy in the long run, clearly India needs to deploy it consistently in both directions—retaliation and cooperation.

Conclusion:

The lesson to learn from game theory is that consistency in policy is vital to get the message across. Tit for tat will work as long as it is consistent across governments.

Giving it up for meaningless talks will mean loss of all the gains made so far from the surgical strike and Balakot.

Connecting the dots:

- What strategy should India adopt in order to deal with proxy-wars from the neighbouring countries?
- M.K. Gandhi believed that an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth would leave the whole world blind and toothless. Would Gandhi's philosophy of non violence work in today's world? Examine.
- Essay: "To retaliate with hate and bitterness would do nothing but intensify the hate in the world," Martin Luther King, Jr. said.

India discusses terror with 4 countries

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – India and the World; International Relations; Security related issues

In news:
- India held crucial discussions with Saudi Arabia, United States, Turkey and the UAE on countering Pakistan-based terror groups.
- India reiterated its position that terrorism "remains one of the gravest threats to global peace and security".
- India asked for a united front against terrorism (during its appearance as a "Guest of Honour" at the recent ministerial of the OIC)

Meanwhile, China is still reluctant on listing Azhar. Beijing has thrice blocked efforts to label him a 'terrorist'.

Next steps for Indian diplomacy

Context:

In the immediate aftermath of the Pulwama terrorist attack and then the Indian Air Force strike in Balakot, the **government has been garnering international support** for its case against Pakistan and the need to take direct action against groups there.

The below are the next steps for Indian diplomacy:
- India should focus on **keeping the pressure going on Pakistan**.
- It should work **to ensure that Masood Azhar is listed as a terrorist by the UNSC**.
- It should **work with the Financial Action Task Force [FATF]** to keep the lens on terror financing and choking off support that groups like the JeM and Lashkar-e-Taiba [LeT] receive in Pakistan.
- India **should repeatedly raise the Azhar issue with the Chinese government**.
- Core focus should be to ensure Pakistan **end cross-border terror**. Therefore, India cannot afford to lose focus on that.

Garnering support from international community
- After the Pulwama attack, almost all major nations recognised India's right to protect itself and take action to prevent terror attacks on its soil wherever it is needed.
- Three Security Council members led by France have taken up the listing of Azhar at the UNSC 1267 Committee again, and the case on terror funding at the FATF. (Welcome move)
- International community has affirmed India's right to protect its citizens from attacks planned across its borders. (That is a net gain.)

China's position
- China expects enough information to list Azhar and it does take Pakistan's interests into account. However, China's objections are not insurmountable.
- India was able to bring China around to placing Pakistan on the FATF's 'grey list' by being transactional about it.
- India's approach must be to work slowly on China to align itself on terror with our concerns, and then for it to move Pakistan in the direction we want it to go.

- Like many countries (the U.S., Saudi Arabia and the UAE) which supported India and conveyed to Pakistan that it needs to crack down on terror groups there. India must also hope that China will do the same.
- China does not wish to be isolated from the rest of the world, especially on the issue of terror.

Conclusion:
- Indian government holds the view that talks and terror don't go together. As witness in 2016 and 2019, it is willing to take action against those terror groups directly if Pakistan refuses to.
- Therefore, Pakistan is left with only one choice if it wishes to avoid more such action: to stop the terrorist groups there.

Connecting the dots:
- What strategy should India adopt in order to deal with proxy-wars from the neighbouring countries?

India's grand strategy on Pakistan

What India gained from air strikes?
- India's muscular approach towards Pakistan, especially post-Uri, post-Pulwama is a clear **departure from the policy of strategic restraint**.
- India's tactical air strike succeeded in **demonstrating the nation's "capacity and will"** and giving signal to Pakistan that **it could respond** to a major Pakistani-linked terror attack. **(Tit-for-tat strategy)**
- The idea that India has a **right to pre-emptive self-defence** — a right that so far has been the exclusive privilege of the Western powers — has been legitimised by the reaction and behaviour of the great powers during the crisis.
- **"Non-military pre-emptive action"** will be its counter-terrorism policies.
- It has created a measure of uncertainty in the minds of Pakistani planners.

While total deterrence is unrealistic, Delhi has made the other side conscious that its actions could produce unpredictable consequences.

What should be India's grand strategy on Pakistan?
- **Tit-for-tat strategy as a consistent policy for India:** India should incorporate tit for tat approach as part of a grand strategy.

- **Involve a more robust internal security framework:** It should not only focus solely on Pakistan's external behaviour but more logically also keep an eye on its internal structure as part of a long-range effort to re-orient domestic incentives inside Pakistan.
- **Advanced counter-terror capabilities and doctrines:** It should include ore advanced counter-terror capabilities and doctrines that seek to substantially minimise Indian military casualties in Kashmir. It should patiently build covert proxy capabilities that impose reciprocal costs on Pakistani security institutions.
- **A more sophisticated conventional military posture:** to degrade the flow of terrorist networks while also presenting the Pakistan army with a costly choice to escalate to a bigger conventional clash.

Other strategies:
- India should recognize that Pakistan cannot be isolated, however, it should persuade its patrons and allies (many of whom seek to develop deeper ties with India) to influence Pakistani behaviour.
- Support and coalition from international community - vigilant third parties can work to India's advantage.

Conclusion
Unless India conceives a broader plan to alter Pakistan's behaviour and its internal setting, it will find it difficult to sustain international support and it would only embolden the Pakistan army to up the ante knowing the Indian side is utterly unprepared for a serious game.

Connecting the dots:
- What strategy should India adopt in order to deal with proxy-wars from the neighbouring countries?

China places hold on listing Azhar as designated terrorist

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – International; Security issues

In news:
- China has placed a technical hold on the listing request for Pakistan-based terror group Jaish-e-Mohammad's (JeM) leader Masood Azhar at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) 1267 Committee.
- The initial hold is for six months, after which it can be extended by another three months.

- The ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee (1267 Sanctions Committee), was not able to come to a decision on the proposal for listing Mohammed Masood Azhar Alvi under the UN Sanctions regime, on account of a member placing the proposal on hold.

France slaps sanctions on JeM chief Azhar

In news:

- Two days after China blocked a UN Security Council move to designate Masood Azhar as a global terrorist, France has sanctioned him and taken steps to stop the outfit from accessing French financial resources.
- It is understood that the decision was aimed at imposing a national ban on Azhar as this is necessary for barring him from accessing any EU territory.

U.S. puts Pakistan on notice over terror attack

Part of: GS Mains II and III – International Relations; Security issues; Terrorism

In news:
- The United States has asked Pakistan to take sustained, verifiable and irreversible action against the perpetrators of terrorism.
- It also warned Pakistan that another terror attack on India will prove to be "extremely problematic."

SCO offers 'mediation' in India-Pak. Talks

Part of: GS Mains II and III – International Relations; Security issues; Terrorism

In news:
- The eight-nation Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) offered to smoothen a bilateral dialogue between India and Pakistan so that the two countries can resolve their differences, following last month's terror attack in Kashmir.

Do you know?

- The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) was established in Shanghai in 2001 with China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as founding members. It was expanded in 2017 with the inclusion of India and Pakistan.
- Pakistan had accepted Russia's offer to mediate between Pakistan and India.
- Before joining the SCO as full members, India and Pakistan committed themselves to strictly implement all the provisions of the legal framework that has been developed by the Member States of the Organisation.
- One of the such fundamental obligation is not to bring bilateral contradictions and disagreements to the SCO family, as the SCO is not engaged in the settlement of disputable bilateral issues, whether border, water or other topics in relations between individual Member States.
- The most important condition for participation in a multi-disciplinary cooperation within the SCO is the commitment to unconditional and consistent struggle against terrorism, separatism and extremism. Otherwise, it would be impossible for the two states to participate in the SCO.
- After joining the SCO, India and Pakistan have common ground and are ready to work in the SCO format to ensure regional security, joint counteraction to complex challenges and threats, sustainable socio-economic development.

India wants visa-free travel to Kartarpur

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II - India and its neighbours; International Relations; Bilateral ties

In news:
- India has urged Pakistan to grant visa-free travel rights to Indian pilgrims visiting the Kartarpur shrine.

Do you know?
- November 2019 marks 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev.
- India had first proposed the Kartarpur Sahib corridor in 1999 when the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee took a bus ride to Lahore.
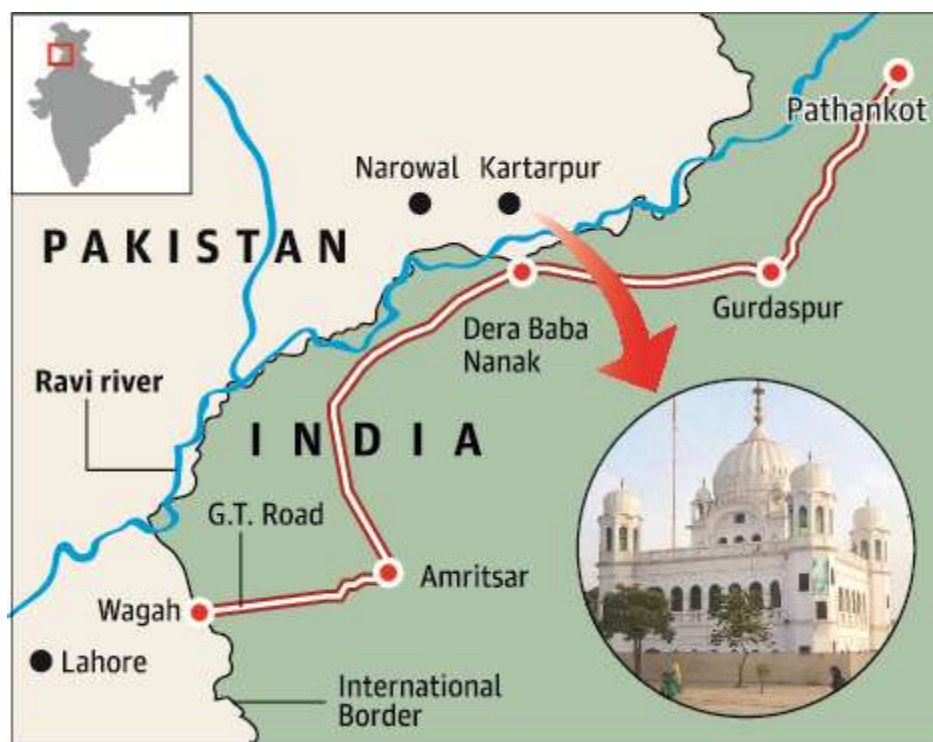
Gurdwara in Kartarpur

- The gurdwara in Kartarpur is located on the bank of river Ravi in Pakistan
- It is about four km from the Dera Baba Nanak shrine, and about 120 km northeast of Lahore
- It was here that Guru Nanak assembled a Sikh community and lived for 18 years until his death in 1539
- The shrine is visible from the Indian side, as Pakistani authorities generally trim the elephant grass that would otherwise obstruct the view
- Indian Sikhs gather in large numbers for darshan from the Indian side, and binoculars are installed at Gurdwara Dera Baba Nanak
- The gurdwara was opened to pilgrims after repairs and restoration in 1999, and Sikh jathas have been visiting the shrine regularly ever since
- Sikh jathas from India travel to Pakistan on four occasions every year- for Baishakhi, the martyrdom day of Guru Arjan Dev, the death anniversary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, and the birthday of Guru Nanak Dev.

India and Myanmar: Countering Naga militants

Part of: GS Mains II and III – India and its neighbouring countries – Bilateral ties; International Relations; Security issues

In news:
- India's improved ties with Myanmar fuelled the crackdown on Naga militants training camps.
- In late January, Myanmar took over National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K), which is considered to be the mother lode of most extremist groups in the northeastern region.
- NSCN-K outfit had violated an agreement not to allow Myanmar territory to be used by "any rebel group to attack a neighbouring country [India]."
- Extremist groups such as the United Liberation Front of Asom and the United National Liberation Front of Manipur are known to use jungle routes for hit-and-run operations in India from the NSCN-K's base.

U.K. offers collaboration in fighter tech, carriers

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II and III – International Relations; India and the World; Bilateral ties; Security issues; Defence ties

In news:
- As the Indian Air Force (IAF) continues its efforts to procure new fighter jets, the U.K. has made a pitch for cooperation in the fields of building aircraft carriers and future fighter aircraft technologies.
- It is a partnership building exercise on how India and the U.K. can collaborate as future defence technologies are increasingly going to be delivered by collaborative programmes.

Do you know?
- The IAF has floated a tender for 114 fighter jets, while a proposed fifth generation stealth fighter, the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA), is on the drawing board.
- As part of the air combat strategy, BAE Systems has begun the Tempest project to develop sixth generation stealth fighters to replace the Typhoons in service with the Royal Air Force and are scheduled to be phased out by 2040.

Draft Emigration Bill 2019

Context:

- The below article deals with the draft Emigration Bill 2019 which was recently released by the ministry of external affairs (MEA) and is currently pending for parliamentary approval.

Do you know?
- The draft Emigration Bill proposes **a new legislative framework** for matters related to emigration of Indian nationals.
- It is **set to replace** the extant one under the **Emigration Act of 1983.**
- The intention of replacing the old Act is consistent with the government's effort to **weed out anachronistic laws** and **update them in line with modern conventions**.
- India is among a handful of countries that has explicit legislation for promoting emigration.

Adhering to SDG goal
- The United Nations' "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" has for the first time recognized migration as a core element of the global development agenda, and has set several targets that relate to it.
- These cover student mobility, human trafficking and exploitation, labour migration and employment, migration governance, remittances and migration data.

Therefore, the new legislation aims to draw up appropriate regulations that would conform to the contemporary global agenda on these matters.

Why the new emigration bill is important?
- As mentioned above, it helps to **weed out anachronistic laws** and **update them in line with modern conventions**.
- Conform to SDG goals and draw up appropriate regulations.
- Since 1983, there has been a **structural shift** in the quantum, nature, pattern and direction of emigration from India. Therefore, the **1983 Act falls short in addressing** the wide geo-economic, geo-political and geo-strategic impact that emigration has today.
- The government's attitude towards international migrants has changed over time. From labelling NRIs as "non-required Indians" at the height of the "brain drain" in the 1970s and 1980s to addressing them as "India's brand ambassadors" and "symbols of our capacities and capabilities". The proposed bill, with its thrust on strengthening the institutional framework for emigration management, **affirms that shift in outlook.**

Do you know?

- As per the latest World Migration Report published by the International Organization for Migration, India features as the largest country of origin for international migrants (about 30 million in 2017); the largest recipient of remittances (about $80 billion or ₹5.6 trillion in 2018); and figures in five of the top 20 migration corridors from Asian countries.

The draft bill proposes a three-tier institutional framework –

- With the **MEA as the nodal ministry.**
- At the top, a **central Emigration Management Authority (EMA)** has been proposed for policy guidance and supervision.
- In the middle, a **Bureau of Emigration Policy and Planning**, and a **Bureau of Emigration Administration** shall handle day-to-day operational matters and oversee the welfare of emigrants.
- At the bottom, **nodal authorities** in states and union territories shall coordinate aspects of management related to both emigrants and returnees.

This could **allow vertical policy coherence** on emigration matters—particularly in promoting and managing safe, orderly and regular emigration.

Conclusion:

For the Indian diaspora, it is a welcome sign. The Emigration Act of 1983 had many anomalies like not being migrant-friendly and was not representative of the the multi-layered immigration problems and challenges.

Well-managed migration brings development to both India and the countries of destination. In this perspective or guiding principle, the new comprehensive migration Act should be developed.

Connecting the dots:

- Discuss why there is need for a Comprehensive Migration Management Act that can address every aspect of the exploitation of migrant workers.
- What are the most pressing problems being faced by India's diaspora across the world? Analyse.

Tariff hike to hit exports to U.S.

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II and III – India and US bilateral relations; International relations; Indian Economy and issues related to it.

In news:
- U.S. President announced that he intends to end preferential trade terms for India under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) programme.
- GSP is an arrangement that allows concessional or zero tariff imports from developing couturiers into the US. Withdrawal of the GSP benefit is expected to adversely affect exports from India.
- The GSP programme accounts for some $5.6 billion of India's exports to the U.S., making India the largest GSP beneficiary.
- Chemicals, gems and jewellery, engineering and textiles are among the Indian industrial sectors that benefit from the GSP.

About GSP
- Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) is a preferential tariff system extended by developed countries (also known as preference giving countries or donor countries) to developing countries (also known as preference receiving countries or beneficiary countries).
- It involves reduced MFN Tariffs or duty-free entry of eligible products exported by beneficiary countries to the markets of donor countries.

US arguments –
India has implemented a wide array of trade barriers that create serious negative effects on United States commerce.
- India's new e-commerce rules which have impacted American companies like Amazon and Walmart (majority owner of Flipkart)
- Price controls on medical devices (cardiac stents)
- Tariffs on ICT products like smart watches and high-end mobile phones
- Lack of greater market access for the U.S. dairy industry

The above are some of the issues that have caused trade friction between the two countries.
Indian government arguments –
- The impact would amount to only $190 million on the value of $5.6 billion in exports to the U.S. that fall under the GSP category.
- Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) has said that overall impact will amount to less than 0.4% of India's exports to the U.S.

- India's exports to the U.S. stood at $50.57 billion in 2017 with a GSP tariff advantage of only $190 million, which was less than 0.4% of total exports.
- According to FIEO, the sectors that will likely be significantly impacted will include processed foods, leather products other than footwear and engineering goods such as spark ignition, turbines and pipes.
- The export body also pointed out that the withdrawal of GSP benefits to Indian exporters will also impact the downstream industries in the U.S. that were using the cheaper inputs from India.

However the government would continue to talk to the U.S. during the 60-day period after which the GSP withdrawal would come into effect, in an effort to work out a deal.

Do you know?

Difference between GSP and the other trade arrangement under WTO

- Under the normal trade laws, the WTO members must give equal preferences to trade partners. There should not be any discrimination between countries. This trade rule under the WTO is called the Most Favored Nation (MFN) clause.
- The MFN instructs non-discrimination that any favorable treatment to a particular country.
- At the same time, the WTO allows members to give special and differential treatment to from developing countries (like zero tariff imports). This is an exemption for MFN. The MSP given by developed countries including the US is an exception to MFN.

Male reaffirms its 'India first' policy

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – International relations; India and the World

In news:

India-Maldives highlights:

- Requests for a cricket stadium, renewable energy projects and a thousand additional slots for Maldivian students in Indian courses were the highlights of the discussions during India's External Affairs Minister recent visit to the Maldives, as the island nation reaffirmed its "India first" policy.
- Three agreements were signed during the visit, which officials called the first "full-fledged substantive bilateral" engagement at a political level with the new government in Male.
- One of the agreements is for visa exemption for diplomats and another for MoUs for development projects.

Maldives reiterated that it would remain sensitive towards India's security and strategic concerns.

ECONOMY

Tackling the issues in GST Regime

Introduction:

- We know that GST is one of the biggest indirect tax reforms in the country. GST is expected to bring together state economies and improve overall economic growth of the nation.
- GST has the best intentions, but the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council is nevertheless systematically eroding the strongest features of the new tax regime that is simplicity and transparency.

Concerns:

1. Issue of Tax Simplicity:
- Before the GST was introduced, Arvind Subramanian panel related to GST, came up with a standard rate of 15% for most items, a "low rate" for essentials, and a "high rate" for demerit goods. However the government introduced GST with five different tax slabs: 0%, 5%, 12%, 18% and 28%.
- The GST Council then introduced two more highly specific rates: a nominal 0.25% for rough diamonds and 3% for gold.
- In the latest GST Council meeting, it introduced yet another rate of 1% for the sale of under-construction affordable houses.

Though, the number of tax slabs does not affect the concept of 'One Nation One Tax', as a single product is still taxed at the same rate across the country. But specifying eight different GST rates is a blow to tax simplicity, which the GST was to provide.

2. Wrong precedent which undermine 'One Nation One Tax' concept:
- Government felt it was necessary to provide Kerala additional funds for rehabilitation after the devastating floods of 2018 and allowed the State to impose a 1% disaster relief cess.
- However, it had several options available apart from the one it chose.
- As a result, for two years, the Indian market will be divided into two: Kerala, where goods and services are 1% more expensive, and the rest of India.
- While it can be argued that the cess in Kerala is a one-off, the fact remains that this is a bad precedent to set. It's not too hard to imagine a situation where States start clamouring for a cyclone relief cess, drought relief cess, flood relief cess, etc.
- Recovery from natural disasters is an expensive process, and additional funds must be made available. But mechanisms for this have already been put in place. There is a

National Disaster Response Fund at the Central level and each State has a State Disaster Response Fund. Increasing budgetary allocations in these areas instead of spending on giant statues and advertising campaigns is an option.

3. Increasing the Opacity:

- Recent decision by GST council to remove the input tax credit provision from the real estate sector will likely go a long way in increasing opacity in an already murky sector.
- The input tax credit system was designed to create a seamless chain in the entire supply process.
- Under a fully functioning GST system, the government can verify the amount of credits to be paid to the company by matching its invoices with those provided by the vendor. Such a system encourages honesty and transparency.

4. Not utilizing the National Anti-Profiteering Authority:

- This is the third time the Council has removed this vital provision (input tax credit), and its reason for doing so is weak that is real estate developers were not dropping their prices in line with what they should be doing, considering they were getting the benefit of input tax credits.
- This happened before in the case of restaurants. In both situations, the government took the easy way out and simply removed the input tax credit provision altogether.
- So, rather than relying on the body it had created to handle such issues, the National Anti-Profiteering Authority, the Council instead chose to weaken the entire tax system.
- This wouldn't have been too much of a problem if the real estate sector was as small as the restaurant industry or the sanitary pads industry (the third industry where there is no input tax credits).
- But the real estate industry is estimated to be at least 40O00 crore in size. Not to forget the fact that cement, a huge input in real estate, is taxed at the highest rate of 28%, and will now not be offset by credits.

Conclusion:

In both cases (disaster relief and anti-profiteering), the GST Council has chosen to ignore established institutions designed for those very purposes in favour of a patchwork approach that is likely to cause more problems than it solves.

Connecting the dots:

- How has GST impacted the economy of India in short term? Critically analyse.
- Determine the importance of GST Council and Anti-Profiteering Authority in GST.
- Do you think the present GST tariff structure addresses the generally regressive nature of indirect taxes? Critically examine.

National Mineral Policy 2019

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Indian economy and development

In news:
- The Union Cabinet approved the National Mineral Policy 2019.
- The New National Mineral Policy will ensure more effective regulation. It will lead to sustainable mining sector development in future while addressing the issues of project affected persons especially those residing in tribal areas.
- The aim of National Mineral Policy 2019 is to have a more effective, meaningful and implementable policy that brings in further transparency, better regulation and enforcement, balanced social and economic growth as well as sustainable mining practices.

Do you know?
- The new National Mineral Policy 2019 replaces the extant National Mineral Policy 2008 ("NMP 2008") which was announced in year 2008.
- The impetus to review NMP 2008 came about by way of a direction from the Supreme Court vide its judgment in 2017 in Writ Petition entitled Common Cause v/s Union of India & Others.

Provisions under National Mineral Policy 2019
- Introduction of Right of First Refusal for RP/PL holders
- Encouraging the private sector to take up exploration.
- Auctioning in virgin areas for composite RP cum PL cum ML on revenue share basis.
- Encouragement of merger and acquisition of mining entities and transfer of mining leases and creation of dedicated mineral corridors to boost private sector mining areas.
- Proposes to grant status of industry to mining activity to boost financing of mining for private sector and for acquisitions of mineral assets in other countries by private sector.
- It also mentions that Long term import export policy for mineral will help private sector in better planning and stability in business.
- It mentions rationalize reserved areas given to PSUs which have not been used and to put these areas to auction, which will give more opportunity to private sector for participation.
- It mentions to make efforts to harmonize taxes, levies & royalty with world benchmarks to help private sector.

- Include the focus on make in India initiative and Gender sensitivity in terms of the vision. In so far as the regulation in Minerals is concerned, E-Governance, IT enabled systems, awareness and Information campaigns have been incorporated. Regarding the role of state in mineral development online public portal with provision for generating triggers at higher level in the event of delay of clearances has been put in place.
- Aims to attract private investment through incentives while the efforts would be made to maintain a database of mineral resources and tenements under mining tenement systems.
- Focusses on use coastal waterways and inland shipping for evacuation and transportation of minerals and encourages dedicated mineral corridors to facilitate the transportation of minerals. The utilization of the district mineral fund for equitable development of project affected persons and areas.
- The 2019 Policy also introduces the concept of Inter-Generational Equity that deals with the well-being not only of the present generation but also of the generations to come and also proposes to constitute an inter-ministerial body to institutionalize the mechanism for ensuring sustainable development in mining.

Software product policy

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Indian economy and development

In news:
- The Union Cabinet approved the National Policy on Software Products 2019.
- It aims to help the industry grow at CAGR of 40% to reach $70-80 billion by 2025, while creating employment opportunities for 3.5 million people.
- Initially an outlay of ₹1,500 crore is being planned for various schemes under in policy in the next seven years.
- Further, the policy proposes to create a ₹5,000-crore fund with industry participation to promote emerging technology such as Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain, Big Data and robotics. Of this, government contribution will be ₹1,000 crore.

Significance of the Policy:
Promoting ecosystem
- 'Software Product Development Fund' will participate in venture funds having objectives aligned to this policy and so can leverage private investments targeted to promote software product ecosystem.The SPDF will be financially managed by a professional financial institution.

- Presently, total revenue of IT-ITeS industry in India is pegged at about $168 billion (including e-commerce), with revenue of about $7.1 billion from software product industry, of which $2.3 billion is from exports.

Tenfold rise
- The policy, which aims to increase share of Indian software products in global market by tenfold, pitches for nurturing of 10,000 technology start-ups in software product industry, including 1,000 such start-ups in tier-II and tier-III towns.
- It also proposes up-skilling of 10 lakh IT professionals as well specialise 10,000 professionals to "provide leadership."

Only 3.32 lakh MSME jobs created in last four years: CII survey

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Indian Economy and issues related; Unemployment issues

In news:
According to Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) survey –
- The number of net jobs created in the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector in the last four years stood at just 3,32,394, which is 13.9% higher than the base four years ago.
- CII survey also indicated that 5,70,804 new jobs are likely to be created over the next one year, marking an increase of 21 per cent over the current employment base.
- The CII survey shows that micro enterprises were the largest job creators in the past four years and will continue to be so in the next three years. This holds true for both exporters and non-exporters.
- MSMEs growth is pivotal to jobs creation. Government initiatives such as **2 per cent interest subvention scheme**, the **Trade Receivables e-Discounting System (TReDS)** and **enabling ease of doing business** needs to be promoted to MSMEs who are not taking benefit of these initiatives, it said.

Do you know?
- The top job generating sectors were hospitality and tourism followed by textiles, apparel and metal products.
- Machinery parts along with transport and logistics were the next significant job creators.
- The survey shows just three States — Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Telangana — accounted for over 50% of the jobs created in this period (2015-16 to 2018-19).

'Sirsi Supari' gets GI tag

Part of: GS Prelims – Indian Economy and development

In news:
- For the first time in the arecanut sector, 'Sirsi Supari' grown in Uttara Kannada has received the GI tag.
- It is cultivated in Yellapura, Siddapura and Sirsi taluks of Karnataka.
- Its GI number is 464.
- The arecanut grown in these taluks have unique features like a round and flattened coin shape, particular texture, size, cross-sectional views, taste, etc.
- These features are not seen in arecanut grown in any other regions.

Important value additions:
Geographical Indication
- According to the World Intellectual Property Rights, "Geographical Indication is the sign used on the products that have specific geographical origin and posses' reputation and some qualities that are due to the origin."
- In India Geographical Indication tag is governed by the Geographical Indication of Goods (Registry and Protection) Act of 1999.

About GI Act, 1999:
- GIs indicate goods as originating in a specific geographical region, the characteristics, qualities or reputation thereof essentially attributable to such region.
- Complying with the World Trade Organisation-Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (WTO-TRIPS) obligations, India enacted the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration & Protection) Act, 1999 (GI Act) and has set up a registry in Chennai to register such names.
- Covering agricultural goods, manufactured and natural goods, textiles, handicrafts and foodstuffs, the GI Registry's website lists popular GIs like Basmati rice, Darjeeling tea and Pashmina shawls etc.

Do you know?
- Darjeeling tea became the first product to get this tag in 2005.
- The Pashmina from Kashmir, Nagpur mangoes, Madhubani paintings of Bihar, are some of the examples.

Five varieties of Indian coffee awarded GI certification

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Economy and development; Intellectual Property Rights

In news:
- Five varieties of Indian coffee have been awarded the **Geographical Indication (GI) tag**.
- The move is expected to enhance their visibility globally and allow growers to get the right value.
- The initiative will also help integrate farmers with markets in a transparent manner, and lead to realisation of fair prices for coffee producers.

5 varieties of Indian coffee which got GI tag
1. **Coorg Arabica coffee** is grown specifically in the region of Kodagu district in Karnataka.
2. **Wayanad Robusta coffee** is grown specifically in the region of Wayanad district which is situated on the eastern portion of Kerala.
3. **Chikmagalur Arabica coffee** is grown specifically in the region of Chikmagalur district and it is situated in the Deccan plateau, belongs to the Malnad region of Karnataka.
4. **Araku Valley Arabica coffee** can be described as coffee from the hilly tracks of Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh and Odisha region at an elevation of 900-1100 Mt MSL. The coffee produce of Araku, by the tribals, follows an organic approach in which they emphasise management practices involving substantial use of organic manures, green manuring and organic pest management practices.
5. **Bababudangiris Arabica coffee** is grown specifically in the birthplace of coffee in India and the region is situated in the central portion of Chikmagalur district. Selectively hand-picked and processed by natural fermentation, the cup exhibits full body, acidity, mild flavour and striking aroma with a note of chocolate. This coffee is also called high grown coffee which slowly ripens in the mild climate and thereby the bean acquires a special taste and aroma.

Do you know?
- The **Monsooned Malabar Robusta Coffee**, a unique specialty coffee from India, was given GI certification earlier.

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India ranks 11th in gold holding

In news:

- India, which is the world's largest consumer of gold, has the 11th largest gold reserve, with the current holding pegged at 607 tonnes, as per the latest report by the World Gold Council (WGC).

Do you know?
- India's overall position in terms of total gold holding would have been tenth had the list included only countries.
- Since IMF is included in the list, India stands at 11th (IMF stands 3rd with total gold reserves of 2,814 tonnes)
- US ranks 1st (8,133.5 tonnes) followed by Germany with 3,369.7 tonnes.
- Meanwhile, among Asian countries, China and Japan have more reserves of the precious metal when compared to India.

Rank	Possessor	Tonnes
1	U.S.	8,133.5
2	Germany	3,369.7
3	IMF	2,814.0
4	Italy	2,451.8
5	France	2,436.0
6	Russia	2,119.2
7	Mainland China	1,864.3
8	Switzerland	1,040.0
9	Japan	765.2
10	Netherlands	612.5
11	India	607.0
12	ECB	504.8
13	Taiwan	423.6
14	Portugal	382.5
15	Kazakhstan	353.3

Gold cache

SOURCE: WGC

https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2019/03/12/CNI/Chennai/TH/5_14/8de11abe_279 1914_101_mr.jpg

Multidimensional Poverty Index

Context:

Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI)
According to a new version of the global MPI –

- India reduced its poverty rate sharply from 55 per cent to 28 per cent in ten years between 2005-06 and 2015-16
- A total of 271 million (27.10 crore) people moved out of poverty during these ten years
- The poorest groups in India — Muslims and Scheduled Tribes — reduced poverty the most over the ten years from 2005-06 to 2015-16
- Country still has the largest number of people living in multidimensional poverty in the world (364 million people) out of which 156 million (34.5 per cent) are children
- But multidimensional poverty among children under 10 has fallen the fastest. In 2005-06 there were 292 million poor children in India, so the latest figures represent a 47 per

cent decrease or a 136 million fewer children growing up in multidimensional poverty. (When considering the durable and lifetime consequences of childhood deprivation, particularly in nutrition and schooling, this is a tremendously good sign for India's future.)

- The poorest district is Alirajpur in Madhya Pradesh, where 76.5 per cent of people are MPI poor.
- Among states, Jharkhand had the greatest improvement, with Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Nagaland only slightly behind. However, Bihar is still the poorest state in 2015-16, with more than half of its population in poverty.
- In 2015-16, the four poorest states — Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh — were still home to 196 million MPI poor people — over half of all the MPI poor people.
- A total of 113 million people — 8.6 per cent of India's people — live in severe poverty

About Multidimensional Poverty Index

- The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) identifies multiple deprivations at the household and individual level in health, education and standard of living.
- It uses micro data from household surveys, and—unlike the Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index—all the indicators needed to construct the measure must come from the same survey.
- Each person in a given household is classified as poor or non-poor depending on the weighted number of deprivations his or her household, and thus, he or she experiences. These data are then aggregated into the national measure of poverty.
- The MPI reflects both the incidence of multidimensional deprivation (a headcount of those in multidimensional poverty) and its intensity (the average deprivation score experienced by poor people). Example of multiple deprivations – those who are both undernourished and do not have safe drinking water, adequate sanitation and clean fuel.
- It can be used to create a comprehensive picture of people living in poverty, and permits comparisons both across countries, regions and the world and within countries by ethnic group, urban or rural location, as well as other key household and community characteristics. The MPI offers a valuable complement to income-based poverty measures.

Drawbacks of the Index
- First, the indicators may not reflect capabilities but instead reflect outputs (such as years of schooling) or inputs (such as cooking fuel).

- Second, the health data are relatively weak and overlook some groups' deprivations, especially for nutrition, though the patterns that emerge are plausible and familiar.
- Third, in some cases careful judgments were needed to address missing data. But to be considered multidimensionally poor, households must be deprived in at least six standard of living indicators or in three standard of living indicators and one health or education indicator, or in two health or education indicators. This requirement makes the MPI less sensitive to minor inaccuracies.
- Fourth, intra-household inequalities may be severe, but these could not be reflected.
- Fifth, while the MPI goes well beyond a headcount ratio to include the intensity of poverty, it does not measure inequality among the poor, although decompositions by groups can be used to reveal group-based inequalities.

Challenges to Fiscal Federalism

Concept of 'Federalism'

- We are aware of the concept 'Federalism' – It is a type of government in which the power is divided between the national government and other governmental units.
- Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Vallabhai Patel favored the decentralized structure and stood for the idea of federalism.
- Constitution framers felt that federal structure can efficiently meet the requirements of people from different regions.

Concerns:
- However, in the immediate period following Independence, the Centre and all States were ruled by the same party and when many of the powerful provincial leaders migrated to the Centre, the process of centralisation gathered further momentum.
- Also Economic Planning at a nation-wide level helped this centralising process.

Concept of 'Fiscal federalism'
- Fiscal federalism refers to the division of responsibilities with regards to public expenditure and taxation between the different levels of the government.
- Having a Fiscal Federalism mechanism allows the government to optimize their costs on economies of scale, because in this manner, people will get public service which they prefer, and there will be no unnecessary expenditure.
- It is generally believed that the Central government must provide national public goods that render services to the entire population. (For example, Defence)

- Sub-national governments are expected to provide goods and services whose consumption is limited to their own jurisdictions.

Concerns:
- However, centrally sponsored schemes, which have ballooned in recent years, have 'encroached' on the territory of States.
- Over years, the performance of the Central government is judged not only on the basis of actions taken which fall strictly in its jurisdiction but also on initiatives undertaken in the areas which fall in the Concurrent and even State lists. Centralised planning has something to do with it.
- Today, the Central government is held responsible for everything that happens, including, for example, agrarian distress.
- Therefore, while viewing the responsibilities of the Centre and States we must take a broader view than what is stipulated in the Constitution.

Do you know?
- The Constitution has provided provisions which enable the Union and the States to work in coordination and to levy and collect taxes through systematic arrangements.
- One important aspect of fiscal federalism is the determination of the specific fiscal instruments that would enable the different levels of government to carry out their functions.
- While determining the taxes that are best suited for use at different levels of government, one basic consideration is – in relation to the mobility of economic agents, goods and resources.
- It is generally argued that the de-centralised levels of government should avoid non-benefit taxes and taxes on mobile units.
- In other words, the Central government should have the responsibility to levy non-benefit taxes and taxes on mobile units or resources.

It is important that the above principle is specifically provided in the Constitution. However, different Constitutions interpret differently what is mobile and what is purely a benefit tax.

For example, in the United States and Canada, both Federal and State governments have concurrent powers to levy income tax. On the contrary, in India, income tax is levied only by the Central government though shared with the States.

Trends in Tax Revenue

- A look at the composition of central and states' own taxes and expenditure reveal that the share of the own tax revenue and expenditure of the states is approx. 38% and 58% respectively.
- This reflects the more than proportionate expenditure obligations of the states and also the lesser revenue raising powers vis-à-vis the centre.
- Also many studies has highlighted that the performance of tax revenue in India is below its potential. This limits not only the spending capacity of the centre, but also the amount of taxes devolved to the states.
- Besides, what is constitutionally sought to be devolved to the states is not being done in its spirit by the centre, which imposes surcharges and cesses as a means of raising revenue, without the same being part of the divisible pool of taxes shareable with the states.

Against Co-operative Federalism

In addition to these, the FRBM acts have imposed an asymmetric burden on the state governments in the face of non-compliance to the targets by the central government. This is sought to be accentuated by the recommendations of the FRBM Review Committee, 2017.

The rate apportionment and voting rights in the GST Council are also not in accordance with the principles of cooperative federalism, in which decisions are to be taken by a consensus among equal stakeholders. The decentralisation of the LGs is impeded by the asymmetry in centre–state relations.

The ToR of the Fifteenth Finance Commission, which is the last in the chain of events, hastens the process of centralisation and if implemented, cooperative federalism would only exist in name, devoid of any content whatsoever.

Fundamental changes are needed to make cooperative federalism a meaningful and functioning one.

Connecting the dots:

- What do you understand by Fiscal Federalism? Examine the challenges associated with India's Fiscal Federalism.
- How well the existing federal structure has given room to the states to function as independent units? Examine. Also explain the concepts of cooperative and competitive federalism.

Aviation sector in turbulence

Key pointers:

- India has been the fastest growing aviation market over the last four years.
- India was seventh largest aviation market with 187 million passengers in FY 2017-18. It is expected to become the third largest by 2022.
- Along with telecom, the aviation sector has symbolised the successes of liberalisation — with a visible impact in terms of the entry of a number of players and opening up of access to flying, besides ensuring pan-India coverage.
- India's air passenger traffic is expected to grow six-fold to 1.1 billion and the number of operational airports increase to around 200 in 2040, according to Ministry of Civil Aviation's vision document released.

Concerns: Turbulence in the domestic airline industry
- The Indian aviation sector is the fastest growing in the world with a growth rate of 20 per cent a year. But despite this 20 per cent growth, we have only 3-3.5 per cent of population flying, signifying great potential to grow further.
- Full service carrier, Jet Airways, has been forced to ground several of its aircraft due to its inability to pay rentals. Jet Airways is looking for working capital loans but banks want the airline to show a turnaround commitment.
- Market leader, Indigo, is facing shortage of pilots.
- The Kingfisher Airlines had collapsed because of its owner's profligacy.
- Surging fuel prices and a weaker rupee are hurting Indian airlines.
- For the national carrier, Air India, with a debt burden of Rs 55,000 crore, the government has provided interim support, a sovereign guarantee and loaned funds from the National Small Savings Fund, helping it to keep flying while keeping alive another state-owned entity, BSNL, in the telecom sector.

It is ironic that the domestic aviation industry, expected to grow at 8.5% annually and register a six fold increase in the traffic flow over the next two decades, is facing an existential crisis.

Floundering Growth

There is not much hope for the (airline) industry until the cost structure fundamentally changes. The fault lies in two things.

- One is that the cost of operation for Indian airlines is very high compared to its peers in other parts of the world.
- The second is that revenue is lower compared with counterparts across the globe.

Cost of operation shoots up mainly because of aviation turbine fuel (ATF), which is around 50% of the total cost.

ATF has not been covered under Goods and Services Tax (GST). At present, it attracts an excise duty of 11%. Over this central levy, states charge different rates of value-added tax (VAT) that goes up to 30%.

Other than ATF cost, various surcharges, user development fee (UDF) and steep navigational, landing and parking charges at airports make the cost structure of domestic airlines unviable.

Classifying ATF as an input and subsuming it into the GST regime will allow airlines to claim credit on fuel tax.

Connecting the dots:

- Critically analyze the issues plaguing the Aviation Sector in India. Discuss what measures are needed to address the issues.

Indian Accounting Standards (Ind AS)

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Indian Economy and related issues; Banking

In News:
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has deferred the implementation of **new accounting rules, Indian Accounting Standards (Ind AS)** for banks till further notice.
- This is the second extension provided by the RBI. Earlier in April 2018, RBI had postponed the implementation of Ind AS by the banks by one year.

Do you know?
- The new rules based on the **IFRS9 standards created in the aftermath of the financial crisis** were supposed to kick in at the start of the new fiscal year that starts on April 1, after being delayed last year.
- According to Fitch Ratings' local unit, India's state-run lenders would have had to increase provisions by as much as 1.1 trillion rupees ($16 billion) in the fiscal first quarter ending June 30 if the rules had gone ahead.
- That would have forced public sector lenders to raise "substantial" amounts of extra capital, beyond the estimated 1.9 trillion rupee infusion already committed by the government.

About Indian Accounting Standard:
- Indian Accounting Standard (abbreviated as Ind-AS) is the **Accounting standard adopted by companies in India** and issued under the supervision of Accounting Standards Board (ASB) which was constituted as a body in the year 1977. MCA has to spell out the accounting standards applicable for companies in India.
- The implementation of Ind-AS for public sector banks requires an amendment to the **Banking Regulation Act**. The schedule in BR Act relating to financial statement disclosures needs to be changed to the Ind-AS format.
- Section 29 of the BR Act deals with the accounts and balance sheets of public sector banks. Private sector banks are covered by the Companies Act, which is based on the new accounting standards.

Issues associated with Aadhaar Payment Bridge System (APBS)

Aadhaar Bridge Payment System (ABPS)

- Aadhaar Payment Bridge system implemented by NPCI is used by the government departments and agencies for electronic transfer of benefits and subsidiaries under Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) scheme launched by GoI.
- Here the beneficiary is identified through an Aadhaar number, then NPCI manages an Aadhaar Mapper where the Aadhaar number is mapped to a specific bank account and the money flows to the connected bank account.
- In other words, instead of having to provide multiple account details (Name, Account number, IFSC Code etc.) to receive a bank transfer, one can only provide their Aadhaar number.

Benefits of Aadhaar Payment Bridge (APB) System
- Eliminates inordinate delays, multiple channels & paper-work involved in the existing system.
- Transfers benefits & subsidies in a seamless & timely manner and directly into the Aadhaar Enabled Bank Account.
- In case of change in bank account, customer is not required to convey the bank account details or change in bank details to the Government Department or Agency.
- Customer not required to open multiple bank accounts for receiving benefits and subsidies of various social welfare schemes – Customer just need to open one account and seed his/her Aadhaar number in the bank account to start receiving benefits and subsidies directly into his/her Aadhaar Enabled Bank Account.

Do you know?

Induction of a bank account into APBS involves two distinct steps –

- First, the account must be "seeded" with the customer's Aadhaar number.
- Second, it must be connected to the NPCI mapper — a step known as "mapping".

Issues/Concerns:

1. **Issue with ABP mapper:** Under the current system, the APB sends the subsidies to the last bank account seeded with the Aadhaar. In other words, in cases of multiple accounts for the same person, the APBS automatically sends money to the latest-mapped account. (**without customer's consent**)
2. **Haphazard seeding:** Under Jan Dhan Yojana (JDY), millions of bank accounts were opened and seeded with Aadhaar in a haphazard manner. Aadhaar numbers were seeded into these accounts without proper verification.
   Haphazard seeding continued because the government wanted to bring all direct benefit transfer (DBT) payments — pensions, scholarships, subsidies, MGNREGA wages, and so on — under the Aadhaar payments umbrella.
3. **Issue of diverted payments**: Bank payments were being redirected to a wrong account, without the recipient's consent or knowledge. For example, in 2017 the nation witnessed mass diversion of LPG subsidies to Airtel wallets without seeking "informed consent" of the recipient.
4. **Issue with e-KYC norms:** Compulsory e-KYC became a nightmare for poor people, as they did not know what they were supposed to do. Many pensioners are struggling to understand why their pension was discontinued after e-KYC was made compulsory.
5. **Issue of rejected payments** — another nightmare for powerless DBT recipients.
6. **Lack of accountability** – ABPS is a very opaque payment system and few people have a clear understanding of it. When people have problems of diverted or rejected payments, they have no recourse. More often than not, they are sent from one office to another.
7. **Problems of biometric authentication** and inconsistencies between the Aadhaar database and the bank database are other issues.

Conclusion:

- The premature and coercive imposition of the APBS has resulted in increased diverted payments, which is a serious problem.
- A recent study of the Indian School of Business (ISB), on an analysis of more than 10 million payments in 2014-18, concludes that 38% of all the APBS payments of MGNREGA wages in Jharkhand "redirect wages to a completely unrelated account".
- There is a need for reliable seeding of bank accounts with Aadhaar for APBS to work efficiently.

- An independent and participatory review of the system is long overdue.
- While Aadhaar-based payments have only added to the suffering of the labourers and Aadhaar's implementation through fragile rural banking systems have only created commotion, it is high time that the government should see the ground realities which are clear as daylight.

Connecting the dots:

- What are the concerns being raised over Aadhaar Payment Bridge System (APBS)? Critically evaluate.
- Should Aadhaar be made compulsory for availing the benefits of government schemes? Examine in the light of the recent SC judgement in this regard.

AGRICULTURE

Strength to Blue revolution

Context:

- The below article deals with the current government's proposal to create a separate department for fisheries.

Key facts:
- Fisheries are the primary source of livelihood for several communities in India.
- **India is the world's second-largest fish producer** with exports worth more than Rs 47,000 crore.
- Fisheries are the **country's single-largest agriculture export**, with a growth rate of 6 to 10 per cent in the past five years.

Concerns:
- According to FAO's State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture reports – 90% of the global marine fish stocks have either been fully-exploited, or over-fished or depleted to an extent that recovery may not be biologically possible.
- In order to meet the ever-increasing demand for animal protein, global fish production should touch 196 million tonnes by 2025 — it currently stands at 171 million tonnes.
- India has a marine fisher population of 3.5 million; 10.5 million people are engaged in inland fishery and fish farming. However, the productivity in both sectors is low.

Why creation of a separate department for fisheries is a significant step?
- Fisheries sector significance is often underscored. Therefore, a concentrated effort by an independent department could help the government achieve its objective of doubling farmers' income and improve exports.
- India's fisheries sector faces the challenge of sustainability. A separate department can held to overcome this challenge through dedicated policies to address the challenge of sustainability.
- India has the potential to bridge the gap between increasing demand and depleting production, provided it concentrates on aquaculture — fish farming. The country has a comparative advantage in this respect.
- The fisheries sector is one that is in dire need of cold storage facilities, landing points and cold chain. Until now, these have received little focus from policy-makers.
- The creation of a separate department can help in ensuring coordination of measures such as conservation, regulation and protection of the fishermen's interests.

- The department can also focus on concerns like falling catch, marine pollution and potential market opportunities.
- The creation of the department can help bring in the much required funding for the sector.

Blue Revolution scheme
- Realizing the immense scope for development of fisheries and aquaculture, the Government of India had restructured the Central Plan Scheme under an umbrella of Blue Revolution.
- It provides for a focused development and management of the fisheries sector to increase both fish production and fish productivity from aquaculture and fisheries resources of the inland and marine fisheries sector including deep sea fishing.

Do you know?
- The scheme adopted a two-pronged approach: **Sustainable capture fishery** to harness marine and inland water resources and **expanding the horizon of fish farming** through increased coverage, enhanced productivity, species diversification and better market returns.
- India's marine capture fishery comprises largely of small fishermen who operate their vessels or boats in near-shore coastal waters, which are highly overfished.
- India lacks modernized vessels to capture high value fish stock, which proliferates in the deep seas.
- Therefore, harnessing these resources sustainably will bring immense benefits to fishing communities.

New National Policy on Marine Fisheries
- The new policy provides guidance for promoting 'Blue Growth Initiative' which focus on ushering 'Blue Revolution'.
- The policy talks of introducing deep-sea fishing vessels and assisting fishing communities to convert their vessels and gears for the waters beyond.
- The policy envisages intensive fish farming through increased stocking of seed, better feed quality and diversification of species.
- Innovative practices such as re-circulatory aquaculture system aim to realise the goal of more crop per drop.
- The government has invested in hatcheries to meet the ever-increasing demand for good quality fish seed.
- Productivity of freshwater fish farms and productivity of brackish water coastal aquaculture has gone up.

Fisheries and Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund
- The investment of Rs 3,000 crore in the Blue Revolution is being supplemented through the Rs 7,523-crore Fisheries and Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund. This will meet the capital investment requirement of this sector.

Conclusion:
- India right now has opportunity to introduce large-scale industrial fishing; however, it must also factor in the sustainability challenges and acknowledge that fishing is a primary livelihood activity for a large number of communities and individuals.
- The policies framed by the new department should aim at enhancing productivity, better returns and increased incomes.
- Future policies must prioritise seed production in order to attain self-sufficiency in the sector.
- Open sea cage culture is at a pilot stage and the initial trials have given promising results. This may prove another game changer.
- The new department will give undivided attention to creating and strengthening infrastructure facilities in marine and inland fisheries and give a boost to aquaculture and post-harvest activities.

Connecting the dots:
- Examine the bottlenecks associated with the current Fisheries Sector in India. Also suggest ways to address them.
- What is Blue Revolution? Examine why the creation of a separate Fisheries Department is significant.

'Kerala model' of sustainable fishing

Part of: GS Mains II and III – Government schemes and policies;

In news:
- The Department of Fisheries under the Union Agriculture Ministry has advised coastal States and Union Territories to consider **adopting conservation measures** already introduced by Kerala.
- One important component/measure under the Kerala model is - **'Suchitwa Sagaram' (Clean Sea) initiative** - to keep the marine environment clean and litter-free.
- At a time when sustainable utilisation of marine resources has become a hot topic globally, the **'Kerala model' of curbing destructive fishing practices** and protecting marine ecosystems has found takers at the national level.

Cane growers get a sweet deal

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II and III - Social/welfare issue; Farmer's issue; Indian Economy and development

In news:
- In a bid to boost sugar mills' ethanol-production capacity and help them pay off mounting arrears to cane farmers, the Union government has approved ₹3,355 crore in incentives.
- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved ₹2,790 crore for bank loan interest subvention to mills, and ₹565 crore for loan interest subvention to the molasses-based standalone distilleries.
- Banks will be able to extend soft loans worth ₹15,500 crore to mills and distilleries under the scheme.
- This is likely to benefit 268 mills and create an additional 300-400 crore litres of ethanol capacity, according to industry estimates.
- Record harvests and sugar recovery have caused a glut in sugar production and brought the prices down.
- Cash-starved mills owe farmers more than ₹22,000 crore in arrears for the current season, with almost half the sum owed to farmers in the politically significant parts of Uttar Pradesh.

Do you know?
- India is second largest producer of sugarcane after Brazil and Sugarcane accounts for 6.0 percent of the total value of agriculture output in India. Over the years production has continuously increased. However, sugarcane farmers still face many problems.
- Sugarcane farmers in India are facing a payments crisis running into thousands of crores.
- Emergence of alternative sweeteners replacing sugar and increasing health consciousness, slowdown in the pace of demand growth while continuous increase in overall production (crossed 30 million tonnes in recent years) has led to demand-supply mismatch.
- While sugarcane is procured at minimum prices declared by Government (Fair and Remunerative Price- Central Government, State Advised Price- State Government), market forces determine the price of sugar. Demand-Supply mismatch has caused fall in sugar prices which makes it difficult for Sugar Mills to clear payments of farmers.

ENVIRONMENT/POLLUTION

Fires are a crucial component of some forest systems, says group of scientists

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Environment and Biodiversity; Ecosystem services; Natural Hazards

In news:
- According to the scientists, forest fires have been occurring in India from at least 60,000 years ago, ever since modern humans appeared here.
- They added that "forests that we think are natural and 'pristine' have often been created by anthropogenic burning for thousands of years."
- Some scientists said several native trees and plants in these landscapes have "co-evolved" with fire: fire helps revive dormant seeds of many species.
- Another study revealed that fires, along with seasonal droughts, should not be painted as problematic and need to be considered important drivers of dry deciduous tracts across Andhra Pradesh-Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.
- More evidence points to fires even suppressing invasive species.

Crop burning raises risk of respiratory illness threefold

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II and III – Health Issue; Air Pollution

In news:
According to a study by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) –
- The burning of agricultural residue a contributor to north India's winter pollution increases the risk of respiratory illnesses three fold for those who experience it.
- It may also be responsible for an annual $30 billion (approximately ₹2 trillion) loss in terms of days of work lost in States affected by crop burning.
- Living in an area where crop burning is practiced is a leading risk factor for respiratory disease in northern India.
- North India is impacted more compared to South.

Do you know?

- The researchers used health records and satellite data for crop-burning fires detected by the Moderate-Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS) Terra satellite, managed by the National Aeronautics Space Administration (NASA).
- In 2013, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) issued a directive to Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, asking them to ban stubble burning.
- The Environment Ministers of these States as well as top officials at the Centre declared a "zero tolerance" policy on the burning of stubble, which has been estimated to contribute anywhere from 7% to 78% of the particulate matter-emission load in Delhi during winter.

Grave risk
Key findings of the study

- Living in a district with intense crop burning resulted in a 3-fold risk of Acute Respiratory Infections
- A Lancet study found that 12.5% of the total deaths in India in 2017 were attributable to air pollution

- Delhi was the State with the highest annual population-weighted mean PM2.5, followed by Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Haryana in north India

A farmer burns stubble in Amritsar. ▪ PTI
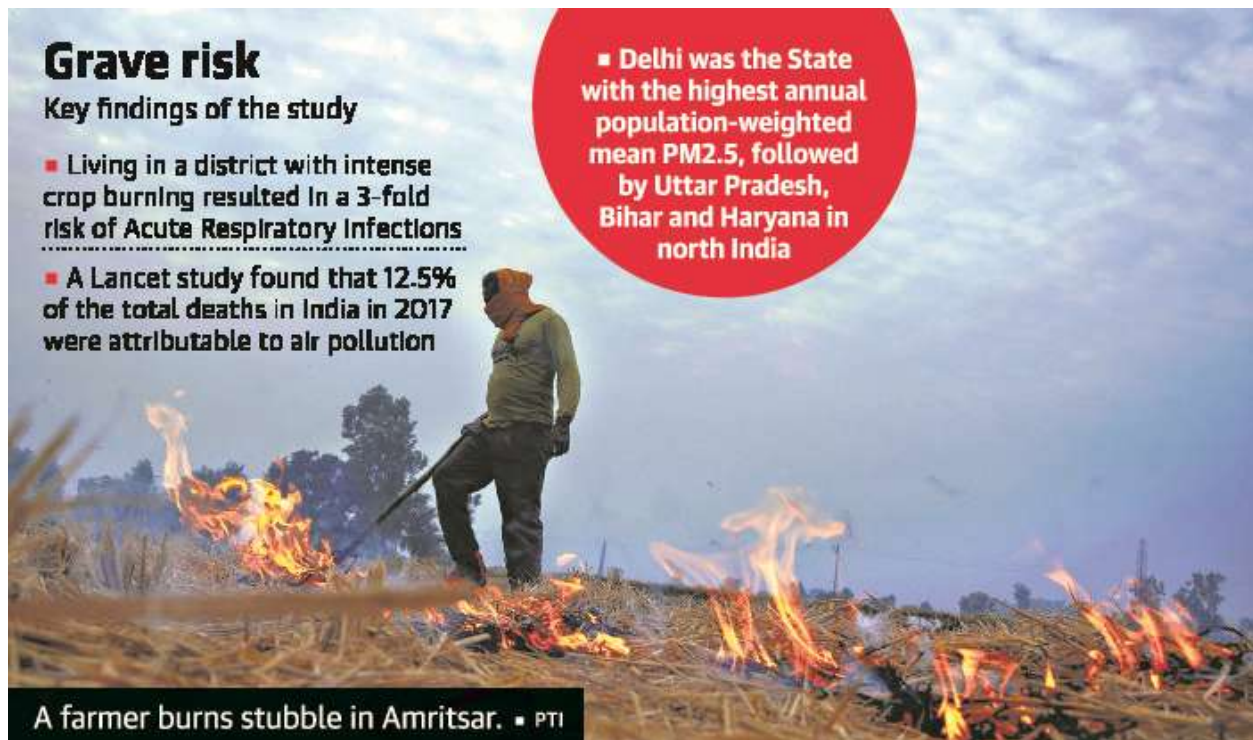
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Fifteen of the 20 most polluted cities in the world are in India

In news:

- Fifteen of the top 20 most polluted cities in the world are located in India.
- **Gurugram in Haryana topped the list** with an average annual particulate matter (PM 2.5) quality of 135 micrograms/cubic metre, in 2018.

- Delhi – a frequent fixture on global pollution hotspots – was only the 11th most noxious city behind Lahore, Pakistan (10th) and Hotan, China (8th).
- The other cities in India that made the list of 20 were Ghaziabad, Faridabad, Bhiwadi, Noida, Patna, Lucknow, Jodhpur, Muzaffarpur, Varanasi, Moradabad, Agra, Gaya and Jind.

Do you know?
- Of the cities analysed, 64% exceeded the WHO's annual exposure guideline (10 micrograms/cubic metre) for fine particulate matter, also known as PM 2.5.
- India's annual guidelines range from 40-60 micrograms/cubic metre, depending on whether they are residential or industrial areas.
- Every single one of measured cities with data in the Middle East and Africa exceeded the WHO guideline, while 99% of cities in South Asia, 95% of cities in Southeast Asia and 89% of cities in East Asia breached this level.

Ranking by country:
- Bangladesh the most polluted followed by Pakistan and India respectively.
- Iceland with the cleanest air.

Methodology:
- The ranking relies on ground-based sensors located in 3,000 cities from 73 countries and was compiled by IQAir Group, a manufacturer of air-monitoring sensors as well as purifiers and environmentalist group Greenpeace.

Pollution hubs
- Jakarta and Hanoi emerged as Southeast Asia's two most polluted cities and average concentrations in the cities in China fell by 12% from 2017 to 2018.
- Beijing ranks now as the 122nd most polluted city in the world in 2018 and China, the 12th most polluted country in the world.

Dubious distinction

Fifteen cities from India figure among the 20 most polluted places across the globe

Rank	City	2018*
1	Gurugram	135.8
2	Ghaziabad	135.2
3	Faisalabad, Pakistan	130.4
4	Faridabad	129.1
5	Bhiwadi	125.4
6	Noida	123.6
7	Patna	119.7
8	Hotan, China	116
9	Lucknow	115.7
10	Lahore, Pakistan	114.9
11	Delhi	113.5
12	Jodhpur	113.4
13	Muzaffarpur	110.3
14	Varanasi	105.3
15	Moradabad	104.9
16	Agra	104.8
17	Dhaka, Bangladesh	97.1
18	Gaya	96.6
19	Kashgar, China	95.7
20	Jind	91.6

*Average PM2.5 in $\mu g/m^3$

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Stubble burning

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Environment and Ecology; Pollution

In news:

According to a team of Swiss and Indian researchers –

- Enforcing a ban will not end the menace of stubble burning.
- In other words, government's efforts earmarking funds for specialised farming equipment (for straw management) or enforcing the State-led ban on the practice are unlikely to solve the problem.
- Only educating farmers about the monetary costs of burning stubble can address the environmental crisis triggered every year in Punjab.
- Farmer cooperative groups, a key link between the government and farmers, ought to be playing a more active role in educating farmers.
- There needs to be greater participation by village cooperatives in being able to impose social norms that would dissuade burners.

Do you know?

- The burning of paddy stubble by farmers to clear their fields for the next crop is considered to be responsible for 20% of the smog in Delhi.
- In 2013, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) issued a directive to Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, asking them to ban stubble burning.
- The Environment Ministers of these States as well as top officials at the Centre declared a "zero tolerance" policy on the burning of stubble, which has been estimated to contribute anywhere from 7% to 78% of the particulate matter-emission load in Delhi during winter.
- The Centre has spent about ₹600 crore in subsidising farm equipment via village cooperatives to enable farmers to access them and avoid stubble burning.

Plastic waste import

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Environment and Biodiversity; Pollution

In news:

- In spite of a ban on the import of plastic waste into India, the influx of PET bottles has quadrupled from 2017 to 2018 (due to legal loophole)
- Indian firms are importing plastic scraps from China, Italy, Japan and Malawi for recycling.
- To incentivise domestic plastic recycling units, the government had banned the import of plastic waste, particularly PET bottles in 2015.
- In 2016, an amendment allowed such imports as long as they were carried out by agencies situated in Special Economic Zones. It's this loophole that's been exploited.

Life in plastic
A look at the production and consumption in India

Big importer

■ India is the **10th** largest importer of plastic scrap after China and Hong Kong, the Netherlands, Germany, the U.S., Belgium, Malaysia, Canada, Austria and Taiwan

Huge growth

■ India produces **25,940** tonnes of plastic every day, of which only **15,564** tonnes is collected

■ The plastic processing industry recorded a compounded annual growth rate of **10%** between 2010 and 2015

Rising threat: A worker sifting through used PET bottles at a waste collection centre near Chandigarh. ■ AKHILESH KUMAR

Massive use

■ India's annual plastic consumption is expected to rise from **12 million** tonnes to 20 million tonnes by 2020, according to FICCI

■ The average per capita consumption of plastic in India is about **11 kg** against the global average of 28 kg

Waste generation

■ Solid waste generation per capita varies from **0.17 kg**/person/day in small towns to roughly **0.62 kg**/person/day in big cities

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Do you know?

- Solid plastic waste has been prohibited from import into the country including in Special Economic Zones (SEZ) and by Export Oriented Units (EOU).
- The change in law was part of the Hazardous and Other Wastes (Management & Transboundary Movement) Amendment Rules, 2019.
- Government and industry estimates suggest that India consumes about 13 million tonnes of plastic and recycles only about 4 million tonnes.
- A lack of an efficient waste segregation system and inadequate collection is the root cause for this wide gap.

UN Environment Assembly: Focus is on Plastic

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Environment and Biodiversity; Plastic pollution

Key pointers:

- **UN Environment Assembly** is the top annual forum on the planet's environmental crisis.
- Countries from around the world set their sights on a **pivotal deal to curb plastic waste**.
- The UN environment forum was held in Nairobi.
- The UN wants individual countries to sign up to "significantly" reduce plastic production, including a phasing out of single-use plastics by 2030 — a goal inspired by the 2015 Paris Agreement on voluntary reductions of carbon emissions.

Do you know?

- The world currently produces more than 300 million tonnes of plastics annually, and there are at least five trillion plastic pieces floating in our oceans.
- Microplastics have been found in the deepest sea trenches and high up the earth's tallest peaks, and plastic consumption is growing year-on-year.

About UN Environment Assembly

- The UN Environment Assembly has the universal membership of all 193 UN Member States and the full involvement of UN organizations, specialized agencies, inter-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector. In bringing together these varied communities, the Assembly provides a groundbreaking platform for leadership on global environmental policy.
- Latest Environment Assembly took place in Nairobi, Kenya.

Global Environmental Outlook (GEO)

In news:

According to the Global Environmental Outlook (GEO), prepared by the United Nations Environment Programme –

- Unless environmental protections were drastically scaled up, cities and regions in Asia, the Middle East and Africa could see millions of premature deaths by mid-century.
- India could save at least $3 trillion in healthcare costs if it implemented policy initiatives consistent with Paris climate goals.
- In other words, ensuring that the globe didn't heat up beyond 1.5 degrees Celsius by the turn of the century.

Do you know?

- India's stated commitment is to lower emissions intensity of its GDP by 33-35% compared to 2005 levels by 2030;

- increase total cumulative electricity generation from fossil free energy sources to 40% by 2030; and
- create additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tons through additional forest and tree cover.
- India is on track to achieve two of these goals — of emissions intensity and electricity generation — according to independent climate-watch site Climate Tracker.

GEO report also highlighted that –
- A quarter of all premature deaths and diseases worldwide are due to manmade pollution and environmental damage.
- It said that poor environmental conditions "cause approximately 25% of global disease and mortality" — around 9 million deaths in 2015 alone.
- The report says air pollution causes 6-7 million early deaths annually.
- The report called for a root-and-branch detoxification of human behaviour while insisting that the situation is not unassailable.
- It called for immediate changes in the way the world eats, generates energy and handles its waste.

6th edition of Global Environment Outlook

Key pointers:

- Global Environment Outlook (GEO) is released by **UN Environment Programme (UNEP)**
- The GEO project was initiated in response to the environmental reporting requirements of **UN Agenda 21**.
- Agenda 21 is a **non-binding action plan** of the **United Nations** with regard to sustainable development. It is a product of the **Earth Summit** (UN Conference on Environment and Development) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in **1992**.
- The "21" in Agenda 21 refers to the 21st century.
- Since 2015, **Sustainable Development Goals** are included in the **Agenda 2030**.
- UN report, **GEO-6 theme**: *"Healthy Planet, Healthy People"*

According to 6th GEO Report –
- The world is **unsustainably extracting resources** and producing **unmanageable quantities of waste**.

- With rising growth, higher quantities of resources are extracted, which leads to chemicals flowing into air, water and land. Thus causes ill-health, premature mortality, poor quality of life etc.
- East and South Asia have the highest number of deaths due to air pollution. (In 2017, air pollution has killed 1.24 million in India alone)
- Freshwater pollutants making antimicrobial-resistant infections a major cause of death by 2050.

Other highlights provided by GEO-6:
- It estimates that the top 10% of populations (in terms of wealth) globally are responsible for 45% of GHG emissions, whereas, bottom 50% for only 13%.
- Pollution impacts are borne more by the poorer citizens.

Concerns: (India)
- Deaths due to air pollution is high
- Unsustainable resources extraction
- Over-population leading to stress on land and agricultural yields are coming under stress due to increase in average temperature and erratic monsoons (impacts food security and health)
- Poorly enforced environment laws.
- Water protection is given low priority.
- India is the leading extractor of groundwater.

The way ahead:
- Effective environment laws and political will is necessary to end business-as-usual policies.
- Curbing the use of fossil fuels and toxic chemicals.
- Targeted interventions are needed to resolve specific air and water pollution.
- Aggressive monitoring and assessment of air quality and greenhouse gases emissions.
- Policies should give impetus to shift to cleaner sources of energy (or renewable energy sources)
- Combating air pollution would require all older coal-based power plants in India to conform to emission norms at the earliest.
- Quick transition to green mobility is needed.
- It is imperative to stop the contamination of surface supplies by chemicals, sewage and municipal waste.
- Waste water should be recovered, treated and reused. Augmenting rainwater harvesting.

Connecting the dots:
- Human activities are degrading the global environment at a pace that could endanger the "ecological foundations of society" and human health. Comment.
- Discuss the factors responsible for long term climate change. What evidences do we have that support current global warming. Explain.

Climate vulnerability index for India

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Environment and Bidoversity

In news:
- Department of Science and Technology (DST) will be commissioning a study to assess the climate risks faced by States in India.
- The assessment to include global warming risks faced by 12 Himalayan States – especially States such as Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand – which are vulnerable to climate change.
- IITs and IISc are coordinating to evolve a common methodology, and determine how districts are to be equipped to deal with the vagaries of climate change.

Do you know?
The scientists conducted workshops with the States and culled eight key parameters on the basis of which a vulnerability score could be generated. They included:
1. percentage of area in districts under forests
2. yield variability of food grain
3. population density
4. female literacy rate
5. infant mortality rate
6. percentage of population below poverty line
7. average man-days under MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act), and
8. The area under slope > 30%.

Climate sensitive — Assam and Mizoram have been identified as most vulnerable to climate change in a study done by various IITs and IISc, Bengaluru

VULNERABILITY INDEX VALUE

Sikkim, Uttarakhand, Arunachal, Himachal, Tripura, West Bengal, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, J&K, Mizoram, Assam

Low female literacy was key in Arunachal Pradesh, while loss of forest cover & steep slope factored in Nagaland's vulnerability

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Sunstroke and Heat Wave

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II and III – Health issues; Impact of Climate Change and Global Warming; Disaster management

In news:
- Sunstroke claimed three lives in Kerala. The number of sunstroke deaths in the State over just the weekend has now risen to three.
- Between March 1 and March 24, as many as 125 persons sought medical attention due to sunburn.
- IMD warns of further rise in temperatures.

Heat Wave on the rise
- Earlier this month the IMD had forecast heat wave conditions in Tamil Nadu, coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema. (India's 'core heatwave zones')

Do you know?
- Heat waves are among the leading causes of deaths among natural disasters in India.
- The heat waves of 2015 and 2016 had killed 2,040 and 1,111 people across the country respectively, according to records from the National Disaster Management Agency.

- Climate change is driving temperatures higher as well as increasing the frequency and severity of heat waves. India too is experiencing increased instances of heat waves every year.
- NDMA has been closely working with vulnerable States to reduce the adverse impacts of heat wave.

According to recent UN climate report –
- India to face threat of deadly heat waves
- If the average global temperature rises by more than one degree Celsius from the present, India could "annually" expect conditions like the 2015 heat wave that killed at least 2,000
- The report stated that capping the rise in temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius would require "rapid and far-reaching" transitions in land, energy, industry, buildings, transport and cities.

Impact of rising sea levels

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III –Impact of Climate Change and Global Warming; Disaster management

In news:
- Rising sea levels to affect water table in T.N.
- Fresh water will be replaced with saline water over time: study
- The water table would witness an incursion of sea water to the extent of 2-3mm every year.
- Rapid urbanisation and indiscriminate drawal have already led to salt water intrusion in many areas.

Do you know?
- There is a rise in sea level by 2mm every year based on a report by the Indian Network for Climate Change Assessment under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- The sea would also be moving closer to the land by 0.5 m every year because of the increase in sea level.

India's carbon dioxide emissions up 5%

In news:

According to a report by the Paris-based International Energy Agency (IEA) –
- India's carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions are growing at a faster rate than in any other major energy-consuming nation.
- India emitted 2,299 million tonnes of carbon dioxide in 2018, a 4.8% rise from the previous year.
- India's emissions growth was higher than that of the United States and China — the two biggest emitters in the world.
- But "despite this growth, per capita emissions in India remain low at only 40% of the global average," the report adds.
- Emissions from India accounted for 7% of the global CO_2 burden in 2018, compared with the US's 14%.
- India's higher CO_2 emissions have been spurred by an increasing consumption of fossil fuels.

Growth rate of CO2 emissions in 2018
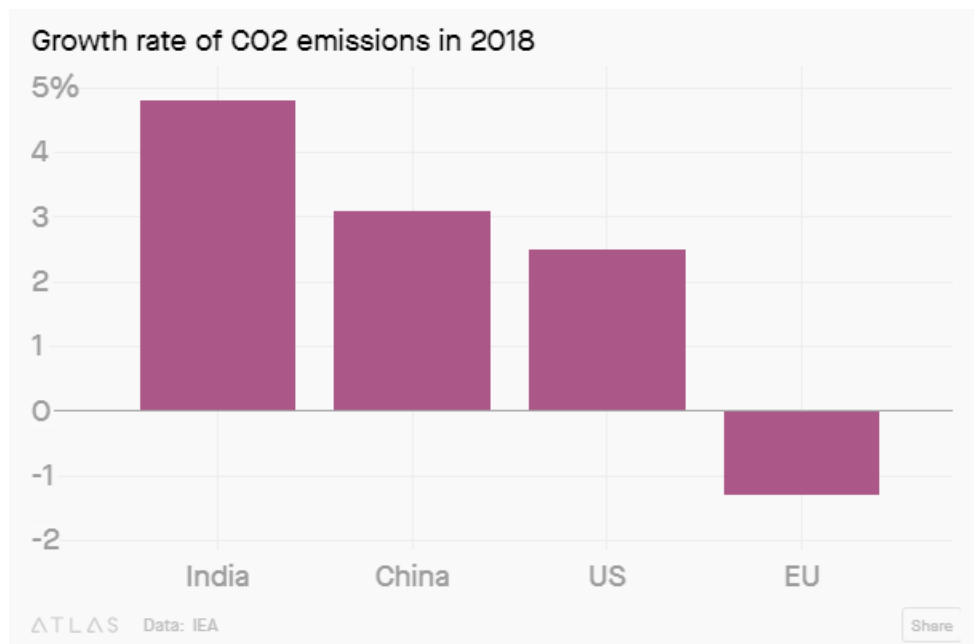
Do you know?
- The country has set ambitious renewable energy targets for 2022, but is likely to miss them. The vast majority of the energy that India consumes comes from fossil fuels.
- Under the Paris climate agreement, India has set a target to reduce the emissions intensity of its economy by over 30%, compared with 2005 levels, by 2030.

- But the country has continued building new coal plants, and oil imports are only rising as its growing population becomes more prosperous.

Growth in India's primary energy demand in 2018

Coal	20 Mtoe
Oil	10
Renewables	3
Gas	2

△T L △S   Data: IEA, Mtoe: metric tonnes of oil equivalent
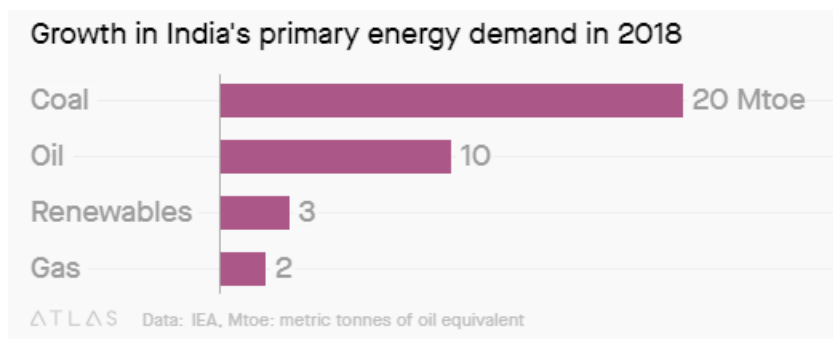
For carbon neutral cities

Context:

Last year 18 climate scientists released a report targeted at urban policymakers. The report was released before the UNFCCC Katowice summit.

- The report stressed on the urgency of keeping global warming to less than 1.5ºC above pre-industrial levels.
- According to the report, cities hold the key as nearly 75 per cent of the global carbon footprint is due to urban activities.
- Well-connected and pedestrian-friendly cities have a relatively low carbon footprint.
- The report recommends the use of "information and communication technologies to optimise public transportation efficiency, and enable vehicle sharing".
- It also advocates the use of "energy-efficient buildings and infrastructure that have low or near zero-emissions".
- All this will require cooperation between local, provincial and national governments.

Mayors of several cities promised to act on the report's recommendations.

Copenhagen case study:

- Copenhagen (Denmark's capital) became the first city to present a plan to cancel out its carbon footprint by 2025.
- Copenhagen has already reduced its GHG emissions by more than 40 per cent compared to 2005.
- Nearly 45 per cent of people who live in and around Copenhagen use bicycles to commute.

- The city also has specially-designated roads for cyclists and uses waste to generate electricity.
- For every unit of fossil fuel it consumes, Copenhagen plans to sell commensurate amounts of renewable energy.

Conclusion:
- Copenhagen shows how mayors, town planners and other local authorities hold the key to the success of national commitments to mitigate global warming.
- The Danish capital's experience could hold lessons for civic authorities around the world.

Connecting the dots:
- For India to make urbanisation sustainable, it is important to empower urban local governments. Do you agree? Elucidate.
- Local governments hold the key to the success of national commitments to mitigate global warming. Do you agree? Elucidate.
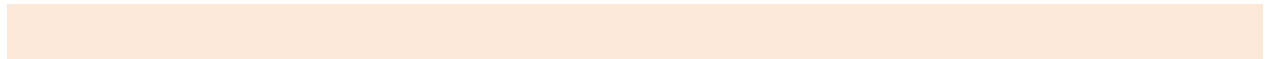
ANIMALS/NATIONAL PARKS IN NEWS

Rhinos without borders

Part of: GS prelims and Mains III – Animal conservation; Environment and Biodiversity

In news:
- International boundaries will not come in the way of conservation of rhinos.
- The **New Delhi Declaration** was adopted during the second meeting of the Asian rhino range countries.
- Experts had noted that trans-boundary collaboration is needed between India, Nepal, and Bhutan for the conservation and protection of the greater one-horned rhino.
- There are no rhinos in Bhutan, but some from the Manas National Park in adjoining Assam or Buxa Tiger Reserve in West Bengal are known to cross over occasionally.

India to tie-up with 4 nations to save rhinos
- India will collaborate with **Bhutan**, **Nepal**, **Indonesia** and **Malaysia** to increase the population of **three species of Asian rhinos**, including the **Greater one-horned rhinoceros** found in the Indian sub-continent.
- The **five rhino range nations** signed a declaration **'The Declaration on Asian Rhinos 2019'** for the conservation and protection of the species at the recently held Second Asian Rhino Range Countries meeting held in Delhi.
- The declaration includes undertaking studies on health issues of the rhinos, their potential diseases and taking necessary steps; collaborating and strengthening wildlife forensics and strengthening of transboundary collaboration among India, Nepal and Bhutan for conservation of the Greater one-horned rhino.

Do you know?
Three species of Asian rhinos –
1. Greater one-horned rhinoceros (found in the Indian sub-continent)
2. Javan rhinos
3. Sumatran rhinos

IUCN Status: Javan and Sumatran Rhino are critically endangered but the greater one-horned (or Indian) rhino vulnerable.

National Park in news: Orang National Park

Why in news?

- A Royal Bengal tigress, F103, strayed out of north-central Assam's Orang National Park 16 months ago.
- Despite a 16-month trapping operation, a tigress from a reserve in Assam remains elusive.

Animal in news: Wood snake

Part of: Prelims and Mains III – Environment and Biodiversity; Animal conservation

In news:
- A species of **wood snake** that wasn't seen for 140 years has resurfaced in a survey conducted by scientists in the **Meghamalai Wildlife Sanctuary**.
- The species is endemic to the Meghamalai forests and the Periyar Tiger Reserve landscape. (Tamil Nadu)

Do you know?
- The local population of wood snakes was last spotted and recorded by British military officer and naturalist Colonel Richard Henry Beddome in 1878, who went on to describe it as a new species, Xylophis indicus.
- The rediscovery of the snake indicated that the quality of the habitat was good.
- The documentation of the existence of this species will aid in both the management and conservation of biodiversity in this region.

Animal in news: Starry dwarf frog

Part of: Prelims and Mains III – Environment and Biodiversity; Animal conservation

In news:
- A "secretive" new species of frog has been discovered on the forest floor in India's **Western Ghat mountain range**.
- Dubbed the Starry dwarf frog after the markings on its dark brown back, Astrobatrachus kurichiyana has an orange underbelly and is just 2cm in length.
- It has named as Astrobatrachus kurichiyana (genus Astrobatrachus after its starry spots and kurichiyana in honour of the Kurichiya tribal community who live in the area).

- The frog, whose closest relatives are a group of species native to India and Sri Lanka, is the only member of an ancient lineage dating back millions of years, according to the Florida Museum of Natural History.
- It is unclear yet whether the species descended from African or Asian frogs.
- Genetic testing and a closer look at its shape, colouring and other features have revealed that it does not match any existing species.
- Genetic analysis reveal that the species is at least 60 million years old.

Rushikulya waits for Olive Ridleys

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Environment and Biodiversity; Animal conservation

In news:
- Even after waiting for almost a month, Olive Ridley turtles have not yet arrived for mass nesting at Odisha's Rushikulya rookery and Devi river mouth.
- The reasons are not fully understood yet.
- Mass nesting has already occurred at the Gahirmatha coast of the State.

Do you know?
- Only two species of marine turtles display a unique mass nesting behavior. This behavior is known as an 'arribada'.
- This reproductive phenomenon was first observed by the scientific community in 1961.
- By producing large numbers of offspring most organisms like sea turtles can insure their survival even after predation occurs.

Arribada- Spanish term meaning arrival; a mass nesting behavior
- An arribada is a unique nesting phenomenon common to both the Olive ridley and the Kemp's ridley sea turtle.
- The Olive ridley is endemic to the Pacific coasts of Mexico, Central America, and India. It is known to be a nocturnal nester.
- Olive Ridley: IUCN Status-Vulnerable
- The Kemp's ridley is endemic to the Gulf of Mexico. It ranges from Galveston, Texas to Tampico, Mexico. Kemp's ridley turtles display unique diurnal arribadas.

Major nesting sites in Odisha:
- The Gahirmatha beach
- The mouth of the Debi river
- The Rushikulya rookery coast in the Ganjam district

The Gahirmatha beach is the largest mass nesting site for olive ridley turtles along the Indian coastline, followed by the rookery at the mouth of the Rushikulya river.

'Do forest surveys separately'

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Environment and Biodiversity; Protecting ecologically fragile areas

In news:
- A high-power committee constituted by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has recommended that forest surveys explicitly demarcate trees grown in forests from those grown outside (in plantations and private lands)
- Forest surveys are biennial exercise conducted by the government to estimate forest cover.

Do you know?
- Currently, the government counts both towards estimating the portion of India's geographical area covered by forest.
- Independent critics have for long pointed out that including both isn't an ecologically sound principle.
- India posted a marginal 0.21% rise in the area under forest between 2015 and 2017, according to the India State of Forest Report (SFR) 2017.
- India has about 7,08,273 sq. km. of forest, which is 21.53% of the geographic area of the country (32,87,569 sq. km.).
- Getting India to have at least 33% of its area under forest has been a long-standing goal of the government since 1988.
- The total tree cover, according to this assessment, was 93,815 sq. km. or a 2% rise from the approximately 92,500 sq. km. in 2015.

Miles to go Bringing at least 33% of India's area under forests has been a goal since 1988. In 2017, 21.53% of its geographical area was forests

Kambalakonda forest in Visakhapatnam.

Year	Total forest cover (sq km)	Total tree cover	Tree cover % of India's geographical area	Forest cover as % of India's geographical area
2017	7,08,273	93,815	2.95	21.53
2015	7,01,673	92,572	2.82	21.34
2013	6,97,898	91,266	2.78	21.23
2011	6,92,027	90,844	2.76	21.05
2009	6,92,394	92,769	2.82	21.06

https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2019/03/09/DEL/Delhi/TH/5_07/43a05378_2785628_101_mr.jpg

SC on ecologically fragile Aravali Hills

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Environment and Biodiversity; Protecting ecologically fragile areas

In news:
- Supreme Court cautioned the Haryana government against doing "anything" to harm the ecologically fragile Aravali Hills.
- The court has threatened the Haryana government with contempt if it went ahead with the amendments virtually allowing massive scale of construction in the Aravali Hills.
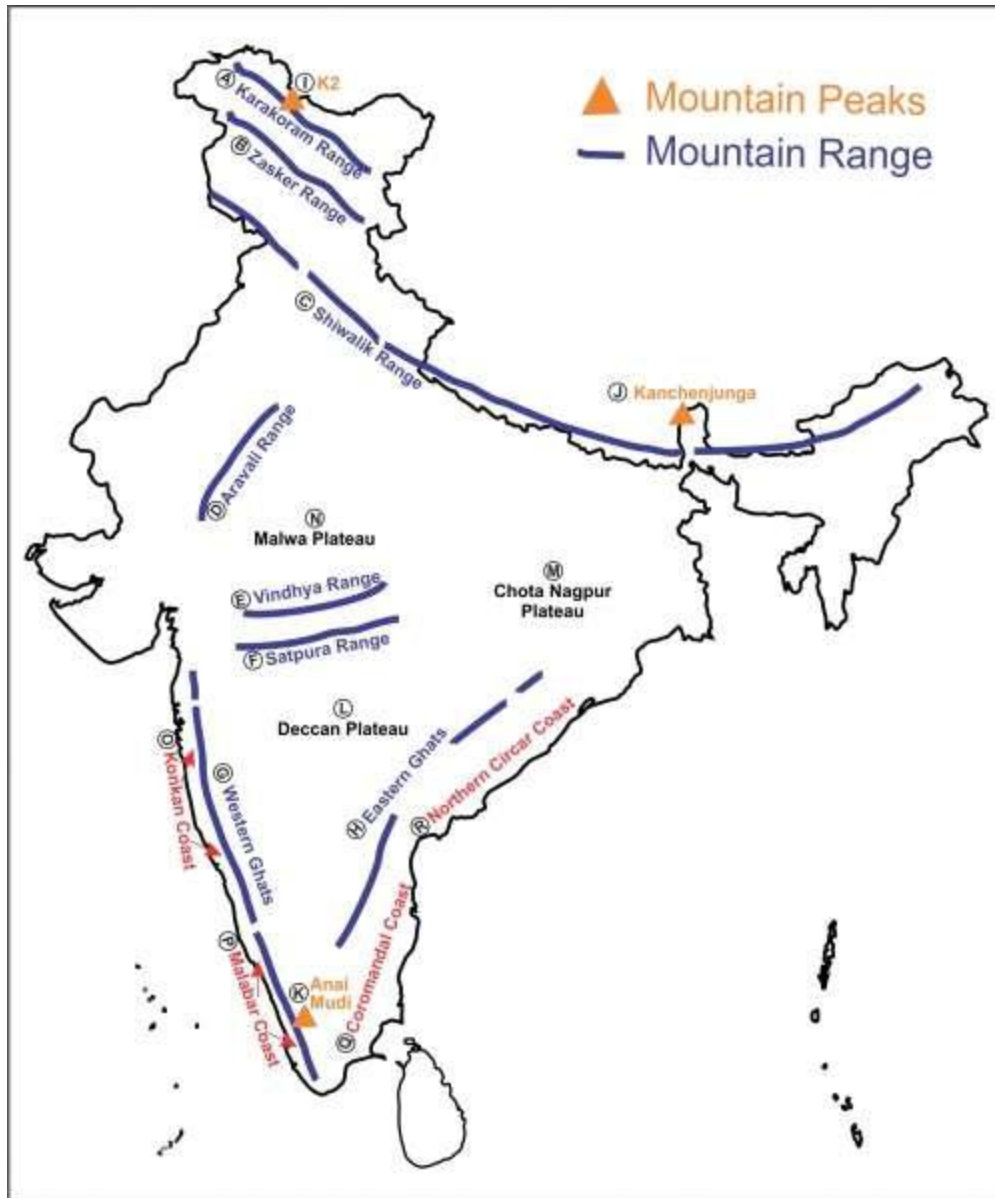
Pic: http://www.nirmancare.com/blog/content/public/upload/ix%20-
%20map%20work%20(chapter%202)%202017-18_0_o.jpg

Do you know?

- SC had passed series of orders over the years to protect the Aravali and Shivalik ranges from builders and indiscriminate mining.
- Once lush Aravali region is devastated after years of indiscriminate and illegal mining.
- The Forest Survey of India (FSI) reported continued illegal mining at more than 3,200 sites in Aravali.
- The degradation of the Aravalis on such a huge scale is also eroding its ability to act as a green barrier against the creep of the Thar Desert towards the highly fertile plains of Punjab, Haryana and Delhi.

- The Aravali range needs to be conserved because it is a rich biodiversity hotspot, hosting many rare species of flora and fauna.
- Several rivers and rivulets, including the Sabarmati, Luni, Chambal and Krishnavati, originate here.

HOW ARAVALIS HAVE BEEN DEFINED AND WHY IT'S GOOD NEWS

The MoEFCC has said 'forests' in Haryana have to be identified in light of various orders passed by the Supreme Court, particularly in the Godavarman and Lafarge cases. MoEFCC has also clarified that definition of Aravalis has been settled — Aravalis should be identified according to the Aravali notification of May 1992. This means governments can no longer hide behind ambiguity to allow commercial projects at the cost of the environment

What are Aravalis?

- It is as the Aravali notification of 1992 says
- Gair mumkin pahar (uncultivable hill)
- Gair mumkin rada (foothills, pastures)
- Gair mumkin behed (ravined foothills)
- Banjad beed (cultivable grassy foothills)
- Rundh (rocky areas between two hills)
- All areas notified under Sections 4 and 5 of the Punjab Land Preservation Act

Construction is not allowed in these places. According to MoEFCC, these parameters (so far valid only for Gurgaon and Alwar) are to be applicable for all of NCR

What is a forest? Key Supreme Court orders

Godavarman case, 1996 | In addition to notified forest areas, areas recorded as forest in government records, and areas that fulfil the dictionary meaning of a forest are to be treated as forest, irrespective of ownership, and whether degraded, denuded or cleared

Samatha case, 1997 | Court gives an expansive meaning of forests to include pastures, grassland and trees

Lafarge case, 2011 | SC directed states to complete process of identifying forests, irrespective of whether they were notified or not, and asked MoEFCC to make criteria for identification of forests

How are Aravlis protected? Key SC orders

MC Mehta case, 2002 | Mining and drawing groundwater in the Haryana Aravalis, within 5km of the Delhi border, banned

MC Mehta case, 2004 | Haryana prevented from withdrawing its affidavit on areas identified as forests — primarily areas notified under the Punjab Land Preservation Act (PLPA), and plantations in Aravalis. Court says Aravalis should be protected at any cost.

2009 | Mining banned in Faridabad and Gurgaon districts. Construction in Aravalis put on hold

How this affects demarcation of Natural Conservation Zones (NCZ)

Aravalis, forests and groundwater recharge areas all make up NCZ. Haryana has undertaken a fresh exercise to demarcate NCZs. The NCR Planning Board has asked it to submit its final report

WHY ARAVALIS NEED PROTECTION

- Natural groundwater recharge zone for Haryana and Delhi
- Act as catchment for 5 lakes — Surajkund, Peacock, Badhkhal, Dhauj and Damdama
- The Mangarbani sacred grove, a natural forest on Gurgaon-Faridabad border, key to ecological balance
- Act as a barrier against the advancing Thar desert. Forest cover in Haryana is only 3-4%, second lowest in the country
- Act as a sink for air pollutants, improves microclimate
- Harbour hundreds of plant, animal and bird species. Faridabad Aravalis is a leopard habitat. Important wildlife corridor between Asola Bhatti sanctuary in Delhi and Sariska Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan

Pic: http://indpaedia.com/ind/images/9/91/What_are_the_Aravalis%3F_II.jpg

Bannerghatta eco-sensitive zone curtailed

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Environment and Biodiversity; Protected areas

In news:
- The Bannerghatta National Park's Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ), which provides a regulated buffer zone around protected areas, will remain at 168.84 sqkm despite thousands of citizens objecting to the reduction of nearly 100 sqkm as compared to the original proposal.
- Earlier in 2016, an ESZ Expert Committee had marked an ESZ area of 268.9 sqkm. However, now the committee is set to declare an ESZ area of 168.84 sqkm around the BNP. (a 37% reduction from the first draft notification)

About Bannerghatta National Park:
- It is near Bangalore, Karnataka, was founded in 1970 and declared as a national park in 1974.
- In 2002 a portion of the park, became a biological reserve, the Bannerghatta Biological Park.
- It is a popular tourist destination with a zoo, a pet corner, an animal rescue centre, a butterfly enclosure, an aquarium, a snake house and a safari park.

Important Value Additions:
Eco-Sensitive Zones
- Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs) or Ecologically Fragile Areas (EFAs) are areas notified by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC), Government of India around Protected Areas , National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries.
- The purpose of declaring ESZs is to create some kind of "shock absorbers" to the protected areas by regulating and managing the activities around such areas.
- They also act as a transition zone from areas of high protection to areas involving lesser protection.

Do you know?
- The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 does not mention the word "Eco-Sensitive Zones".
- However, Section 3(2)(v) of the Act, says that Central Government can restrict areas in which any industries, operations or processes or class of industries, operations or processes shall not be carried out or shall be carried out subject to certain safeguards.
- Besides Rule 5(1) of the Environment (Protection) Rules, 1986 states that central government can prohibit or restrict the location of industries and carrying on certain

operations or processes on the basis of considerations like the biological diversity of an area, maximum allowable limits of concentration of pollutants for an area, environmentally compatible land use, and proximity to protected areas.

- The above two clauses have been effectively used by the government to declare ESZs or EFAs.

No Development Zones
- The same criteria have been used by the government to declare No Development Zones.
- Time to time, the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) approves a comprehensive set of guidelines laying down parameters and criteria for declaring ESZs. A committee constituted by MoEF puts this together.
- The guidelines lay out the criteria based on which areas can be declared as ESZs.
- These include Species Based (Endemism, Rarity etc), Ecosystem Based (sacred groves, frontier forests etc) and Geo-morphologic feature based (uninhabited islands, origins of rivers etc).

Law to empower forest staff

Part of: GS Mains III – Environment and Biodiversity; Conservation of protected areas

In news:
- Centre to amend the Indian Forest Act, 1927
- In other words, Indian Forest Act, 2019 is envisaged as an amendment to the Indian Forest Act, 1927.

New proposals:
- Amendment aims to accord significant powers to India's forest officers – such as power to issue search warrants, enter and investigate lands within their jurisdictions, and to provide security or protection to forest officers using arms to prevent forest-related offences.
- Forest-officer not below the rank of a Ranger shall have power to hold an inquiry into forest offences…and shall have the powers to search or issue a search warrant under the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973.
- Any Forest-officer not below the rank of a Forester may, at any time enter and inspect any land within his area of jurisdiction.
- It explicitly provides for traditional forest dwellers to jointly manage forests with officers.

- "Village forests", according to the proposed Act, may be forestland or wasteland, which is the property of the government and would be jointly managed by the community through the Joint Forest Management Committee or Gram Sabha.
- It also proposes a new cess, called Forest Development Cess, upto 10% of the value assessed of the mining products extracted from the forests and water for irrigation or in industries.

Adding muscle

The Indian Forest Act, 2019 is envisaged as an amendment to the Indian Forest Act, 1927

How will it help?
The legislation gives India's forest officers the power of a civil court to prevent offences

Mandate to officials:

- Every forest officer, police officer or revenue officer shall prevent, and may interfere for the purpose of preventing, the commission of any forest offence

- Any person, forest officer, or any officer of the State cannot withdraw forest offence cases

- **New cess:** It proposes a forest development cess, upto 10% of the value assessed of the mining products extracted from the forests and water for irrigation or in industries

https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2019/03/23/DEL/Delhi/TH/5_05/7bd5c909_2818315_101_mr.jpg

INFRASTRUCTURE/ENERGY

Funding period extended to boost regional air connectivity

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Infrastructure; Government schemes and programmes

In news:
- The Union Cabinet gave its approval for extending the "time and scope" of **financial support of ₹4,500 crore to the Airports Authority of India (AAI)** for the revival of small airports for the **regional connectivity scheme (RCS).**
- The need to seek these extensions was felt because the duration of the RCS programme according to the scheme document is 10 years.
- The scheme was launched in March 2017 after the first set of RCS routes were awarded.
- The AAI has developed 38 unfrequented and less frequented airports since the launch of the scheme in March 2017.
- As many as 750 routes have been awarded for connecting 77 un-served airports, 21 under-served airports, ten waterdromes and 31 helipads.

Important Value Additions:

Regional Connectivity Scheme UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik)
- The Civil Aviation Ministry launched Regional Connectivity Scheme UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik) in 2017.
- UDAN is an innovative scheme to develop the regional aviation market. It is a market-based mechanism in which airlines bid for seat subsidies.
- This first-of-its-kind scheme globally will create affordable yet economically viable and profitable flights on regional routes so that flying becomes affordable to the common man even in small towns.

About the Scheme:
- The UDAN scheme seeks to provide connectivity to un-served and under-served airports of the country through revival of existing air-strips and airports.
- This first-of-its-kind scheme will ensure affordability, connectivity, growth and development.
- It aims to increase ticketing volume from 80 million to 300 million by 2022.
- Under it regional connectivity will be developed on market-based mechanism under which Airlines will bid for seat subsidies.
- It will create affordable yet economically viable and profitable flights on regional routes so that flying becomes affordable to the common man even in small towns.

- Under it, airlines will have complete freedom to enter into code sharing with larger airlines for connectivity and they will be exempted from various airport charges.
- Airlines will have exclusive rights for three years to fly on a particular regional route.
- On these routes for regional flights Airfares will be capped at 2500 rupees for an hour's flight.
- Central and State governments and airport operators will provide a financial stimulus in the form of concessions to airlines
- The mechanism of Viability Gap Funding (VGF) will be provided to interested airlines to kick-off operations from such airports so that the passenger fares are kept affordable
- Government will provide subsidy to airlines for first three years of operations when they will have exclusive flying rights on the selected routes.
- Once the market in these routes gets jump started, it will operate on a commercial basis as per market forces of supply and demand.

New hydroelectric policy and 'renewable energy' status to large hydro projects

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Environment and Ecology; Renewable energy

In news:
- The Union Cabinet approved a new hydroelectric policy aimed at boosting the sector, including according large hydro projects the status of renewable energy projects.
- According to the new policy, large hydro projects will also be designated as renewable energy projects. So far, only smaller projects of less than 25 MW in capacity were categorised as renewable energy.
- With the removal of this distinction, large hydro projects will be included as a separate category under the non-solar renewable purchase obligation policy.
- Under this policy, power purchasers will have to source a portion of electricity from large hydro projects.
- The new policy had increased the debt repayment period for hydro projects to 18 years from the current 12 years with the provision to introduce an escalating tariff of 2%.

Need of the hour: Diversifying India's energy sources

Introduction:

The effects of global warming are already visible.

- Average temperatures today are only 0.8 degree Celsius higher than in 1880.
- Yet there is already an increasing frequency of extreme weather events, rising ocean temperatures and disappearing corals, melting glaciers and shrinking polar ice caps, and rising sea levels.
- Public actions have been too small and poor to cope with such looming disaster.
- The Paris accord has been signed and containing global warming is now on the policy agenda. Still, it is mostly business as usual both in private industry and in public policy.

According to an estimate by the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) –

- Containing the earth's temperature increase over the 1880 benchmark to under 1.5 degrees Celsius will require a 20% reduction in oil and gas production by 2030.
- But several oil companies have plans to produce 25% more oil and gas by 2025, and other oil majors are headed in the same direction.
- Irony is that the same oil majors support the Paris accord. They are also among the largest investors in solar power and other renewables.
- The roughly $300 billion of annual investment in renewables is just a fraction of the investment being made in extracting more fossil fuels.
- Fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas are more profitable than renewables and account for 85% of the total energy supply. That is what drives the current shareholder value of oil companies.

According to BP Energy Outlook (BPEO) –

- Renewables will account for just about 16% of total energy supply in 2040, up from around 3% today
- Hydro and nuclear power will account for another 11%
- Fossil fuels will still account for over 70% of total energy supply.
- BPEO also envisages that there will be a shift from coal to oil and further to gas, not from fossil fuels to renewables.

Therefore, market incentives fall well short of what it will take to contain global warming within the limits necessary for global survival. It is this market failure that requires muscular policy intervention by governments.

The way ahead:
- Requires muscular policy intervention by governments
- Effective fiscal policies to radically shift market incentives and profitability in favour of renewables.

Conclusion:

- Energy demand is projected to grow annually, considering the growing population and rising incomes in the developing countries.
- India remains heavily dependent on vast reserves of coal, which is also the dirtiest fuel. But switching from coal to cleaner oil or gas poses a security risk since India is heavily dependent on imports for these fuels. Hence, India's long-term strategic interest requires a radical shift from fossil fuels to renewables, including hydropower.
- Over the medium term, India requires a strategic energy policy. India should move towards maximum dependence on renewable.
- Instead of subsidizing power prices and distorting energy markets to achieve this goal, tax incentives should be used to maximize investment in renewables. They can turn India's barren deserts and other non-cultivable land into vast energy generation fields.

Connecting the dots:

- Heavy dependence on coal will continue for years, but it should be gradually reduced. Comment.
- What do you understand by the term 'energy mix'? Elucidate it's importance for India in fighting out the ensuing energy crisis.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

SpaceX's capsule docks on ISS

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Science and Technology; Space Missions

In news:
- SpaceX's new Dragon capsule successfully docked on the International Space Station (ISS).
- The capsule was launched on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from the Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral in Florida.
- The Dragon capsule will remain on the ISS for few days before detaching to splash down in the Atlantic. It will be slowed by four parachutes, in what is the one of the mission's riskiest stages.
- The launch is a key step towards resuming manned space flights from U.S. soil after an eight-year break.

Chandrayaan 2 to carry NASA's laser instruments to Moon

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Science and Technology; Space Missions

In news:
- Chandrayaan 2 – is India's lunar mission scheduled to launch next month
- Chandrayaan 2 will carry NASA's laser instruments
- NASA's laser instruments to help scientists to make precise measurements of the distance to the Moon
- Israeli lander Beresheet to also carry NASA-owned laser retroreflector arrays.

Do you know?
- Retroreflectors are essentially sophisticated mirrors. Scientists on Earth can shoot them with lasers and study the light that is reflected back. That signal can help pinpoint precisely where the lander is, which scientists can use to calculate its — and the moon's — distance from Earth.

About Chandrayaan 2
- India's second lunar exploration mission after Chandrayaan 1.

- Developed by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), the mission is planned to be launched to the Moon by a Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle Mark III (GSLV Mk III).
- It includes a lunar orbiter, lander and rover, all developed by India.
- Chandrayaan-2 is scheduled to launch in April 2019 and will attempt to soft land a lander and rover in a high plain between two craters, Manzinus C and Simpelius N, at a latitude of about 70degree south.
- If successful, Chandrayaan-2 will be the second mission to land a rover near the lunar south pole.

ISRO's PSLV-C45 project or Emisat mission

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Science and Technology; Space Missions

In news:
PSLV-C45/Emisat mission scheduled to lift-off from Sriharikota on April 1st will be a memorable one for the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).
- PSLV-C45 will mark the 47th flight of the PSLV.
- It will be ISRO's first attempt at placing payloads in three different orbits.
- 436 kg **Emisat** — will be injected into a 749 km orbit. Emisat, the chief payload on PSLV-C45, is meant for electromagnetic spectrum measurements, according to the ISRO.
- After that, the fourth stage of the rocket will be manoeuvred to a 504 km orbit for releasing 28 international satellites.
- Once that job is over, the fourth stage will be restarted and guided to an altitude of 485 km.
- This stage will serve as an **orbital platform for space-based experiments**. This is another first for the ISRO. Normally, the spent stage simply becomes space junk.
- The orbital platform will also sport **solar panels**, which too is a first.
- The launch vehicle itself is a new variant, designated **PSLV-QL**.
- For the first time, ISRO will be employing **four XL strap-on motors on the first stage**.

Do you know?
- One of the three experiments aboard the orbital platform is the Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology (IIST)'s **Advanced Retarding Potential Analyser for Ionospheric Studies (ARIS).**
- ARIS will study the structure and composition of the ionosphere.

- The other two experimental payloads aboard the orbital platform are the **Automatic Identification system (AIs)**, an ISRO payload for maritime satellite applications, and the **Automatic Packet Repeating System (APRS)**, meant to assist amateur radio operators.

GRAPES-3 muon telescope facility

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Science and Technology; Space Missions

In News:
- For the first time in the world, researchers at the GRAPES-3 muon telescope facility in Ooty have measured the electrical potential, size and height of a thundercloud that passed overhead on December 1, 2014.
- Learning about the properties of thunderclouds can be useful in navigation of aircraft and preventing short circuits.

About GRAPES-3
- GRAPES-3 is designed to study cosmic rays with an array of air shower detectors and a large area muon detector.
- It aims to probe acceleration of cosmic rays in the following four astrophysical settings. These include acceleration of particles to,
    (i) ~100 MeV in atmospheric electric fields through muons,
    (ii) ~10 GeV in the Solar System through muons,
    (iii) ~1 PeV in our galaxy,
    (iv) ~100 EeV in the nearby universe through measurement of diffuse gamma ray flux.

The observations began with 217 plastic scintillators and a 560 m2 area muon detector in 2000. The scintillators detect charged particles contained in extensive air showers produced by interaction of high energy cosmic rays in the atmosphere.

About Muons:
- Muons and other particles are produced when cosmic rays bombard air particles surrounding the earth. The muons produced can have positive or negative charge.
- When a positively charged muon falls through a cloud, it loses energy If its energy falls below 1 giga electron volt (GeV), which is the threshold of detection of the GRAPES-3 muon telescope, it goes undetected.
- On the contrary, a negatively charged muon gains energy when falling through the cloud and gets detected. Since there are more positive than negative muons produced in nature, the two effects don't cancel out, and a net change in intensity is detected.

Humans can detect the earth's magnetic fields

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains I and III – Geography; Science and Technology
In news:
- Scientists have long known that turtles, birds, honeybees and even bacteria can sense the earth's magnetic field and use them for navigation.
- But this magneto-reception has hardly been tested in humans and many studies have been inconclusive.
- However, a team of scientists has found that the human brain is capable of detecting the Earth's magnetic field, challenging previous studies. But they are yet to decode what our brains may be using this information for.
- The discovery shows humans have not entirely lost the mechanism of orienting themselves using the magnetic field.

Do you know what causes the Earth's magnetic field?
- Our planet's magnetic field is believed to be generated deep down in the Earth's core.
- Right at the heart of the Earth is a solid inner core, two thirds of the size of the Moon and composed primarily of iron. At a hellish 5,700°C, this iron is as hot as the Sun's surface, but the crushing pressure caused by gravity prevents it from becoming liquid.
- Surrounding this is the outer core, a 2,000 km thick layer of iron, nickel, and small quantities of other metals. Lower pressure than the inner core means the metal here is fluid.
- Differences in temperature, pressure and composition within the outer core cause convection currents in the molten metal as cool, dense matter sinks whilst warm, less dense matter rises. The Coriolis force, resulting from the Earth's spin, also causes swirling whirlpools.
- This flow of liquid iron generates electric currents, which in turn produce magnetic fields. Charged metals passing through these fields go on to create electric currents of their own, and so the cycle continues. This self-sustaining loop is known as the geodynamo.
- The spiralling caused by the Coriolis force means that separate magnetic fields created are roughly aligned in the same direction, their combined effect adding up to produce one vast magnetic field engulfing the planet.

Why Earth's magnetic field is important?
- Without Earth's magnetic field, solar winds — streams of electrically charged particles that flow from the sun — would strip away the planet's atmosphere and oceans.

- As such, Earth's magnetic field helped to make life on the planet possible, researchers have said.
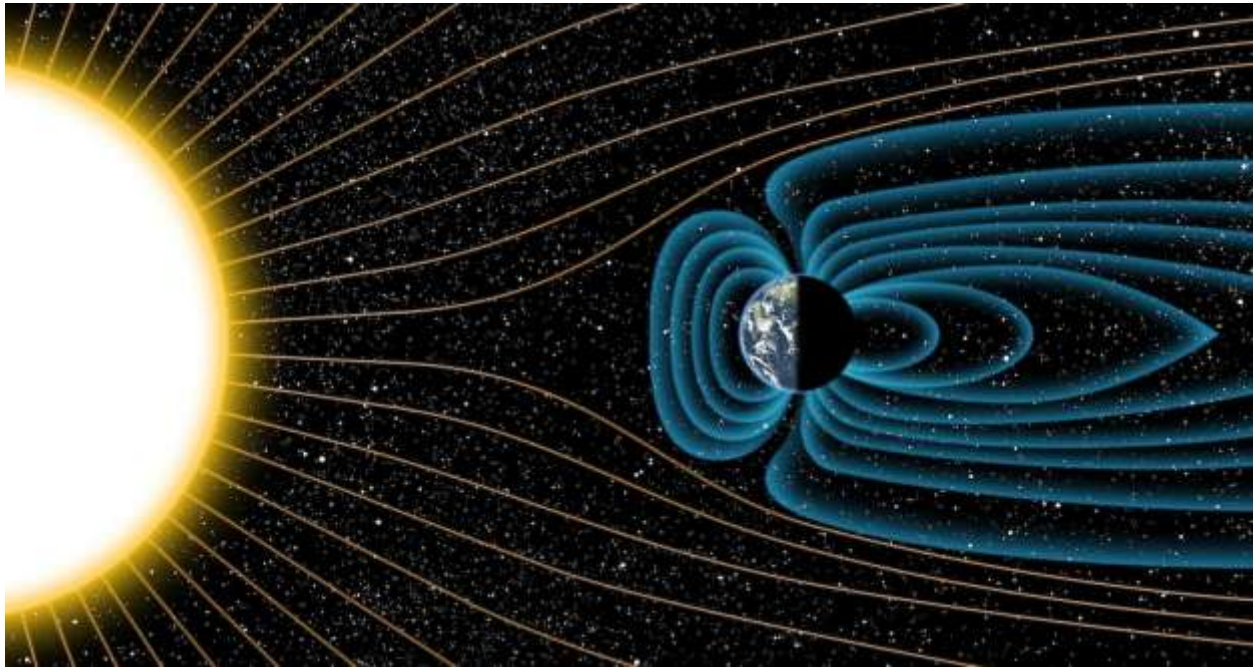
Mission Shakti: India prepare to take the enemy in space

Introduction:

- India became the fourth country (after Russia, the United States, and China) to have the capability in taking down an enemy in space.
- India shot down a low-orbit satellite through an Indian anti-satellite weapon A-SAT, in an operation called 'Mission Shakti'

About Mission Shakti
- It was an anti-satellite missile test, from the Dr A P J Abdul Kalam Island launch complex.
- This was a technological mission carried out by DRDO.
- The ASAT comprised a Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) Interceptor developed by the DRDO.
- The significance of the test is that India has tested and successfully demonstrated its capability to interdict and intercept a satellite in outer space based on complete indigenous technology.
- India's space programme is a critical backbone of India's security, economic and social infrastructure.

- The test was done to verify that India has the capability to safeguard our space assets.
- It is the Government of India's responsibility to defend the country's interests in outer space.

SENT UP, BROUGHT DOWN

Pic: https://images.indianexpress.com/2019/03/capture-29.jpg
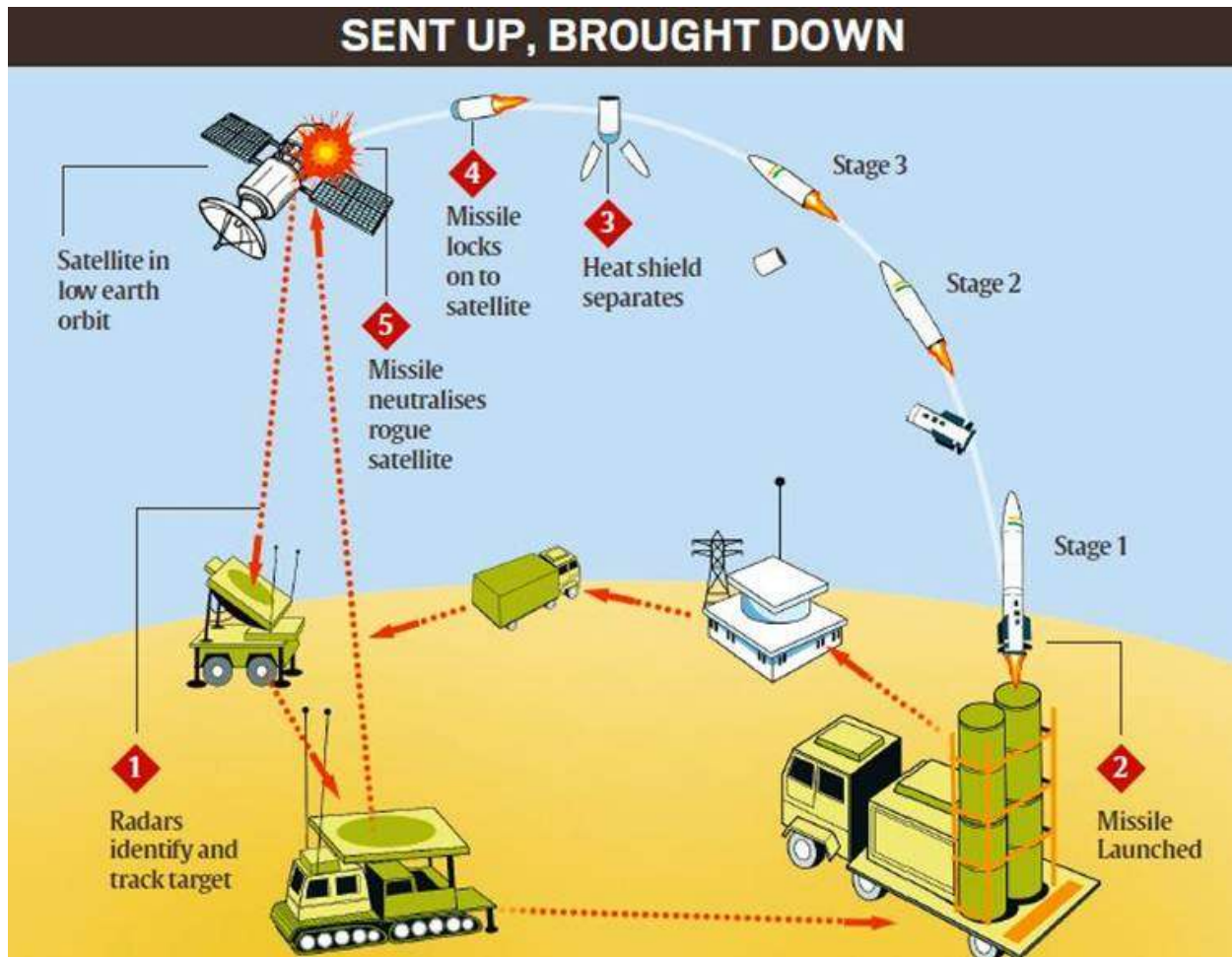
Is India entering into an arms race in outer space?
- PM reiterated that the mission focus is to strengthen its defence and not to wage war.
- PM also said that India has always been against the presence of weapons in the space and this development will not change our stand.
- India has always maintained that space must be used only for peaceful purposes. India is against the weaponization of Outer Space and support international efforts to reinforce the safety and security of space based assets.
- India believes that Outer space is the common heritage of humankind and it is the responsibility of all space-faring nations to preserve and promote the benefits flowing from advances made in space technology and its applications for all.

Do you know?
- India is a party to all the major international treaties relating to Outer Space.
- India already implements a number of Transparency and Confidence Building Measures(TCBMs) – including registering space objects with the UN register, pre-launch notifications, measures in harmony with the UN Space Mitigation Guidelines, participation in Inter Agency Space Debris Coordination (IADC) activities with regard to space debris management, undertaking SOPA (Space Object Proximity Awareness and COLA (Collision Avoidance) Analysis and numerous international cooperation activities, including hosting the UN affiliated Centre for Space and Science Technology Education in Asia and Pacific.
- India has been participating in all sessions of the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space.
- India supported UNGA resolution 69/32 on No First Placement of Weapons on Outer Space.
- India's sees the No First Placement of weapons in outer space as only an interim step and not a substitute for concluding substantive legal measures to ensure the prevention of an arms race in outer space, which should continue to be a priority for the international community.
- India supports the substantive consideration of the issue of Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS) in the Conference on Disarmament where it has been on the agenda since 1982.

What is the international law on weapons in outer space?
- The principal international Treaty on space is the 1967 Outer Space Treaty.
- India is a signatory to this treaty, and ratified it in 1982.
- The Outer Space Treaty prohibits only weapons of mass destruction in outer space, not ordinary weapons.
- India expects to play a role in the future in the drafting of international law on prevention of an arms race in outer space including inter alia on the prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space in its capacity as a major space faring nation with proven space technology.
- India is not in violation of any international law or Treaty to which it is a Party or any national obligation.

Blockchain based market place app

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III - Science and Technology

In news:

- With a view to enabling growers find better price for their produce, the Coffee Board has launched **Coffee Blockchain**, a marketplace app, developed in coordination with Eka Software Solutions.
- The pilot project has about 20 participants, including 14 coffee growers, and will run for four-to-six months.
- The block chain-enabled marketplace was aimed at reducing growers' dependency on intermediaries, bring in trust and efficiency in the chain, help farmers with market access, and ensure traceability.
- Anyone willing to participate in the marketplace will have to register on the app and will get a smart contract number.

Important Value Additions:

About Blockchain technology

- Blockchain can be thought of as a public account ledger, an immutable, transparent and permanent one. Each transaction is recorded and stored in the ledger that is out on a public bulletin board. Every transaction adds a block to the chain of transactions and each one is evaluated by every user based on algorithms they've agreed upon. Rather than being kept in single location, a copy of the blockchain is stored on every user's server so that a user cannot alter it without other users finding out. Even though blockchain was conceived for financial transactions, its characteristics make it an apt solution that can support voting systems.
- Due to its unique attributes of trust, transparency and immutability, such a system is expected to mitigate issues like vote manipulation in political processes.
- Blockchain is the backbone technology on which bitcoins run. Simply put, it is a digital public ledger that records every transaction. Once a transaction is entered in the blockchain, it cannot be erased or modified. Blockchain removes the need for using a trusted third party such as a bank to make a transaction by directly connecting the customers and suppliers.
- Each transaction is recorded to the ledger after verification by the network participants, mainly a chain of computers, called nodes. While the origin of the technology is not clear, it is widely believed that a person or group of people by the pseudonym Satoshi Nakamoto, who invented bitcoins, released the technology to support cryptocurrency.
- Bitcoin is just one of the applications for the technology, whose use is being tested across industries. It is witnessing a lot of traction within India, in sectors such as banking and insurance. In most of these industries, players are coming together to form a consortium to realise the benefits of blockchain at an industry level.

- For example, in India, there is a consortium 'BankChain' which has about 27 banks from India (including State Bank of India or SBI and ICICI) and the Middle East as its members. The consortium is exploring using usage of Blockchain technology to make business safer, faster and cheaper.
- The Institute for Development and Research in Banking Technology (IDRBT), an arm of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), is developing a model platform for blockchain technology.
- Blockchain is expected to improve the efficiency of a transaction by eliminating the middlemen, while also reducing the cost of all transactions. It is also likely to increase transparency and bring down fraud as every transaction would be recorded and distributed on a public ledger.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Odisha shelter homes to have lightning protection system

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Disaster Management; Government schemes and policies

In news:
- 640 shelters to be taken up in first phase with funding from World Bank under the National Cyclone Risk Mitigation Project
- Lightning has emerged as the leading cause behind natural deaths across the State.
- In Odisha, lightning claims an average of 400 lives every year.
- The total number of reported deaths due to lightning during the last three years from 2015-16 to 2017-18 is 1,256, which accounts for about 27% of total number of disaster deaths.

Important value additions:
About National Cyclone Risk Mitigation Project (NCRMP)
- NCRMP was started by the Ministry of Home Affairs to mitigate vulnerability to the cyclone and hazards prone coastal communities.
- After the formation of National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), management of the project was transferred to NDMA in September, 2006.
- NCRMP-I covers States of Andhra Pradesh and Odisha.
- NCRMP-II covers States of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, and West Bengal.
- The project is implemented by the Ministry of Home Affairs through National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and executed by the respective State Disaster Management Authorities at the State level.
- The project is partly funded by the World Bank.

Objectives of NCRMP
- The overall objective of the National Cyclone Risk Mitigation Project ('NCRMP') is to minimize vulnerability to cyclones and make people and infrastructure disaster resilient in harmony with conservation of the coastal eco-system in the cyclone hazard prone States and Union Territories of India.

Need for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure

Key pointers:

- As the world is urbanising at an unprecedented pace, need for **resilient infrastructure is very important.**
- The term "resilient" refers to the ability of such infrastructure systems (including their interconnected ecosystems and social systems) to absorb disturbance and still retain their basic function and structural capacity.
- Around 34% of India's population lives in cities and this demographic cohort is expected to grow in the years ahead.
- This growing rate of urbanisation and the subsequent increase in population density is bringing massive new investments in infrastructure.
- Bridges, roads, dams, power stations and electrical grids are just some of the services and facilities that need to be built to serve burgeoning urban populations.

Concerns:

- Unprecedented growing rate of urbanization and increasing population density.
- Half of the infrastructure needed in Asia by 2050 is yet to be built.
- Globally, $6 trillion needs to be invested in infrastructure every year until 2030 to meet current demands.
- Disasters in heavily populated urban areas can lead to high numbers of human casualties.
- Economic losses from disasters that damage infrastructure can reach huge proportions. (According to World Bank estimates, annual disaster losses are already close to $520 billion)

The way ahead:

- New infrastructure is to be made resilient to withstand future shocks, including those brought by a changing climate.
- Ensuring that all new investments in infrastructure are made in a risk-sensitive way can play a significant role in reducing economic losses from disasters.

Do you know?

- **Second International Workshop on Disaster Resilient Infrastructure** is being hosted this month (March 2019) under the initiative of the Indian government and with support from the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction.
- It aims to create global coalition for resilient infrastructure and ensure that new risks are not created, as enshrined in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

Conclusion:

Money saved from relief and rebuilding costs can be invested in development objectives, such as education, health care or improved transportation, helping countries achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Such international cooperation and shared commitment are needed to "future-proof" our cities and lock-in resilience for generations to come.

Connecting the dots:
- Define the term "Resilient Infrastructure"? Discuss the significance of Sustainable and Resilient Infrastructure.
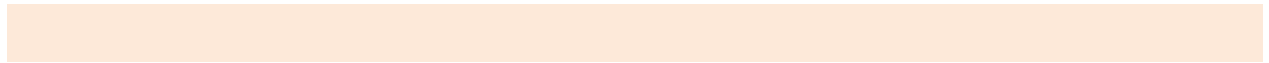
DEFENCE/INTERNAL SECURITY/SECURITY

Assam gets 'smart' fence along border

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Security issues; Defence

In news:
- A digital 'barrier' has finally filled a 61 km gap on the 4,096.7 km India-Bangladesh border fence three decades after the project kickstarted.
- Union Home Minister inaugurated an electronic surveillance system that "is expected to diminish challenges faced by the Border Security Force in manning this stretch against cross-border crimes."
- Comprising microwave communication, optical fibre cables, cameras, and an intrusion detection device, this system is called **BOLD-QIT (Border Electronically Dominated QRT Interception Technique)** and was established under the Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System.

Do you know?
- Assam shares a 263 km border with Bangladesh. Much of the border was fenced, but a 61 km stretch in Dhubri district remained open owing to the terrain dictated by the Brahmaputra.

ISRO, French agency seal agreement on maritime security

In news:

- National space agency ISRO and its French counterpart CNES sealed an agreement to set up a joint maritime surveillance system in the country in May.
- The two nations will explore putting up a constellation of low-Earth orbiting satellites that will identify and track movement of ships globally – and in particular those moving in the Indian Ocean region where France has its Reunion Islands.

Do you know?
- The two agencies have put up two climate and ocean weather monitoring satellites Megha-Tropiques (of 2011) and SARAL-AltiKa (2013) that are considered a model.
- This fleet will be augmented with the launch of Oceansat-3-Argos mission in 2020 along with a joint infrared Earth-observation satellite.

Army to undergo major reforms

Part of: GS Mains III - Defence and Security related issues

In news:
- In a major move, Defence Minister approved the first batch of reforms in the Army
- Finalized after 12 independent studies, the reforms are intended to make the 1.3 million-strong force leaner and meaner

The reforms include -
- relocation of 229 officers from the Army headquarters
- creation of a new post of Deputy Chief for Military Operations and Strategic Planning
- setting up new wings for vigilance and human rights issues
- Restructuring the Army's officer cadre
- Bringing down age of key commands
- Arresting rising revenue expenditure and "rightsizing" the force

Do you know?
- The number of officers being moved out was 20% of the number of officers in the Army headquarters in the national capital, and they would be deployed in forward locations along the borders with China and Pakistan.
- The post of Deputy Chief of the Army Staff, Strategy, is being created to deal with military operations, intelligence, strategic planning and operational logistics.

India, Russia sign deal on nuclear submarine

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – India and the world; International Relations; Defence/Security ties

In news:
- India sealed a $3-billion deal with Russia for **leasing a nuclear-powered attack submarine** for the Indian Navy for a period of 10 years.
- The two countries signed an **inter-governmental agreement** capping months of negotiations on price and other aspects of the deal.

Do you know?

- Under the pact, Russia will have to deliver the **Akula class submarine**, to be known as **Chakra III**, to the Indian Navy by 2025.
- It will be the third Russian submarine to be leased to the Navy.

India is world's 2nd largest arms importer

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Defence and Security issues

In news:
According to the latest report published by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) –
- India was the world's second largest arms importer from 2014-18.
- India was accounted for 9.5% of the global total.
- Russia accounted for 58% of Indian arms imports in 2014–18, compared with 76% in 2009-13.
- Israel, the U.S. and France all increased their arms exports to India in 2014-18.

However, the Russian share in Indian imports is likely to sharply go up for the next five-year period as India signed several big-ticket deals recently, and more are in the pipeline.
India-Russia defence ties –
- S-400 air defence systems
- Four stealth frigates
- AK-203 assault rifles
- a second nuclear attack submarine on lease (Akula class)
- Kamov-226T utility helicopters
- Mi-17 helicopters
- Short-range air defence systems etc.

Do you know?
- Despite the long-standing conflict between India and Pakistan, arms imports decreased for both countries in 2014-18 compared with 2009-13.
- Pakistan stood at the 11th position accounting for 2.7% of all global imports. (Its biggest source was China, from which 70% of arms were sourced, followed by the U.S. at 8.9% and Russia at 6%.)
- The five largest exporters in 2014-18 were the United States, Russia, France, Germany and China together accounting for 75% of the total volume of arms exports in 2014-18.

Defence deal
A look at the global share of arms bought by the 10 largest importers from 2014-2018

- Saudi Arabia **12%**
- India **9.5%**
- Egypt **5.1%**
- Australia **4.6%**
- Algeria **4.4%**
- China **4.2%**
- UAE **3.7%**
- Iraq **3.7%**
- South Korea **3.1%**
- Vietnam **2.9%**
- Others **47%**
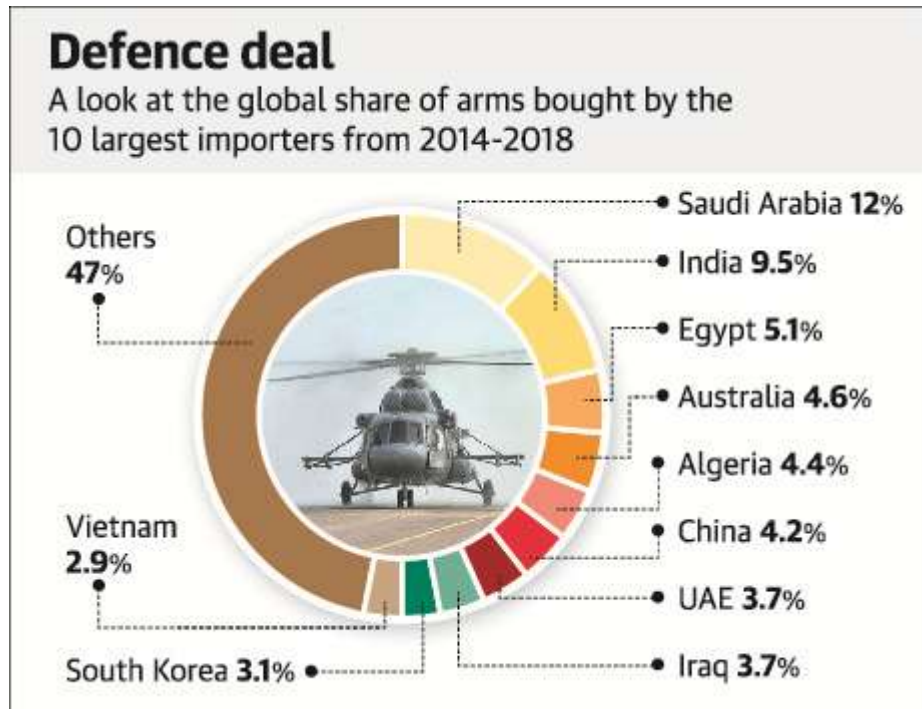
SOURCE: SIPRI ARMS TRANSFER DATABASE

https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2019/03/12/CNI/Chennai/TH/5_10/62aab5fa_2791
973_101_mr.jpg

Indigenous Defence Development

Context:

- Recently, the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas Mark 1, received its long-awaited Final Operational Clearance (combat-ready and can be exploited to the limits).
- However, a day later, came a rather unwelcome report: a DRDO announcement of its decision to shelve the Kaveri turbo-jet engine project.

Do you know?
- Kaveri engine is supposed to power LCA-Tejas, which is currently powered by US manufactured GE-F404 engine.
- Two developments are of significance, for India's national security as well as its moribund aeronautical industry.

India's dependence on technology
- Historically, all major aerospace powers have possessed the capability to design airframes as well as power-plants.

- Until India can design and produce its own aero-engines, the performance and capabilities of any indigenously designed/built aircraft will be seriously limited by the technology that we are permitted to import.
- India has already had two bitter experiences in this regard. For example, the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited's sleek and elegant HF-24 Marut fighter, of the 1960s and 1970s, failed to achieve its huge potential as a supersonic fighter for want of a suitable engine.
- Similarly, many of the problems the Tejas faced emanate from lack of engine thrust.
- Even as the Kaveri has failed to make an appearance, U.S.-made alternatives such as the General Electric F-404 engine, or even the more powerful F-414, do not deliver adequate thrust for the Tejas Mk 1, to meet all its missions.
- For the Tejas Mk I, Mk II, the LCA Navy, and other aircraft programmes such as the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft, India will need turbo-jet engines of even greater thrust.

Need for Indigenous Aircraft Industry
- It is vital for India to develop a family of homegrown jet engines to power indigenous combat aircraft as well as re-engine imported ones.
- In this context, it is necessary to recognise that both the Tejas and Kaveri projects — which have seen more than their share of headwinds and uncertainty — form key components of India's technological aspirations.
- Unless carefully guided, protected and nurtured, their failure could spell the end of India's aeronautical industry, or condemn it forever to licensed production.
- A long production run of, say, 250-300 aircraft for the Tejas and its advanced derivatives is essential if the industry is to hone its design and production skills.

Conclusion:
- It is still not too late for the government to declare both these projects as 'national missions' and initiate urgent remedial actions.
- The success of both the Kaveri and Tejas programmes will transform the aerospace scene, and put India in the front ranks of aeronautical nations, perhaps even ahead of China, if the desired degree of resolve and professional rigour can be brought to the fore.
- If we miss this opportunity, we will remain abjectly import-dependent forever in this vital area.

Connecting the dots:
- Does India's Defence Procurement Policy give impetus to indigenisation? Critically examine.

Guided rocket system 'Pinaka'

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III –Defence and Security related issues; Missiles and technology

In news:

- DRDO successfully tested-fired the indigenously developed guided rocket system 'Pinaka' at Pokhran in Rajasthan.
- This was the third test conducted by the DRDO.
- All the three trials were able to meet the mission objectives.

https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/photo/46038559.cms

About Pinaka:

- It is a multiple rocket launcher produced in India and developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) for the Indian Army.

- The system has a maximum range of 40 km for Mark-I and 75 km for Mark-II,and can fire a salvo of 12 HE rockets in 44 seconds.
- The system is mounted on a Tatra truck for mobility.
- Pinaka saw service during the Kargil War, where it was successful in neutralizing enemy positions on the mountain tops.
- It has since been inducted into the Indian Army in large numbers.
- As of 2014, about 5,000 missiles are being produced every year while an advanced variant is under development with enhanced range and accuracy.

Ocean surveillance ship

Part of: GS prelims and Mains III – Defence/Security; Science and Technology

In news:
- The sea trials of India's first and most prestigious missile tracking ocean surveillance ship built at the Ministry of Defence-owned **Hindustan Shipyard Limited** have received an encouraging response.
- The ship, being built under the direct supervision of the Prime Minister's Office and the National Security Adviser, is being referred to as yard number **VC 11184**.

Do you know?
- It will be handed over to the Ministry of Defence shortly.
- It will get a formal name to be chosen by the Navy once it is inducted into the naval fleet.
- The ship was built at an estimated cost of over $231 million.

Chinook will improve reaction capabilities, says IAF chief

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Defence; Technology

In news:
- Indian Air Force (IAF) inducted the first batch of four Chinook CH-47F (I) heavy-lift helicopters.
- Induction of Chinook helicopters to significantly improve airlift to high-altitude areas.
- The modern, multi-mission-capable, heavy-lift transport helicopter will enhance heli-lift capability across all types of terrain to the full effect.

- The service ceiling of 20,000 feet would redefine heavy lift not just in operations but also for inter-valley transport and the artillery.
- These helicopters will be deployed in northern and eastern regions.

Do you know?
- India finalised a contract for 15 Boeing Chinook helicopters in September 2015. The first batch arrived at the Mundra Port in Gujarat in February this year. All helicopters will be delivered by March next year.
- The Chinook CH-47F (I) heavy-lift helicopters can carry a maximum payload of 11 tonnes and 54 combat-ready troops or 24 stretcher patients.
- The Army's recently inducted M-777 Ultra-Light Howitzers can also be carried to forward areas.
- Boeing CH-47 Chinook: It is an American twin-engined, tandem rotor, heavy-lift helicopter developed by American rotorcraft company Vertol and manufactured by Boeing Vertol (later known as Boeing Rotorcraft Systems).
- The CH-47 is among the heaviest lifting Western helicopters. Its name, Chinook, is from the Native American Chinook people of modern-day Washington State.

Navy's Theatre Level Exercise, TROPEX 19

Part of: GS prelims and Mains III – Defence/Security; Maritime exercises

Key pointers:
Theatre Readiness Operational Exercise (TROPEX) is an annual inter-service exercise

Aim: The exercise is aimed at testing combat readiness of the combined fleets of the Indian Navy, and the assets of the Indian Air Force, Indian Army and the Indian Coast Guard. It will also strengthen inter-operability and joint operations in a complex environment.

About: Exercise will have ships and aircraft of both the Western and Eastern Naval Commands, as also assets from the Indian Air Force, Indian Army and the Indian Coast Guard exercising together. The exercise is being conducted off the Western Seaboard.

Do you know?
- This year as tensions between India and Pakistan mounted, India put its key naval assets, including the aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya and nuclear submarines, on operational alert.

- The Navy said the availability of a large number of combat-ready assets in the theatre of operations for TROPEX allowed it to "expeditiously respond to the developing situation in synergy with the three services."

INS Khanderi: Second Scorpene submarine ready for induction

Part of: GS prelims and Mains III – Defence/Security; Science and Technology

In news:
- The Navy is set to induct the second Scorpene submarine Khanderi by early May.
- INS Khanderi is the second of the Indian Navy's six Kalvari-class submarines being built in India.
- It is a diesel-electric attack submarine which is designed by French naval defence and energy company DCNS and being manufactured at Mazagon Dock Limited in Mumbai.
- INS Khanderi, named after Maratha king Chhatrapati Shivaji's island fort Khanderi

Project 75
- Six Scorpene class submarines are being built under Project 75 by the Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDSL), Mumbai, under a $3.75 billion technology transfer signed in October 2005 with the Naval Group of France.
- The Scorpene class is the Navy's first modern conventional submarine series in almost two decades, since INS Sindhushastra was procured from Russia in July 2000.

Indian Army's wait for close-quarter-battle carbines(CQB) continues

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Defence

In news:
- Even though the procurement of 93,895 close-quarter-battle carbines (CQB) a deal worth $ 553.33 million been put on Fast Track Procurement (FTP), the final report of the Oversight Committee is awaited.

Do you know?
- In January 2018, the DAC approved the purchase of 72,400 assault rifles and 93,895 carbines for ₹3,547 crore through the fast-track procurement (FTP) mode.
- After evaluation, Sig Sauer of the U.S. emerged as the lowest bidder for the assault rifles and the United Arab Emirates-based Caracal for the carbines.

Gunning for glory

The Army has been looking to replace the indigenous INSAS (Indian National Small Arms System) rifles in use with a modern rifle

- In January 2018, Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) approved purchase of 72,400 assault rifles and 93,895 carbines for ₹3,547 crore through Fast Track Procurement

- Sig Saur of the U.S. emerged as the lowest bidder for assault rifles and UAE based Caracal for carbines

- Last month, defence ministry signed a deal with Sig Saur for SIG 716 assault rifles for frontline infantry soldiers

- These two deals are to meet immediate requirements of the Army to lend muscle to its armoury and will equip frontline soldiers

A Caracal CAR816 carbine, which was shortlisted for procurement. ■ CARACAL

https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2019/03/25/DEL/Delhi/TH/5_07/245b789e_2823430_101_mr.jpg

Countering Islamophobia

Context:

- The massacre at Christchurch in New Zealand show **Islamophobia is real, deadly and spreading** around the world.
- The incident has forced many countries (esp. European) into **deep introspection**.
- People are being asked to look at the reality of **increasing malice and hatred against Muslims** in particular **and immigrants** in general.

Islamophobia
- Islamophobia is the fear, prejudice and hatred of Muslims and people perceived to be Muslim that leads to provocation, hostility and intolerance.
- It is motivated by institutional, ideological, political and religious hostility, and can merge with racism to target the symbols and markers of a being a Muslim.

A string of attacks targeting Muslims
- The past few years have seen a number of deadly Islamophobic attacks in Europe and North America.

- India, home to the second largest population of Muslims in the world, has also witnessed attacks on mosques — Malegaon, Mecca Masjid, Ajmer Sharif etc.
- Such attacks, therefore, not be dismissed as the act of one deranged person acting alone but as a manifestation of deep-seated hatred against Muslims among some segments of societies.

Roots of Islamophobia:

There are several factors –

- Acts of terrorism carried out by extremist Muslim groups against innocent civilians. Attacks on 9/11 and other similar acts in London, Madrid, Orlando, Mumbai and elsewhere have augmented the feeling against the "barbaric" world of Islam.
- Historical depiction of the Muslim world as the definitive "other" in the Orientalist literature produced from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries by European authors. Perception of Muslims has traditionally been highly negative in character.
- Muslims were perceived to be racially and militarily inferior and at the same time as perpetually rebellious subjects against colonial rule. Since many rebellions adopted the religious idiom of "jihad" to garner popular support they were perceived in the metropolitan countries as wars between Islam and the West.
- Exclusivist Wahhabi ideology that preaches hostility toward non-Muslims as well as Muslims who refuse to accept its narrow and insular interpretation of Islam.
- Clashes between exclusivist ideologies – White supremacy and Islamist radicalism.
- Hundreds and thousands of column inches of hatred printed in the press, many Muslim-hating politicians and unchecked social media bigotry.
- Policy makers and implementers unabashedly express their Islamophobia under cover of national security.

The way ahead:

- It is important that the people work constantly to identify Islamophobia in all forms and demand action against those who promote it.
- Only education that emphasizes anti-racism and acceptance of cultural and religious diversity will eventually be able to do counter the above mentioned factors encouraging Islamophobia.
- The ultimate goal in countering Islamophobia should be to create a fair and just society for all, one that values and safeguards the citizenship of its members.

Connecting the dots:

- The past few years have seen a number of deadly Islamophobic attacks around the world. Critically examine what factors are leading to the proliferation of Islamophobia and what measures/strategies are needed to counter Islamophobia.

- How did the 9/11 attack in the United States change the world? Discuss.

Countering Terrorism

Context:

- **Terrorism** has no place in a civilised world and is completely **contrary to all religious tenets**.
- India has emerged as one of the world's most consistent targets of Islamist militants.
- Thousands of civilians (including the armed forces, paramilitary forces and the police) have died in India in terrorist strikes.

How to counter terrorism in a manner far more effective than what has been done by governments so far?
- The country suffers from a fragmented and inefficient bureaucracy, far fewer resources than developed countries even though it faces a higher threat level, and a political elite focused primarily on electoral politics.
- There have been absences of accountability and repeated failures by intelligence agencies, the police, the Army, and bureaucrats and politicians who frame and implement policies.
- Counterterrorism and intelligence units, especially local police, are often poorly trained and equipped.
- In addition to these organizational challenges, many of the security institutions at all levels of government are understaffed, undertrained, and technologically backward.
- Lives and productivity of people is dependent on the quality and efficiency of public services.

Conclusion
- The government must act swiftly and let citizens know that it means business when it says it will fight against terrorism. It is not enough to remember the dead, hold prayer meetings, and compensate families.
- True homage can only be paid when action is taken against those responsible for failures.
- For instance, attacks in Pathankot and Uri in 2016 revealed chinks in India's armour. However, apart from taking action against a few, no large-scale accountability was fixed.
- Godhra tragedy in 2002: No responsible officer from the civil or police administration in Gujarat was held accountable for failing to save the lives (even after intelligence inputs of a possible attack in Godhra were available).

- The fight against terrorism can never succeed without holding those in power responsible for costly lapses.
- The process of bolstering Indian counterterrorism capabilities will be long and difficult, and is unlikely to bring any sudden successes, but it is nevertheless essential.

Connecting the dots:
- Examine how to counter terrorism in a manner far more effective than what has been done by governments so far?
- What strategy should India adopt in order to deal with proxy-wars from the neighbouring countries?

Centre bans JKLF under anti-terror law

Part of: GS Mains III – Terrorism and Security issues; Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.

In news:
- Ministry of Home Affairs banned separatist Yasin Malik's Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) under the anti-terror law, Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.
- According to NIA, JKLF continues to be actively engaged in supporting and inciting secessionism and terrorism.

Do you know?
- Section 3(1) in the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 – gives power to the Centre to declare any association as unlawful by notifying it in the Official Gazette.

American "Virtual SIM" Used By Pulwama Attacker, India Seeks Details

Part of: GS Mains III – Science and Technology; Security issues; Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.

In news:
- India has requested the US to provide details from a service provider of "virtual SIMs", which were used by the JeM suicide bomber behind the Pulwama attack and his Pakistan and Kashmir-based handlers.
- It was a fairly new modus operandi where terrorists across the border were using a "virtual SIM", generated by a service provider in the United States.

- Numbers used were pre-fixed with "+1", the Mobile Station International Subscriber Directory Number (MSISDN) number used for the United States.

About virtual SIM technology
- In this technology, the computer generates a telephone number and the user downloads an application of the service provider on their smartphone.
- The number is linked to social networking sites like WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram or Twitter. The verification code generated by these networking sites is received on the smartphone and the user is ready.

Jamaat-e-Islami banned

Part of: GS Mains III – Terrorism and Security issues; Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.

In news:
- Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI-J&K), a socio-religious group that has been active in Jammu and Kashmir since 1942, was banned.
- Most locals who joined terrorist groups were associated with the JeI, either through educational institutions run by it or religious activities.
- An internal note from the Centre said – JeI has been using its network of schools to further promote anti-India feeling among children in the Valley.
- The Centre has claimed that the JeI has been collecting funds in the name of religious activities and using the same for 'anti-national separatist activities'.

Do you know?
- In 2018, over 180 Kashmiri youths joined these groups, and around 56% were locals.
- The same year, 252 terrorists were killed in various operations and around 60% were locals.
- Earlier foreign terrorists killed were more in number but the trend has reversed in the past two years. More locals have joined the militant ranks and more are getting killed.

Ministry of Home Affairs forms Terror Monitoring Group (TMG)

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Security issues

In news:

- Ministry of Home Affairs has formed a Terror Monitoring Group (TMG) to monitor terror sympathisers.
- TMG to take coordinated action in all registered cases that relate to terror financing and terror-related activities.
- The TMG will "investigate the networks of various channels being used to fund terror and terror activities and take coordinated action to stop flow of such funds.

PERSON IN NEWS

Person in news	Description
1. Soumya Swaminathan	**Why in news?** • Soumya Swaminathan is WHO chief scientist • She will head the division created to strengthen the organisation's core scientific work and ensure the quality and consistency of its norms and standards. • First Indian to hold the post.
2. Pinaki Chandra Ghose	**Why in news?** • Pinaki Chandra Ghose is set to be **India's first Lokpal**. (or first anti-corruption ombudsman) • Pinaki is a former Supreme Court judge and current member of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) • Recommended by High-level selection committee chaired by Prime Minister
3. Person/Awardee in news: Alemba Yimchunger	**Why in news?** • **Alemba Yimchunger** got Earth Day Network Star or Earth Day award. • The services of Alemba Yimchunger, a forest guard at the **Fakim Wildlife Sanctuary in Nagaland**, have been recognised with **Earth Day Network Star**, an award by a U.S.-based international environment organisation that engages with green groups in 195 countries. • Mr. Yimchunger has played a major role in protection of forests and wild animals in and around Fakim sanctuary.

MISCELLANEOUS

In News	Description
1. Teachers entitled to gratuity, rules SC	In news: • In a rare move, the Supreme Court altered its judgment and said teachers were entitled to claim gratuity under the Payment of Gratuity Act. • The court had earlier held that teacher is not an 'employee' under the Payment of Gratuity Act,1972.
2. UIDAI to levy fees for verification	Do you know? • Aadhaar authentication services to be charged soon. • Business organisations will now need to shell out ₹20 for each customer verification and 50 paise for authentication of each transaction done using Aadhaar, according to a notification by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI). • Government entities and the Department of Posts will be exempt from authentication transaction charges. • Banks are also exempted from charges.
3. DGCA bars Boeing 737 MAX 8 after global alarm	In news: • India grounded all Boeing 737 MAX 8 aircraft "immediately." • The move came after European aviation regulator EASA, the U.K, France, Germany, Australia and Singapore joined a growing number of countries that have barred the aircraft from their airspace following the recent crash of an Ethiopian Airlines plane. • These planes will be grounded till appropriate modifications and safety measures are undertaken. Do you know? • After last year october's Lion Air crash in Indonesia, investigators said the pilots had appeared to struggle with an automated system designed to keep the plane from stalling, a new feature of the jet. • Anti-stall system may be the problem along with other technical issues or human error.

(TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE)

Model questions: (Answers are provided at the end)

Q.1) Consider the following statements with respect to 'Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)'

1. It has permanent delegations to the United Nations and the European Union
2. India is one of the founding members of the OIC

Select the correct statements

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

Q.2) Which one of the following was a very important seaport in the Kakatiya kingdom? (UPSC 2017)

a) Kakinada
b) Motupalli
c) Machilipatnam (Masulipatnam)
d) Nelluru

Q.3) Consider the following statements about National Cyclone Risk Mitigation Project (NCRMP)

1. The project is implemented by the Ministry of Home Affairs.
2. The project covers only coastal states on eastern side of the country which are prone to cyclones.

Select the correct statements

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

Q.4) Consider the following statements about National Cyclone Risk Mitigation Project (NCRMP)

1. National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) under the aegis of Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) will implement the Project in coordination with participating State Governments and the National Institute for Disaster Management (NIDM)
2. NCRMP Phase – 1 covers states of Goa,Gujarat,Karnataka,Kerela,Maharashtra and West Bengal

Which of the following statements is/are correct?

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

Q.5) Consider the following statements with regard to Motupalli Veerabhadraswamy temple:

1. It was constructed during the regime of the Cholas.
2. It has stone inscriptions in Telugu and Tamil only.
3. Carving on the temple walls and idols in the temple premises shows

the architecture and style of Kakatiya Kings.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
a) Only 1
b) Only 2
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.6) Meiteis are majority ethnic group of
a) Manipur
b) Mizoram
c) Assam
d) Nagaland

Q.6) 'The Declaration on Asian Rhinos 2019' was signed between India and -
a) Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Myanmar
b) Bhutan, Nepal, Indonesia and Malaysia
c) Bhutan, Nepal, China and Bangladesh
d) Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Indonesia

Q.8) Indian rhinoceros are found in
1. Assam
2. West Bengal
3. Uttar Pradesh

Select the correct code:
a) 1 and 2
b) 2 and 3
c) 1 and 3
d) All of the above

Q.9) 'One Nation One Card' is associated with -
a) Kisan Credit Card

b) ID cards for Safai Karamcharis
c) National Common Mobility Card
d) National Common Insurance Card

Q.10) Consider the below statements with regard to Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Mandhan (PM-SYM) Yojana:
1. It is a national pension scheme for workers and labourers of the unorganised sector.
2. It provides for a monthly pension of ₹3,000 to all employees in the unorganised sector.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.11) Which of the following statements are correct regarding Ethanol Blended Petrol Programme?
1. EBP is cheaper than petrol as alcohol is cheaper.
2. Ethanol burns more cleanly and completely as compared to petrol.
3. Calorific value of Ethanol is higher than Petrol

Select the code from following:
a) 1 and 2
b) 2 only
c) 2 and 3
d) All of the above

Q.12) In India, Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) is used for:
a) Pulses

b) Sugarcane

c) Bamboo

d) Gram

Q.13) Consider the following statements:

1. Molasses is a by-product of sugar production process.

2. Bagasse obtained in the sugar mills is used as a fuel in the boilers to generate steam for the sugar factories.

3. Sugar can only be produced from sugarcane as the raw material.

Which of these statements are correct?

a) 1 and 2

b) 2 and 3

c) 1 and 3

d) All of the above

Q.14) Which of the following is the only state to sign an MoU with the Ministry of Civil Aviation and the Airports Authority of India for Regional Connectivity Scheme to develop 10 districts?

a) Telangana

b) Maharashtra

c) Odisha

d) Rajasthan

Q.15) Consider the following statements about 'INS Chakra'

1. It is an Arihant class submarine

2. It is a nuclear-powered submarine which was taken by India on lease from Russia

Select the correct statements

a) 1 Only

b) 2 Only

c) Both 1 and 2

d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.16) Consider the following statements about Trade Receivables Discounting System (TReDS)

1. It is a digital platform where small businesses (MSMEs) can get access to capital by auctioning their trade receivables.

2. Only MSMEs can participate as sellers, while banks, non-banking financial companies and factoring companies are permitted as financiers.

Select the correct statements

a) 1 Only

b) 2 Only

c) Both 1 and 2

d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.17) Consider the below statements with regard to Forest Survey of India (FSI):

1. It is involved in forest cover assessment of the country on biennial basis.

2. Assessment of tree cover outside forests is not part of the activity of FSI.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

a) 1 only

b) 2 only

c) Both 1 and 2

d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.18) Consider the following statements:

1. A wildfire is a fire in an area of combustible vegetation that occurs in the countryside or rural area.
2. It is caused only by anthropogenic means.
3. 50% of forest area in India is fire prone.

Which of the above statements are correct?
   a) 1 and 2
   b) 2 and 3
   c) 1 and 3
   d) All of the above

Q.19) According to the National Forest Policy of India, how much land area should be under forest cover?
   a) 24%
   b) 33%
   c) 15%
   d) 50%

Q.20) On the basis of prominent relief features consider the following statements on Central highlands
1. The Satpura range lies to the eastern most end of the Central Highlands
2. The Central Highlands are bounded to the North-West by the Aravali range.
3. Central Highlands are wider in the West but narrower in the East.

Which of the following statements(s) is/are correct?
   a) 1 and 2 only
   b) 2 and 3 only
   c) 1 only
   d) 3 only

Q.21) Which one of the following mountain ranges is spread over only one State in India?
   a) Satpura
   b) Aravalli
   c) Sahyadri
   d) None of the above

Q.22) Which of the following statements are correct regarding the 'Aravalli' ranges of India?
1. It is the oldest block mountain range of India
2. It is highly denuded because of erosion.
3. The highest peak of Aravallis is Guru Shikhar

Select the code from below:
   a) 1 and 2
   b) 2 and 3
   c) 1 and 3
   d) All of the above

Q.23) Which of the following mountain ranges is/are folding mountain ranges?
1. Aravalis
2. Himalayas
3. Western Ghats
4. Eastern Ghats

Select the code from following:
   a) 2 only
   b) 1 and 2
   c) 3 and 4
   d) 1, 2 and 4

Q.24) Which of the following compounds are used for Cloud seeding?
   a) Sulfuric acid

b) Mercury oxide

c) Nitric Acid

d) Silver Iodide

Q.25) Orang National Park is located in

a) Assam

b) Manipur

c) Mizoram

d) Nagaland

Q.26) Consider the following statements about Cloud Seeding

1. It is a kind of weather modification procedure that attempts to enhance the amount of precipitation from the clouds to generate more rain

2. 'Varshadhare' is a cloud-seeding project by Maharashtra

3. Solid form of carbon dioxide is used for cloud seeding

Select the correct statements

a) 1 and 2

b) 2 and 3

c) 1 and 3

d) All of the above

Q.27) Consider the following statements:

1. The Model Code of Conduct for guidance of candidates and political parties comes immediately into effect after the Election Commission announces the schedule of elections

2. Once the polls are completed and result declared, the Election Commission cannot review any result on its own

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

a) 1 only

b) 2 only

c) Both 1 and 2

d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.28) Chronologically arrange the following events happening during election process.

1. Enforcement of Model Code of Conduct

2. Announcement of election schedule

3. Filing of nominations

4. Scrutiny of nominations

Select the correct code

a) 2-3-4-1

b) 2-1-3-4

c) 3-4-2-1

d) 3-2-4-1

Q.29) Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) is responsible for Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) relating to

1. Geographical Indication of goods

2. Copyrights

3. Semiconductor integrated circuits' layout design

Select the correct code:

a) 1 and 2

b) Only 2

c) 2 and 3

d) All of the above

Q.30) Which of the following statements are true regarding the GI tag?

1. GI tags are given on the basis of the Geographical Indications of Goods

(Registration and Protection) Act, 1999.

2. A GI tag connects the quality and authenticity of a given product to a particular geographical origin, thereby ensuring that no one other than the authorised user can use the popular product's name.

3. The first product to be included in the GI list was Chanderi Sarees.

Select the correct option
a) 1 and 2 only
b) 1 and 3 only
c) 1, 2 and 3
d) None of the above

Q.31) Meghamalai Wildlife Sanctuary is located in -
a) Assam
b) Kerala
c) Tamil Nadu
d) Meghalaya

Q.32) Consider the following statements about United Nations Environment Assembly:

1. It is the world's highest-level decision-making body on the environment.

2. It has a universal membership of all UN members.

3. The Environment Assembly meets triennially.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 1 and 2 only
c) 2 and 3 only

d) All of the above

Q.33) Consider the following statements
a) Pinaka is Multi Barrel Rocket Launcher developed by DRDO
b) INSAS is a small satellite developed by ISRO
c) Nag is an antitank missile

Select the correct statement/s
a) 1 and 3
b) 2 and 3
c) 1 and 2
d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.34) The rise of extremism in India is said to believe to be the reactionary rule of Lord Curzon. Which of the following is associated with him?

1. Division of Bengal
2. Educational reforms
3. The Sedition Act and the Official Secrets Act
4. Rowlatt Act

Choose the correct code:
a) 1, 2 and 3
b) 2, 3 and 4
c) 1, 2 and 4
d) 1, 3 and 4

Q.35) Thakurani Jatra festival is celebrated in –
a) Assam
b) Telangana
c) Sikkim
d) Odisha

Q.36) Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary is located in -
a) Assam

b) Manipur
c) Mizoram
d) Nagaland

Q.37) Global Environmental Outlook (GEO) is released by -
a) World Economic Forum
b) International Monetary Fund
c) World Bank
d) United Nations

Q.38) Raqqa and Mosul have been often in news recently. It is located in -
a) Syria and Iraq
b) Syria
c) Syria and Lebanon
d) Syria and Turkey

Q.39) Which of the following statement is/are correct about archaeological survey of India?
1. ASI is responsible for the maintenance, restoration and discovery of ancient monument, archeological site, horticulture site and museums.
2. Archeological and historical pursuits in India started with the effort of Charles Wilkins.
3. ASI is also responsible for epigraphical and numismatic study.
4. It is also responsible for archeological expedition outside India.

Select the appropriate code:
a) 1 and 2 only
b) 1, 2 and 3 only
c) 1, 3 and 4 only
d) All of the above

Q.40) Which of the following statements are correct regarding Eco – Sensitive Zones in India?
1. Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs) are notified by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC).
2. They act as a transition zone from areas of high protection to areas involving lesser protection.
3. The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 does not mention the word "Eco-Sensitive Zones".

Select the code from following:
a) 1 and 2
b) 2 and 3
c) 1 and 3
d) All of the above

Q.41) With reference to 'Eco-Sensitive Zones', which of the following statements is/are correct?
1. Eco-Sensitive Zones are the areas that are declared under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
2. The purpose of the declaration of Eco-Sensitive Zones is to prohibit all kinds of human activities in those zones except agriculture.

Select the correct answer using the code given below.
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.42) Consider the following pairs:
(National Park)   *(State)*

1. Betla

   Jharkhand
2. Orang

   Nagaland
3. Bannerghatta

   Telangana

Which of the above pairs is/are correctly matched?
   a) 1 and 2 only
   b) 1 only
   c) 2 and 3
   d) None

Q.43) TROPEX is a defence exercise between
   a) India and Nepal
   b) Nepal and Bhutan
   c) India and Sri Lanka
   d) None of the above

Q.44) Consider the following statements about 'INS Khanderi'
   1. It is an Indian Navy's torpedo launch and recovery vessel
   2. It is designed by French naval defence and energy company DCNS and built by Mazagon Dock Limited (MDL)

Select the correct statements
   a) 1 Only
   b) 2 Only
   c) Both 1 and 2
   d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.45) Consider the following about Scorpene-class submarines and identify the incorrect statement:

   a) The submarines are built with the French technology at the Mazagaon Dock Ltd in Mumbai.
   b) The Scorpene-class submarines are a class of diesel-electric attack submarines jointly developed by the French Direction des Constructions Navales (DCN) and the Spanish company Navantia, and now by DCNS.
   c) All the six submarines under this class will be equipped with the Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) system, which will enable them to stay underwater for longer duration.
   d) None of the above

Q.46) Consider the following about Lokayuktas:
   1. Lokayuktas are appointed by the governor of the state.
   2. He is not eligible for reappointment for a second term.
   3. The term of office fixed for lokayukta is of 6 years duration or 65 years of age.

Select the correct answer from the codes given below:
   a) 2 and 3 only
   b) 3 only
   c) 1 and 2 only
   d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.47) According to the Lokpal & Lokayuktas Act, 2013, which of the following statements is/are correct?
   1. The act extends to whole of India, excluding Jammu and Kashmir.

2. The act applies to public servants both in and outside India.
3. The act mandates for creation of Lokpal for Union and Lokayukta for states.

Choose the correct answer from the code given below:
a) 1 only
b) 1 and 2 only
c) 2 and 3 only
d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.48) Consider the following statements about West Nile fever
1. It is a mosquito-borne infection
2. West Nile Virus (WNV) was first identified in Uganda

Select the correct statements
a) Only 1
b) Only 2
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.49) 'Transformation of Aspirational Districts' is under the aegis of
a) Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs
b) NITI Aayog
c) Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
d) Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare

Q.50) Which article of Indian Constitution lays down that a Finance Commission (FC) should be constituted "…within two years from the commencement of this Constitution and thereafter at the expiration of every fifth year or at such earlier time as the President considers necessary…"?**
a) Article 180 (1)
b) Article 280 (1)
c) Article 380 (1)
d) Article 80 (1)

Q.51) Consider the following statements with reference to Finance Commission
1. It is a quasi-judicial body.
2. The chairman of the commission is not eligible for reappointment.
3. The qualifications of the members of commission are not specified in the Constitution.

Which of the statements given above are correct?
a) 1 and 2
b) 1 and 3
c) 2 and 3
d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.52) Consider the following statements with respect to 'Central Information Commission (CIC)'
1. It has been constituted under the Right to Information Act, 2005
2. Chief Information Commissioner is appointed by the President of India

Select the correct statements
a) 1 Only
b) 2 Only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.53) Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) is associated with
   a) European Union
   b) Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
   c) North Atlantic Treaty Organization
   d) None of the above

Q.54) Recently signed 'Qingdao Declaration' is associated with
   a) Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)
   b) BRICS
   c) ASEAN
   d) Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)

Q.55) Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) is associated with which of the following organisations?
   a) BRICS
   b) SCO
   c) European Union
   d) G4

Q.56) 'Right to information' comes under which of the following Rights?
   a) Fundamental Right
   b) Legal Right
   c) Neither Fundamental nor Legal right
   d) Both fundamental and legal right

Q.57) Consider the following statements
   1. National Investigation Agency (NIA) is a non-statutory body
   2. The Central Government has suo-moto powers to direct the agency (NIA) for investigation of any scheduled offence

Select the correct answer from the codes given below
   a) 1 only
   b) 2 only
   c) Both 1 and 2
   d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.58) The repealed acts TADA and POTA were concerned with
   a) Terrorism
   b) Unlawful Activities
   c) Salary, Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament
   d) The Leaders and Chief Whips of Recognised Parties and Groups in Parliament

Q.59) With reference to India, consider the following Central Acts:
   1. Import and Export (Control) Act, 1947.
   2. Mining and Mineral Development (Regulation) Act 1957
   3. The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972
   4. Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980

Which of above Acts have relevance to/bearing on the biodiversity conservation in the country?
   a) 1 and 3 only
   b) 2, 3 and 4 only
   c) 1, 2, 3 and 4
   d) None of the above Acts

Q.60) Which of the following Acts make Environment Impact Assessment mandatory in India?
   a) Indian Forest Act
   b) Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act

c) Wildlife Protection Act
d) Environment (Protection) Act

Q.61) Consider the following about Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trial (VVPAT)
1. The VVPAT is a method that provides feedback to voters after they cast their votes in EVMs
2. It will completely replace the electronic voting machines (EVMs)

Select the correct option
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both
d) None

Q.62) Consider the following statements:
1. Sea of Galilee is between Syria and Lebanon
2. Golan Heights is a grassland plain in south-western Syria but annexed by Israel
3. Rainwater from the Golan's catchment feeds into the Jordan River

Which of the above statements is/are correct?
a) 1 and 2 only
b) 3 only
c) 1, 2 and 3
d) None

Q.63) Consider the following statements with respect to 'Border Area Development Programme (BADP)'
1. The funds under BADP are provided to the States for execution of

projects relating to infrastructure, livelihood, education and health
2. It was initiated during the Second Five Year Plan period

Select the correct statements
a) 1 Only
b) 2 Only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.64) Consider the following statements:
1. Gujarat is the only state which is both emergent and submergent
2. Eastern coast is emergent in nature (barring the Coromandel coast), whereas western coast is submergent (barring the Malabar)
3. The land advancing against sea is termed a positive movement and the sea advancing against land is known as a negative movement

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
a) 2 and 3 only
b) 1 and 2 only
c) 1 and 3 only
d) All of the above

Q.65) Consider the following statements about Olive Ridley Turtles
1. They are found in India
2. They are the only turtles which display a unique mass nesting behaviour 'arribada'

Select the correct statements
a) Only 1
b) Only 2

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

Q.66) Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) do not audit which of the following?
1. Local bodies
2. Oil and Natural Gas Commission
3. State governments
4. All institutions established by act of Central government

Select the correct answer using code below
a) Only 1
b) 1 and 2
c) Only 4
d) 3 and 4

Q.67) Department for Promotion of Industrial Policy & Internal Trade is responsible for Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) relating to
1. Geographical Indication of goods
2. Copyrights
3. Semiconductor integrated circuits' layout design

Select the correct code:
a) 1 and 2
b) Only 2
c) 2 and 3
d) All of the above

Q.68) Araku Valley Arabica coffee was awarded GI certification recently. Araku Valley is located in –
a) Kodagu district, Karnataka
b) Wayanad district, Kerala
c) Visakhapatnam district, Andhra Pradesh
d) Chikmagalur district, Karnataka

Q.69) With the boom of the bitcoin – a variety of cryptocurrency – the blockchain technology has come into prominence. What does this technology promise to do, even though it is still in its infancy?
a) Help facilitate secure, online transactions in a decentralized way
b) Keep out malware
c) Connect servers with common reasons for existence, remotely
d) Helps to remove inequality and promote inclusive development

Q.70) Fakim Wildlife Sanctuary is located in –
a) Telangana
b) Arunachal Pradesh
c) Andhra Pradesh
d) Nagaland

2019 MARCH MONTH CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQs SOLUTIONS

1	a	19	b	37	d	55	b
2	b	20	b	38	a	56	d
3	a	21	d	39	c	57	d
4	a	22	b	40	d	58	a
5	c	23	b	41	d	59	c
6	a	24	d	42	b	60	d
7	b	25	a	43	d	61	a
8	d	26	c	44	b	62	b
9	c	27	c	45	d	63	a
10	a	28	b	46	c	64	b
11	b	29	d	47	c	65	a
12	b	30	a	48	c	66	c
13	a	31	c	49	b	67	d
14	b	32	b	50	b	68	c
15	b	33	a	51	b	69	a
16	c	34	a	52	c	70	d
17	a	35	d	53	d		
18	d	36	a	54	a		