IASBABA'S MONTHLY MAGAZINE SEPTEMBER 2020

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CONTACT
SUPPORT@IASBABA.COM
ILP@IASBABA.COM
ECLP@IASBABA.COM

WWW.IASBABA.COM
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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 **64th edition** of IASbaba's Monthly Magazine. This edition covers all important issues that were in news in the month of **SEPTEMBER 2020** 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

Rare RenatiChola era inscription unearthed

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-I – Art and Culture

In News:

- A rare inscription dating back to the RenatiChola era has been unearthed.
- **Location:** Remote village of Kadapa district, Andhra Pradesh.

Image source: Click here

Key takeaways

- It was found engraved on a dolomite slab and shale.
- It was written in archaic Telugu, which was readable in 25 lines
- It was assigned to the 8th Century A.D., when the region was under the rule of the Chola Maharaja of Renadu.

Important value additions

Renati Cholas

- The Telugu Cholas of Renadu (also called as Renati Cholas) ruled over Renadu region, the present day Cuddapah district.
- They were originally independent, later forced to the suzerainty of the Eastern Chalukyas.
- They had the unique honour of using the Telugu language in their inscriptions belonging to the 6th and 8th centuries.
- The inscriptions at Gandikota at Jammulamadugu and Proddatur are proof of this fact.

Do you know?

- Suzerainty is a relationship in which one state controls the foreign policy and relations of a tributary state, while allowing the tributary state to have internal autonomy.

August rainfall in 2020 has been the highest since 1926

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I- Geography
In news

- According the India Meteorological Department (IMD), August rainfall in 2020 has been the highest since 1926 with about 27% more than what is normal for the month.

Key takeaways

- **Causes of heavy rainfall:** Several long-lasting low-pressure systems or rain-bearing winds that formed in the Bay of Bengal. They were vigorous enough to travel all the way from the south-eastern coast up to north-west India.
- The surplus rain was primarily in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Telangana, Chhattisgarh and Odisha.
- Though August rainfall was in excess, the figure for this year's monsoon as a whole were likely to be within the department's June forecast of a normal (96 to 104% of the long period average) rainfall.
- In the normal course, the monsoon begins its retreat from September 15 and this can go on for nearly a month.

Rogan Art: Gujarat

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I- Art and Culture
In news

- Rogan art (hand painting on cloth) was recently in news because it is facing an unprecedented challenge due to pandemic.

Important value additions

- With origins in Persia, it came to Kutch around 300 years ago.
- This rare craft is practised by a lone Muslim family, the Khatris of Nirona Village, Gujarat.
- Rogan is a form of textile painting which uses a rich, brightly coloured paint made from castor oil and natural colors.
- The intricate motifs – geometric flowers, peacocks, the tree of life, etc. – are drawn from the history and folk culture of the Kutch region.
- The 'Tree of Life' design is the most famous design in Rogan painting.
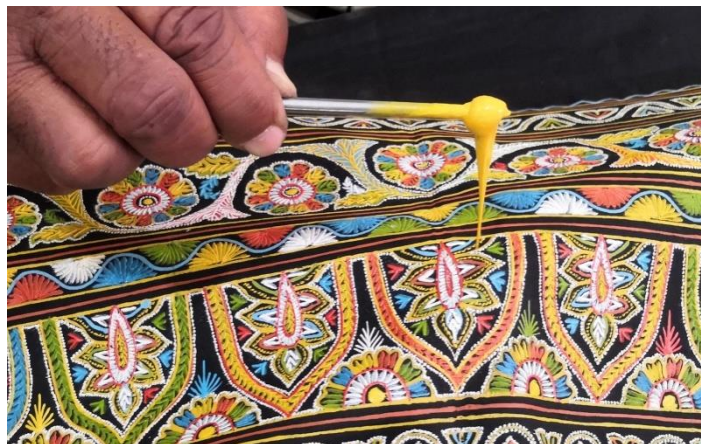
Image source: Click here

Chendamangalam Saree: Kerala

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Intellectual Property Rights

In news

- The Care 4 Chendamangalam (C4C) initiative is supporting the 2018 Kerala flood-affected weavers.

Important value additions

Kerala Kasavu Sarees

- It refers to the zari (gold thread) used in the border of the Kerala saree.
- The identity of the saree comes from the geographical cluster they are associated with.
- The Indian government has identified three clusters in Kerala - Balaramapuram, Chendamangalam and Kuthampully - that have been given a Geographical Indication (GI) tag.

Chendamangalam Saree

- It is recognisable by its puliyilakara border, a thin black line that runs side by side with the sari's selvedge.
- It has extra-weft chuttikara and stripes and checks of varying width.

Temple belonging to Kakatiya Dynasty converted

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I – Art & Culture

In news

- A temple constructed by Emperor Ganapati Deva, a ruler of Kakatiya dynasty, in Dharanikota (Andhra Pradesh) has been converted into an abode of local goddess Balusulamma (Goddess Durga).
- The presiding deity at this 13th-century temple was Kakati Devi, the tutelary deity of Kakatiya rulers.
- Due to ravages of time and for no upkeep, the presiding deity got damaged.
- The villagers of Dharanikota, who had no knowledge about the past of the temple, installed Balusulamma idol and started worshipping.

Importantvalue additions

Kakatiya Dynasty

- Kakatiyas is an Andhra dynasty that flourished in the 12th century CE.
- The Kakatiya dynasty ruled from Warangal (Telangana) from CE 1083-1323.
- They were known for the construction of a network of tanks for irrigation and drinking water and thereby gave a big boost to the overall development of the region.
- Hundreds of Hindu temples were built under the patronage of Kakatiya kings like Ganapati Deva, Rudrama Devi and Prataparudra of Kakatiya dynasty. E.g.
- **Examples:** (1) Thousand Pillar Temple or RudreshwaraSwamy Temple, Telangana. It is a star-shaped, triple shrine (Trikutalayam) dedicated to Vishnu, Shiva and Surya. (2) Ramappa Temple, Warangal, Telangana; (3) Golconda Fort in Hyderabad, Telangana

POLITY/GOVERNANCE

Mission Karmayogi -National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building (NPCSCB)

Context: Dubbed as the biggest bureaucratic reform initiative, the Union Cabinet approved 'Mission Karmayogi', a new capacity-building scheme for civil servants aimed at **upgrading the post-recruitment training mechanism** of the officers and employees at all levels.

Civil Service reform measures undertaken by government in recent past

- Hiring reforms by bringing a nodal recruiting agency(NRA)
- Lateral entry in joint secretary level positions
- Provision of non IAS officers in policy making roles
- Training of government servants through a program called 'arambh'
- Short term posting of young IAS officers at different central departments on a probation before their posting in districts

What are the existing impediments in Civil Service?

- Diverse and fragmented training landscape
- Evolution of silos at Department level preventing shared understanding of India's development aspirations
- Difficulty in finding officials with the right competencies for a task
- Lack of linkages between the Role and Competency
- Inconsistencies in training priorities, competency & pedagogy
- Lack of common platform and barriers to exchange of knowledge
- Lack of lifelong & continuous learning environment
- Redundancy & duplication of efforts

What are the core guiding principles or the Policy Framework of NPCSCB Programme?

1. To complement the physical capacity building approach with Online Learning
2. Supporting Transition from 'Rules based' to **'Roles based' HR Management**. Aligning work allocation of civil servants by matching their competencies to the requirements of the post.
3. To create an ecosystem of **shared training infrastructure** including that of learning materials, institutions and personnel.
4. To calibrate all Civil Service positions to a **Framework of Roles, Activities and Competencies (FRACs)** approach and to create and deliver learning content relevant to the identified FRACs in every Government entity.
5. Enable adoption of modern technological tools such as digital platforms, Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning and Data Analytics

What is the Institutional Structure for Mission Karmayogi?

Mission Karmayogi – Institutional Structure
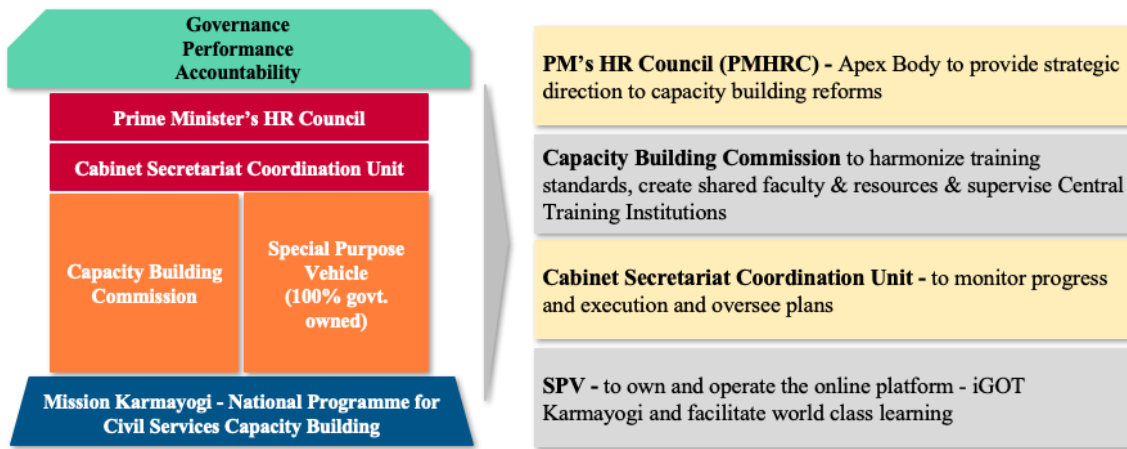
1. PM led Human Resource Council

- It will also include state Chief Ministers, Union Cabinet ministers and eminent national and global Academicians, thought leaders, Industry leaders
- This council will approve and review civil service capacity building programmes.
- Mandate of the Council includes:
- **Apex body driving & providing strategic direction** to the Programme
- **Approves & Monitors** Civil Service Capacity Building plan
- **Reviews reports** submitted by Capacity Building Commission

2. Cabinet Secretary Coordination Unit

- It comprises of select secretaries and cadre controlling authorities, headed by Cabinet Secretary
- The primary function of this body is to monitor progress, and execution of plans.

3. Capacity Building Commission: It will include experts in related fields and global professionals. The mandate of the commission are:

- To prepare annual Capacity building plans and seek approval from PM HR Council
- Audit human resources available in the government.
- Harmonize training standards and capacity building
- Create shared faculty and resources
- Supervisory role over all Central Training Institutions.
- Set norms for common mid-career training programs
- Undertake analysis of data from iGOT-Karmayogi
- Prepare the Annual HR Report on health of Civil Services and Target Achievements

4. Wholly owned Special Purpose Vehicle(SPV)

- **Legal:** Company under Section 8 (of Companies Act) with 100% Government ownership
- **Board of Directors:** Representing allparticipating entities of the Programme
- **Revenue Model:**Self sustaining -Annual Subscription fee of INR 431 per employee

Key functions of SPV are:
- Own and operate the online Platform, iGOT Karmayogi on behalf of Government
- Operationalize a robust content ecosystem
- Manage assessment & certification eco-system
- Telemetry data based scoring – monitoring and evaluation
- Feedback assessment – driven by Artificial Intelligence & evolvable and scalable platform
- Curate & deliver programmes for capacity building of Civil Servants in other countries
- The SPV will own all Intellectual Property Rights on behalf of the Government of India.

What is iGOT- Karmayogi platform?
- The Karmyogi Programme will be delivered by setting up an Integrated Government Online Training (iGOT) Karmayogi Platform.
- iGOT-Karmayogi is a **continuous online training platform**, which would allow all government servants from assistant secretary to secretary level to undergo continuous training, depending on their domain areas.
- Courses from international universities will be made available on the platform for officers to take any time
- The platform is expected to evolve into a vibrant and world-class market place for content where carefully curated and vetted digital e-learning material will be made available.
- Besides capacity building, service matters like confirmation after probation period, deployment, work assignment and notification of vacancies etc. would eventually be integrated with the proposed competency framework

How isMission Karmayogi funded?
- To cover around 46 lakh central employees, a sum of Rs 510.86 crore will be spent over a period of 5 years from 2020-21 to 2024-25.
- The expenditure is partly funded by multilateral assistance to the tune of $50 million.

How is theMonitoring & Evaluation Framework of the mission?
- Monitoring and evaluation of all users on the basis of Key Performance Indicators (KPI).
- Users include the individual learner (Civil Servant), the supervisor, the organisation, the peer group, the content creator and the technology service provider
- **Prime Minister's Dash Board:** Real-time reporting of Capacity Building KPIs with Annual Score Cards and Rankingsfor Departments
- **Capacity Building Plan-** Annual Plans submitted by each Department aligned to National ambitions
- **Annual State of Civil Services Report:** Consolidated Performance of Civil Services as a whole in a year with focus on achievements & contribution to National Progress
- **Independent Audits:** Third Party Audit of Programme, in addition to regular Audit and Quality Assurance by Capacity Building Commission

Merits of the Mission
- **Democratized Civil Service:** This is a New National Architecturefor Civil Services Capacity Building that will herald into Silo-less Performance. It would help augment the capacities of over two crore officials in India.

- **Holistic**: This is a Comprehensive reform of the capacity building apparatus at individual, institutional and process levels for efficient public service delivery.
- **Competency driven HR Management policy**: The mission ensures that right person with right competencies is at the right position
- **Enhanced Accessibility:** The mission enables Civil Servants to learn from the best institutions and practices across the world (through marketplace of iGOT platform)
- **Increased Expertise** The mission is Knowledge driven and aims at building competencies to transform Civil Servants into leaders and subject matter experts.
- **Better Governance:**Capacity of Civil Services plays a vital role in performing core governance functions.The mission will help make Civil Servant more efficient, effective, accountable and responsive to the needs of the citizen
- **Leads to better Work Culture**: The mission organically links the transformation of work culture and strengthening public institutions through adopting modern technology (iGOT Karmayogi platform) which lays emphasis on skills
- **Professional Growth:** It helps make available to all civil servants, an opportunity to continuously build and strengthen their Behavioral, Functional and Domain Competencies in their self-driven and mandated learning paths
- **Uniform Approach:** The mission will enable a uniform approach in managing and regulating the capacity building ecosystem on collaborative and co-sharing basis.
- **Reduces the cost** of training Civil Servants for both Centre & States, due to emphasis given on continuous online learning and shared ecosystem. Expenditure on foreign training will thence be cut down.

Do You Know?
- iGOT Pilot Model has trained COVID Warriors and led India's fight against COVID
- Courses were provided for diverse audiences like Doctors, Nurses, NCC Cadets, NSS Volunteers and Technicians
- The pilot model supported 12 languages and the content was delivered through multiple channels (Mobile, Desktop, Offline access by iGOT TV)
- The pilot was a success with nearly 12.7 lakh registered users and 14.06 lakh certificates issues

Conclusion
Mission Karmayogi aims to prepare the Indian Civil Servant for the future by making him more creative, constructive, imaginative, innovative, proactive, professional, progressive, energetic, enabling, transparent and technology-enabled.

Protests Against Farm Ordinances

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Centre-state Relations; Policies and interventions
In news

- Recently, the Punjab Assembly passed a resolution and rejected the Centre's recent farm ordinances and the proposed Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2020.

Key takeaways

The ordinances include:
- Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance, 2020
- Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance, 2020
- Essential Commodities (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020.
- These ordinances are expected to allow free movement of agricultural produce between states and let the farmers decide to whom they want to sell their crops.
- The Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2020 centralizes the power sector through establishment of Electricity Contract Enforcement Authority.
- Recognition of franchisees and sub- licensees under the Bill might open the sector to private players.

Punjab's Stand:
- Entry 14 of List II of the Constitution comprises agriculture as the subject of the states.
- Therefore, the three ordinances passed by the Centre are against the Constitution of India.
- These ordinances are a direct encroachment upon the functions of the states and against the spirit of cooperative federalism enshrined in the Constitution.

Important value additions
- Article 246 adopts a threefold distribution of legislative power between the Union and the states.
- The subject-wise distribution of this power is given in the three lists of the Seventh Schedule of the constitution:
- List-I- the Union List
- List-II- the State List
- List-III- the Concurrent List

SC Decision on UGC Guidelines on Conduct of Examinations

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Judiciary; Education
In news

- The Supreme Court ruled that the states are empowered under the Disaster Management Act, 2005 (DM Act) to override University Grants Commission (UGC) exam guidelines in order to protect human lives amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

Key takeaways
- It held that universities and other institutions of higher education will have to conduct the final-year exams and cannot promote students on the basis of internal assessment or other criteria.
- In case of a disaster, the priority of all authorities under the DM Act is to immediately combat the disaster and contain it to save human life.
- In future, if any State found it impossible to conduct the exams by the deadline given by UGC and wanted to postpone them, it could apply to the UGC.
- The States and universities cannot dismiss UGC guidelines as being merely advisory.
- SC rejected the argument that compelling attendance by holding physical examination is a violation of the 'Right to Life' under Article 21.

Question Hour and Democracy

Context: The Union Government has announced that in the forthcoming session of Parliament (monsoon session that starts on September 14) there will be no Question Hour. The stated reason for this is the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic

What is Parliamentary Form of Government?
- A parliamentary form of government in the one in which the executive is accountable to the electorate through a legislature which in turn is periodically elected by the electorate.
- This accountability lies at the heart of democratic government and is implemented through procedures put in place by the legislature whose functions include
  - Lawmaking
  - Controlling the national finances
  - Approving taxation proposals
  - Having discussions on matters of public interest and concern
- Each of these functions is discharged, daily or periodically, during sittings of the legislature and cover questions, adjournment motion, calling attention, half-an-hour discussion, motion of no confidence, questions of privilege, etc

What is Question Hour?
- The first hour of every parliamentary sitting is slotted for the Question Hour where Members of Parliament raise questions about any aspect of administrative activity.
- In a **starred question**, a member seeks an oral answer from the concerned minister and this can be followed by supplementary questions, whereas in the case of unstarred questions, a written answer is provided, and no supplementary question can be asked
- **Short notice question** is one that is asked by giving a notice of less than ten days. It is answered orally.
- Ministries receive the questions 15 days in advance so that they can prepare their ministers for Question Hour**.**
- **The presiding officers** of the both Houses (Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha) are the final authority with respect to the conduct of Question Hour.
- Question Hour is regulated according to **parliamentary rules**
- Question Hour in both Houses is **held on all days of the session**. But there are two days when an exception is made (Day of President's address & During Budget presentation)
- With the broadcasting of Question Hour since 1991, Question Hour has become one the most visible aspects of parliamentary functioning

Significance of Question Hour
- **Instrument of Accountability**: During the Question hour, Members of Parliament (MPs) ask questions to ministers and hold them accountable for the functioning of their ministries.
- **Regularity**: The daily 'Question Hour' has an unmatched criticality on account of its regularity and its availability on a basis of equality to every Member of the House, Rajya Sabha or Lok Sabha.
- **Broad Scope**: It has a special significance in the proceedings of Parliament since it covers every aspect of government activity, domestic and foreign.

- **Leads to Wider Debate:** Though questions are pointed & specific, our parliamentary history records instances of answers given to questions leading to wider debates, inquiries, and even administrative scandals.
- **Public Awareness**: The information made available through Question Hour adds to public information essential to informed debates on matters of interest or concern.
- **Stance of Executive:** The advantage of Question Hour to the government is that its position in the matter is authoritatively explained

What is the criticism of government's move to suspend Question Hour?

- **Reduced Space for Opposition**: The rest of the business of Houses was tightly controlled and set by the government, leaving only Question Hour to hold the government accountable.
- **Against the Spirit of Democracy:** Suspension of Question Hour is not good sign in democratic principles especially in a parliamentary democracy.
- **Bad Precedence:**Parliament is the beacon of legislative functioning and its functioning will set the precedent for Vidhan sabhas to follow in the future.
- **Lacks Consensus:** The move to suspend Question Hour due to pandemic and to find alternate options was not discussed with leaders of political parties and groups

How has government responded to above criticisms?

- The government has later clarified that the Unstarred Questions will continue to be received and answered and that the change will relate only to Starred Questions and the Supplementary questions emanating from them that require to be answered orally.

Conclusion

The test of a functioning democracy is its ability to face crises — social, economic, political — and seek correctives premised on institutions of democracy. A resort to what has been called 'the politics of avoidance' does not help the process.

Value Addition

Zero Hour

- Zero Hour is an Indian parliamentary innovation. It is not mentioned in the parliamentary rules book.
- Under this, MPs can raise matters without any prior notice.
- The zero hour starts immediately after the question hour and lasts until the agenda for the day (i.e. regular business of the House) is taken up.
- In other words, the time gap between the question hour and the agenda is known as zero hour.

Language issue and a Case Study of Singapore

Context: The New Education Policy misses the case of Tamil Nadu following a language formula that is distinctly at variance with that of Delhi for the past 50 years

Tamil Nadu's Language Policy

- It follows a two language policy which is at variance with Centre advocation of three language policy

- It was the decision of C.N. Annadurai, who led Dravidian Movement, that beyond Tamil and English (in order of preference) no other language would be taught in the schools of Tamil Nadu either as a language or medium of instruction

What is the language policy adopted by various developed countries?
- Most countries follow a one-language formula (invariably mother tongue) for teaching children in the primary classes.
- On reaching middle school they are given a chance to learn one more language, mostly English.
- As there is no imposition through schools, voluntary learning of other languages is widely prevalent in these countries.

Language Policy in Singapore under the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew (first PM of Singapore from 1959 to 1990)
- In Singapore, **74.2% of the population is Chinese**, 13.2% Malays and 9.2% Indians.
- Singapore had much more justification to adopt Chinese as its sole official language than India insisting on Hindi being the sole official language. Even today the population of Hindi-speaking people has not crossed 50% in India;
- If Lee KuanYew(LKY) had wished he could have well declared Chinese to be the sole official language and satisfied the Chinese who were in a majority.
- However, LKY used **language policy as a strategic tool** to achieve socio-economic development.
- Giving **equal status to English and mother tongue** was considered by LKY as a prerequisite not only to work closely with the international community but also to bring in big ticket changes
- Lee Kuan Yew attributed the international acclaim Singapore received for its success mainly to its **two-language formula.** He mandated that each Singaporean should learn their respective mother tongue along with English.
- He viewed that the **lingua franca of the country should be equidistant to all cultural groups**, thereby creating fair competition and opportunities.
- Only in this background were Malay, Chinese, Tamil and English declared as common languages with the **lingua franca being English.**
- The two-language policy prepared Singaporeans in advance for globalisation
- Many compare this policy with C N Annadurai's view on language

What was the mainstay of Annadurai's language policy?
- He insisted that all the national languages should be made official languages and English should be the common link language
- He held that the official language should be equidistant to all the members of a multilingual society. English would fit the bill for both students of Hindi and Tamil.
- Making Hindi alone as the official language would create disparity among various linguistic groups other than the Hindi-speaking population which will result in partial treatment, giving unfair advantage to the Hindi-speaking population
- Annadurai was also particular that English is the language we communicate with a larger world.
- What Annadurai dreamed of as a language policy for 'the Dravidian land' was actually implemented in Singapore by Lee Kuan Yew.

Does that mean that Two Language Policy has worked well in Tamil Nadu?

- Though comparable to Singapore in language policy, Tamil Nadu's education standards are not comparable to Singapore's in terms of outcomes
- Students in the state suffer a serious handicap while dealing with English and Tamil languages. And they do not have command over either.
- **Counter Argument:** This is not the failure of the two-language formula *per se* but of its implementation and the present Indian educational ecosystem.

Conclusion

If India is really interested in the new education policy capable of creating new generations, Delhi can acquire that vision only by studying the educational ecosystem throughout the world

Connecting the dots

- NEP 2020
- Official Language of Union and Eighth Schedule of Indian Constitution

2009 Anti-Corruption Movement and Challenges to Indian Polity

Context: Nine years ago, Anna Hazare ended his historic fast when the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, informed him that Parliament had expressed support for proposed changes to anti-corruption legislation.

What was the movement all about?

- **Anti-Corruption & Accountability**: The single point demand of the Anna movement was the institution of the Jan Lokpal to try all government functionaries when accused of corruption; even the Prime Minister.
- **Substantive Democracy**: It was a remarkable movement of citizens — rich, middle class, and poor — coming together to take politics back from politicians and to demand Parliament's accountability to citizens
- **Decentralisation**: Anna Hazare who was leading the movement said Lokpals and Lokayuktas would not eliminate the root causes of corruption in politics and government. Electoral reforms and decentralisation of power were essential

What is the present situation vis-à-vis the ideas raised in movement?

- The movement for fundamental reforms of governance lost its steam.
- The nation's attention has moved on, from weaknesses in institutions of governance, to threats from China on the nation's borders and to global problems caused by COVID-19.

What are the issues still plaguing our Political System?

1. Money dominates Electoral Process which leads to Systemic Corruption

- Around the world, electoral democracies have become infected by the disease of funding political parties and elections. Money is required to win elections legitimately, even when people are not bribed to vote
- Communications with citizens, essential for democracy has become expensive.
- The race to raise more money for legitimate electioneering purposes can corrupt the process of funding parties and elections.

2. Challenges with Democratic Process and deliberations

- The problem in electoral democracies is not only with the process by which representatives are elected, but also in the conduct of their deliberations when they come together.
- Representatives fight for the largest share of the pie for their constituency rather than the growth of the whole pie.

- Elected representatives must shed their local hats and put on a national hat to consider what will be best for the whole country, which seldom happens

3. Multi-Party Democracy is a double edged sword
- Emergence of multiple Political parties has enabled even the weakest person to make his voice heard. It has democratised the electoral process.
- However, when there are too many parties and too many contradictory points of view to be accommodated within a coalition, governance can break down.

4. Alternative of Direct Democracy has its own pitfalls
- It is tempting to abandon political parties and parliaments and revert to direct forms of democracy where every decision can be put directly to all citizens to vote on. New Internet technologies make this possible.
- But, if all voters have not understood what is at stake, they cannot decide well as the U.K. has understood with its hasty Brexit referendum.
- Complex issues, where many interests collide, must be resolved by reason, not settled by the numbers

Way Forward
- Electoral funding must be cleaned up
- Democracy within political parties improved to make representative democracy work better.
- Strong local governance remains the unfinished agenda to make India's democracy strong and deep

Connecting the dots
- 73rd& 74th Constitutional Amendment Act

Supreme Court stays reservation for the Maratha community

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I- Society & GS-II - Judiciary
In news
- The Supreme Court has stayed reservation for the Maratha community in government jobs and educational institutions in Maharashtra.

Key takeaways
- A three-judge bench headed by Justice L NageswaraRao referred the case to a larger bench.
- The Bench will consider the constitutional validity of 2018 Maharashtra government law providing reservation to Marathas in the State.

Do you know?
- Maharashtra State Reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes Act originally provided 16% reservation for Maratha community in educational institutions and government jobs.
- The law was challenged before Bombay High Court which in June 2019 upheld its validity but reduced the quota to 12% in educational institutions and 13% in jobs.
- Appeals were filed before the SC stating that the reservation would lead to breach of the 50% cap laid down by the Apex Court in its 1992 judgment of IndraSawhney versus Union of India.
- Maharashtra government had on August 26, 2020, asked the SC to place the matter before a larger bench considering the fact that it involves determination of substantial legal questions.

Judiciary and Housing Rights of Urban Poor

Context: Supreme Court of India on 31 August 2020 ordered the removal of about 48,000 slum dwellings situated along the railway tracks in Delhi within three months.

The hearing was based on a report filed by the Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA), which said Railways is not following the Solid Waste Management Rules.

What are the other directives of SC order?

- The court declared no interference, political or otherwise, should be there against their removal.
- It said any order of interim stay passed by any court against the removal of these encroachment shall be deemed ineffective.
- The court further directed the Railways and local authorities in Delhi to remove plastic waste, garbage, etc, piled up alongside the tracks within three months.

Criticisms of the SC Order

1. Court ignores the specific issues of Pollution raised in PIL & proceeds on a tangential topic

- The order was passed in the long-running case, *M.C. Mehta vs. Union of India &Ors.*, regarding pollution in Delhi and related report filed by EPCA
- However, neither this case nor the report concerns itself with the legality of informal settlements
- Still, the Court made an unconvincing connection between the piling of garbage and the presence of slums and gave an eviction order

2. Court has ignored principles of natural justice

- The order violates principles of natural justice and due process since it decided on the removal of *jhuggijhopris* without hearing the affected party, the *jhuggi*dwellers.

3. Court ignores judicial precedents on the right to shelter

- In *Olga Tellis&Ors vs. Bombay Municipal Corporation &Ors.* (1985), five-judge bench SC held that the right to life also includes the "right to livelihood" and that no eviction shall take place without notice and hearing those affected
- In *Chameli Singh vs. State Of U.P.* (1995), the Supreme Court recognised the "right to shelter" as a component of the right to life under Article 21 and freedom of movement under Article 19(1)(e).
- In *Ajay Maken&Ors. vs Union Of India &Ors.* (2019), a case concerning the demolition of Shakur Basti on railway land, the Delhi High Court invoked the idea of the **"Right to the City"** to uphold the housing rights of slum dwellers.

4. Court has also ignored state policies governing evictions.

- In *Sudama Singh & Others vs Government Of Delhi &Anr.* (2010), the High Court of Delhi held that prior to any eviction, a survey must be conducted and those evicted should have a right to **"meaningful engagement" with the relocation plans.**
- The procedure laid down in this judgment formed the basis for the Delhi Slum and JJ Rehabilitation and Relocation Policy, 2015, which has not been referred by the court

5. Order considered insensitive in the time of Pandemic

- The pandemic makes urban informal livelihoods more vulnerable and Supreme Court order threatens to leave lakhs of people homeless amid a health and economic emergency

Way Ahead
- The affected residents would now need to employ a combination of political and legal strategies to protect their housing rights and ensure that no eviction or rehabilitation is conducted without their prior informed consent.

Connecting the dots
- National Green Tribunal
- Smart City Mission (How City beautification projects are impacting Slum dwellers)

Autonomous Bodies

Context: The Union textile ministry recently abolished the All India Handicrafts Board, Handloom Board and the Power Loom Board.

The ministry also changed the status of the eight Textile Research Associations to "approved bodies", instead of the earlier "affiliated bodies". Thereafter, the government withdrew the officials of the ministry of textiles from the governing bodies of these textile associations.

What are the objectives behind this decision?
- It in consonance with the government's vision of minimum government, maximum governance
- It is a step in achieving leaner government machinery
- Government through these measures wants to introduce systematic rationalisation of government bodies.

What are Autonomous Bodies(AB)?
- **Objective**: Autonomous Bodies are set up whenever it is felt that certain functions need to be discharged outside the governmental set up with some amount of independence and flexibility without day-to-day interference of the Governmental machinery.
- **Establishment**: These are set up by the Ministries/Departments concerned with the subject matter and are funded through grants-in-aid, either fully or partially, depending on the extent which such institutes generate internal resources of their own
- **Nature of these Bodies:** They are mostly registered as societies under the Societies Registration Act and in certain cases they have been set up as statutory institutions under the provisions contained in various Acts.
- **Functions:** They are engaged in diverse activities, ranging from formulating frameworks for policies, conducting research, and preserving the cultural heritage, etc. Institutes imparting technical, medical and higher education fall in this category
- **Governance**: The apex administrative body of ABs is called governing council or governing body and is chaired by the minister or the secretary of the respective ministry.
- **Accountability**: These Autonomous Bodies are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), and the annual report is presented in the Parliament every year.

What are the issues of Autonomous Bodies that needs review?
- **Extent of Flexibility:** Since these bodies are funded by taxpayer's money, it is argued that they should follow the policies of the government and be accountable the way the government

departments are. Others claim that they being "autonomous" have the right to make their own financial and administrative policies

- **The exact count of ABs is not known**, with estimates ranging from 400 to 650 plus.Then, ABs employ a considerable number. For example, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, an AB under the ministry of agriculture, has almost 17,000 employees.
- **Lacks Uniformity in Recruitment:** Unlike the government and PSUs, in which the recruitment rules are uniform and the recruitment is done by a centralised body such SSC, UPSC and the Public Enterprise Selection Board, there is no such body for Central AB recruitments
- **Accountability issue:** In place of Senior Ministry Officials, Junior officials attend meeting who lack jurisdiction to take meaningful decisions. Also, Some ABs are audited by CAG whereas many are done by chartered accountants.

Way Ahead

- **Proper Definition:** A legal framework to describe an AB should be drawn up, which defines the boundaries of its working, its autonomy, and the various policies that it must follow.
- **Rationalisation of their numbers:**ABs that have outlived the cause for which they were established may need to be closed or merged with a similar organisation or their memorandum altered as per the new charter.
- **Uniformity in their Policies**: In order to bring about uniformity in the policies, a task force needs to be set up under a pan-Indian agency such as SSC or UPSC to streamline the recruitment rules, salary structure, allowance and perks paid to employees, and mode of recruitment.
- **Changes in Functioning:**To ensure the participation of ministry officials, committee meetings of similar ABs should be held together so that the appropriate authorities could provide meaningful suggestions.
- **Performance Audit of AB:** CAG had done an exhaustive performance audit of autonomous scientific bodies in 2016, highlighting the gaps in their performance. Such a theme-based audit should be done for other ABs as wel

Connecting the dots

- Tribunals and their utility
- Regulatory Bodies and their functioning

Extension of Tenure of Standing Committees may be extended

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Parliament

In news

- The Rajya Sabha Secretariat is considering changing the rules governing the Departmentally-Related Standing Committees' (DRSC) tenure to make it to two years from the present one year.
- **Objective:** The panels should have enough time to work on the subjects selected by them.A significant amount of the tenure of the committees was lost due to the Covid-19 pandemic.Many of the panels have not been able to complete reports on the subjects they were working on.

Options that are being considered

- To extend the term of the panels for a year.
- To form new committees with a fixed tenure of two years.

Important value additions
Parliamentary Committees
- The Constitution of India makes a mention of these committees at different places, but without making any specific provisions regarding their composition, tenure, functions, etc.
- **Two kinds of parliamentary committees** — Standing Committees and Ad Hoc Committees.
- **Standing Committees**: Permanent (constituted every year or periodically) and work on a continuous basis. **Term**: one year from the date of its constitution.
- **Ad Hoc Committees**: Temporary and cease to exist on completion of the task assigned.
- **Role**: (1) Through Committees, Parliament exercises its control and influence over administration and keeps vigilance over the executive; (2) They aid and assist the Legislature in discharging its duties; (3) They also provide the expertise on a matter which is referred to them.

Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, and how does it control donations

Context: The licences of 13 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been suspended under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 2010, this year. Their FCRA certificates were suspended and bank accounts frozen.

What is the FCRA?
- **Objective**: First enacted in 1976 FCRA regulates foreign donations and ensures that such contributions do not adversely affect internal security.
- **Applicability:**The FCRA is applicable to all associations, groups and NGOs which intend to receive foreign donations. It is mandatory for all such NGOs to register themselves under the FCRA
- **Accountability**: Registered associations can receive foreign contribution for social, educational, religious, economic and cultural purposes. Filing of annual returns, on the lines of Income Tax, is compulsory.
- **Modified rules in 2015**: New rules by Ministry of Home Affairs said all such NGOs would have to operate accounts in either nationalised or private banks which have core banking facilities to allow security agencies access on a real time basis.

Who cannot receive foreign donations?
- Members of the legislature and political parties, government officials, judges and media persons are prohibited from receiving any foreign contribution.
- **Political Funding:** However, in 2017 the MHA, through the Finance Bill route, amended the FCRA law retrospectively paving the way for political parties to receive funds from the Indian subsidiary of a foreign company or a foreign company in which an Indian holds 50% or more shares

How else can one receive foreign funding?
- The other way to receive foreign contributions is by applying for prior permission.
- It is granted for receipt of a specific amount from a specific donor for carrying out specific activities or projects.
- But the association should be registered under statutes such as the Societies Registration Act, 1860, the Indian Trusts Act, 1882, or Section 25 of the Companies Act, 1956.
- A letter of commitment from the foreign donor specifying the amount and purpose is also required.

When is a registration suspended or cancelled?
- **Financial Irregularities of NGO:** The MHA on inspection of accounts and on receiving any adverse input against the functioning of an association can suspend the FCRA registration initially for 180 days.
- **Restriction on Functioning of NGO:** Until a decision is taken, the association cannot receive any fresh donation and cannot utilise more than 25% of the amount available in the designated bank account without permission of the MHA
- **Public Interest Violation**: The government can refuse permission if it believes that the donation to the NGO will adversely affect "public interest" or the "economic interest of the state".
- **Recent Example:** In 2017, the MHA suspended the FCRA of the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI), one of India's largest public health advocacy groups, on grounds of using "foreign funds" to lobby with parliamentarians on tobacco control activities.
- After several representations by the PHFI to the government, it was placed in the 'prior permission' category.

Do You Know?
- According to MHA data, since 2011, the registration of 20,664 associations was cancelled for violations such as misutilisation of foreign contribution, non-submission of mandatory annual returns and diversion of foreign funds for other purposes.
- As on September 11,2020 there are 49,843 FCRA-registered associations.

What are the Criticism of FCRA?
- **Affects Fundamental Rights:** The FCRA restrictions have serious consequences on both the rights to free speech and freedom of association under Articles 19(1)(a) and 19(1)(c) of the Constitution.
- **Democratic Functioning:** NGOs perform vital role of interest aggregation and interest articulation in Democratic process. Disproportionately restricting their functioning will hamper Democracy in long run.
- **Liable to misuse due to Vagueness in law:** The Act gave the government the power to frame rules whereby an organisation can be declared to have political objectives — without defining what a 'political objective' is.

Conclusion

Regulation of NGOs is very much required but it should be 'light' and consistent with the fundamental rights, so as to give effect to the objects for which voluntarism is being promoted.

Connecting the dots
- Importance of NGOs in Democracy

Extending tenure of Departmentally-Related Standing Committees (DRSC)

In news:

The RajyaSabha Secretariat is considering changing the rules governing the Departmentally-Related Standing Committees' (DRSC) tenure to make it to two years from the present one year.

Reason behind:

A significant amount of the tenure of the committees was lost due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Many of the panels have not been able to complete reports on the subjects they were working on.

The panels should have enough time to work on the subjects selected by them.

Parliamentary committees:

- **Standing Committees**: Permanent (constituted every year or periodically) and work on a continuous basis for one year from the date of its constitution.
- **Ad Hoc Committees**: Temporary and cease to exist on completion of the task assigned

Role of committees:

- Through Committees, Parliament exercises its control and influence over administration and keeps vigilance over the executive.
- They aid and assist the Legislature in discharging its duties.
- They also provide the expertise on a matter which is referred to them.

Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committees:

- Out of the total 24 standing committees, 8 work under the RajyaSabha and 16 under the LokSabha.
- Each standing committee consists of 31 members (21 from LokSabha and 10 from RajyaSabha).
- The members of the LokSabha are nominated by the Speaker, just as the members of the RajyaSabha are nominated by the Chairman from amongst its members
- Ministers cannot be members of these committees.

What do the rules say?

As per Rule 331D (4) of the LokSabha rules and Rule 269(3) of the RajyaSabha rules:
The term of office of the "members" of the committees shall not exceed one year.
Thus, it is the tem of the office of the members and not of the committees per se that is one year.

Backdrop:

The tenurial issue has to be looked at against following backdrop:

- The RajyaSabha undergoes partial biennial renewal, since one-third of its members retire every two years by virtue of clause (1) of Article 83 of the Constitution.
- The LokSabha has a fixed tenure of five years, unless sooner dissolved.

Thus it is only once in 10 years that the requirement of major reshuffle of the Standing Committees in both the Houses is expected to coincide, that is after the second round for the LokSabha and the fifth biennial round of the RajyaSabha.

What can be done?

- Different tenures

The terms of the members of the two Houses on these committees can be different, in consonance with the tenure of the Houses themselves.

It may be two years for the RajyaSabha members and for the LokSabhamembers, it may be coincidental with its life.

Conclusion:
The sittings of Parliament are steadily declining over the years. From 100-150 sittings in the 1950s, the number is down to 60-70 sittings per year in 2019-20.
In such a scenario, a major part of parliamentary work is done by DRSCs. A longer tenure will help in completion of tasks and deliberations assigned to them.

Connecting the dots:
- Discuss importance of Departmentally-related Standing Committees (DRSC). Do you think the tenure of the committee or its members should be extended?

Proposed Amendment to Railways Act 1989

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Policies and interventions &GS-III – Infrastructure - Railways
In news
- Recently, the Ministry of Railways has proposed to decriminalise begging on trains or railway premises.
- It has also proposed to compound the offence of smoking by levying spot fine.

Key takeaways
- These changes are part of an exercise to decriminalise/rationalise penalties under the provisions of the Railway Act, 1989.
- **Section 144 (2) of the Act:** If any person begs in any railway carriage or upon a railway station, s/he shall be liable for punishment of either imprisonment for a term that may extend to one year, or with a fine that may extend to Rs. 2,000, or with both.
- **Proposed Amendment**: No person shall be permitted to beg in any railway carriage or upon any part of the Railway.
- **Section 167 of the Act**: No person in any compartment of a train shall, if objected to by any other passenger, smoke therein. Irrespective of any objections raised, the railway administration may prohibit smoking in any train or part of a train. Whosoever contravenes these provisions shall be punishable with a fine that may extend to Rs.100.
- **Proposed Amendment**: If the person liable to pay the fine is willing to pay it immediately, the officer authorised may compound the offence by charging the maximum fine which will be paid to the railway administration. Provided that, the offender shall be discharged and no further proceeding shall be taken against him/her in respect of such offence.

Aircraft (Amendment) Bill 2020

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Legislations &GS-III – Infrastructure - Airways
In news
- Recently, Indian Parliament has passed the Aircraft (Amendment) Bill, 2020 in the RajyaSabha approving it. The Bill has already been passed by the LokSabha.
- It seeks to amend the Aircraft Act, 1934.

Key takeaways
- It has provisions to convert three existing bodies under the Ministry of Civil Aviation into statutory bodies.

- These three authorities are – (1) Directorate General of Civil Aviation; (2) the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security; (3) Aircraft Accidents Investigation Bureau.
- Under the bill, each of these bodies will be headed by a Director General who will be appointed by the centre.
- The Bill raises the maximum limit on fines from 10 lakh rupees to one crore rupees.
- These fines are related to carrying arms, explosives and other dangerous goods aboard aircraft and constructing building or structures within the specified radius around an aerodrome reference point.

Draft of Electricity (Rights Of Consumers) Rules, 2020

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Legislations & GS-III – Infrastructure
In news

- The Central Power Ministry has drafted rules recently which provide for Rights of Electricity Consumers for the first time.
- Draft Rules have been circulated by Ministry of Power on 9th of September for seeking comments and suggestions of consumers up to 30th September.

Key takeaways

- According to the draft, State Electricity Regulatory Commissions (SERCs) will fix average number and duration of outages per Electricity consumer per year for DISCOMs.
- Only two documents will be required for connection up to load of 10 KW and no estimation of demand charges will be required for loads up to 150 KW to expedite giving connection.
- There will be a time period of not more than seven days in metro cities, 15 days in other municipal areas and 30 days in rural areas, to provide new connection and modify existing connection.
- There will be option to pay bills in cash, cheque, debit cards and net banking.
- Bills of Rs. 1,000 or more have to be paid online.

Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, 2020

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Policies and interventions
In news

- LokSabha passed the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, 2020.
- The Bill will replace the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Ordinance which was promulgated in June, 2020.

Key takeaways

- The Bill seeks to amend the Essential Commodities Act, 1955.
- It empowers the central government in terms of production, supply, distribution, trade, and commerce of certain commodities under extraordinary circumstances.
- The Central government will be able to designate certain commodities including food items, fertilizers, and petroleum products as essential commodities.
- The Bill empowers the central government to regulate the stock of an essential commodity that a person can hold.

Do you know?

- The extraordinary circumstances include war, famine, extraordinary price rise and natural calamity of grave nature.

- The provisions of the bill regarding the regulation of food items and the imposition of stock limits will not apply to any government order relating to the Public Distribution System or the Targeted Public Distribution System.

Salary, Allowances And Pension Of Members Of Parliament (Amendment) Bill, 2020

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Policies and interventions; Parliament
In news
- LokSabha unanimously passed the Salary, Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament (Amendment) Bill, 2020.
- The Bill will replace the Salary, Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament (Amendment) Ordinance which was promulgated in April, 2020.

Key takeaways
- The Bill seeks to reduce the salaries of MPs and the sumptuary allowance of Ministers by 30%.
- It also seeks to reduce the constituency allowance and office expenses allowance of MPs.
- The Bill makes these changes effective for a period of one year, effective from 1st April, 2020.

Important value additions
- The Salary, Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament Act, 1954 provides for the salary, allowances and pension of Members of Parliament.
- **Article 106:** The members of either House of Parliament shall be entitled to receive such salaries and allowances as may from time to time be determined by Parliament by law.

Institute Of Teaching And Research In Ayurveda Bill 2020

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Policies and interventions; Health & GS-III - Medicine
In news
- The Institute of Teaching and Research in Ayurveda Bill 2020 has been passed by RajyaSabha. The Bill has been passed in LokSabha.
- This paves the way to establish a state-of-the-art Ayurvedic institution called the Institute of Teaching and Research in Ayurveda (ITRA) at Jamnagar, Gujarat.
- It will also be conferred with the status of Institution of National Importance (INI) to it.

Do you know?
- ITRA will be the first institution with INI status in the AYUSH Sector.
- The ITRA is sought to be established by conglomerating the presently existing Ayurveda institutes at Gujarat Ayurved University campus Jamnagar.

Monsoon Session of Parliament Begins

- Recently, the monsoon session of Parliament began

However, the government has suspended Question Hour and Zero Hour for the session.

Terminologies related to Parliament session

- The President of India is empowered to summon each House of Parliament from time to time.
- The maximum gap between two sessions of Parliament cannot be more than six months.
- There are usually three sessions in a year: (1) Budget Session (February to May); (2) Monsoon Session (July to September); (3) Winter Session (November to December).
- **Recess:** The period between the prorogation of a House and its reassembly.

- **Adjournment**: It suspends the work in a sitting for a specified time, which may be hours, days or weeks.
- **Adjournment sine die**: It means terminating a sitting of Parliament for an indefinite period.
- The power of adjournment as well as adjournment sine die lies with the presiding officer (Speaker or Chairman) of the House.
- **Prorogation**: The President issues a notification for prorogation of the session after the business of a session is completed and the presiding officer declares the House adjourned sine die.
- The President can also prorogue the House while in session.
- **Dissolution**: Only the LokSabha is subject to dissolution. A dissolution ends the life of the existing House. A new House is constituted after general elections are held.
- The President is empowered to dissolve the LokSabha.

Parliamentary Committee

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Polity & Governance
In news
- Recently, the Opposition had demanded that agriculture Bills be referred to a Select Committee of RajyaSabha during the on going Monsoon session.

Important value additions
- Parliament scrutinises Bills in two ways.
- The first is by discussing it on the floor of the two Houses.
- The second mechanism is by referring a Bill to a parliamentary committee.
- Referring of Bills to parliamentary committees is not mandatory.
- Select Committee on a Bill is formed for examining a particular Bill.
- Its membership is limited to MPs from one House.
- They are disbanded after their report.
- These types of committees are chaired by MPs from the ruling party.

You can further read about Parliamentary Committees here.

New Version of Labour Codes

Context: The government has introduced new versions of three labour codes in LokSabha which are
1. Industrial Relations Code Bill, 2020
2. Code on Social Security Bill, 2020
3. Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code Bill, 2020

Do You Know?
- These three bills have been re-introduced after incorporating 174 out of 233 recommendations given by Standing Committees
- These three bills are part of four labour code envisaged incorporating 29 labour laws. First code on wages has already been enacted.

What are the key proposals?
In the Industrial Relations Code Bill, 2020, the government has proposed to

- **New conditions for legal strike** - no person employed in an industrial establishment shall go on strike without a 60-day notice and during the pendency of proceedings before a Tribunal and sixty days after the conclusion of such proceedings. Earlier such restrictions applied only to public utility services.

- **Raised the threshold for requirement of a standing order** — rules of conduct for workmen employed in industrial establishments — from the existing 100 to 300 workers
- **Reskilling Fund** - To set up a re-skilling fund for training of retrenched workers with contribution of the employer of an amount equal to 15 days last drawn by the worker.

The Social Security Code has following provisions
- **National Social Security Board** which shall recommend to the central government for formulating suitable schemes for different sections of unorganised workers, gig workers and platform workers
- **No more ambiguities:** The bill has defined various terms like "career centre", "aggregator", "gig worker", "platform worker", "wage ceiling" , etc.
- **Social security for gig workers:** Also, aggregators employing gig workers will have to contribute 1-2 per cent of their annual turnover for social security of workers

The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code has the following objectives
- **To employ women in all establishments for all types of work**. They can also work at night, that is, beyond 7 PM and before 6 AM subject to the conditions relating to safety, holiday, working hours and their consent
- **To Promote Formalisation**: Issuing of appointment letter mandatorily by the employer of an establishment to promote formalisation in employment
- **Inclusion of inter-state migrant workers in the definition of worker**: Inter-state migrant workers are defined as the worker who has come on his own from one state and obtained employment in another state, earning up to Rs 18,000 a month.
- The proposed definition makes a distinction from the present definition of only contractual employment.
- **Portability Benefits**: An Inter-State Migrant Worker has been provided with the portability to avail benefits in the destination State in respect of ration and availing benefits of building and other construction worker cess
- However, the Code has dropped the earlier provision for temporary accommodation for workers near worksites.
- It has though **proposed a journey allowance** — a lump sum amount of fare to be paid by the employer for to and fro journey of the worker to his/her native place from the place of his/her employment

What are the concerns raised over the new labour codes?
- **Dilutes rights of Workers**: Workers in small establishments (with up to 300 workers) will have their rights watered down with no protection of trade unions, labour laws.
- **Workers safety safeguards diluted**: The new rules will enable companies to introduce arbitrary service conditions for workers.
- **Corporate Friendly:** The new rules provides more flexibility to employers for hiring and firing workers without government permission
- **Restricts Freedom of Speech:** Restrictions on strikes and demonstrations is akin to assault on the freedom of industrial actions.
- **Ambiguity about reskilling Fund:** The Code lacks clarity on the substantive and procedural aspects of reskilling Fund which will fizzle out like the National Renewal Fund in the 1990s

- **Women's Safety:** Allowing women to work during night time inspite of various safeguards imposed may increase their vulnerability to sexual abuse.

Conclusion

In the changed economic scenario post COVID-19 pandemic, the government has to balance the rights of workers and economic recovery. Favouring one over the other will impact the Country's prospects in long run.

Connecting the dots

- Land Reforms
- Reforms required in Judiciary

No Confidence Resolution against Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Parliament; Executive

In news

- Rajya Sabha members of 12 opposition parties moved a no-confidence resolution against Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman over the passage of two controversial farm Bills by the voice vote.

Important value additions

Relevant Rules of Procedures and Conduct of Business

- **Rule 256, Suspension of member**: This is decided by the presiding officer of the house on the grounds like a member disregarding the authority of the Chair or abusing the rules of the Council.
- **Rule 258** of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Rajya Sabha makes a provision to enable a member to raise a point of order.
- **Point of order**: An objection to the pending matter or proceeding which is in violation of a written and unwritten rule of the House.

Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha

- The Deputy Chairman is elected by the Rajya Sabha itself from amongst its members.
- The post of the Deputy Chairman is not subordinate to the Chairman.
- He performs the duties of the Chairman's office when: (1) It is vacant; (2) When the Vice-President acts as President; (3) When the Chairman is absent from the sitting of the House.
- While presiding over the House, he cannot vote in the first instance; he can only exercise a casting vote in the case of a tie.
- **Article 90**: Deals with the removal of the Deputy Chairman

FCRA Bill and why civil society matters

Context: The Lok Sabha has passed the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment (FCRA) Bill 2020 regarding non-governmental organisations (NGOs) without debate.

FCRA, 2010 was enacted to regulate the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality for any activities detrimental to "national interest".

Significance of NGOs

- **Interest Aggregators and Interest Articulators**: Non-profit organisations play vital role in mobilizing public attention to societal problems and needs. They are the principal vehicle through which communities can give voice to their concerns.
- **Complements Government Machinery**: NGOs implement and monitor the government's welfare policies, operating at the grassroots level where the official apparatus is often non-existent.
- **Hold Government Accountable**: NGOs broaden government's accountability by ensuring government is responsive to citizens at large rather than to narrow sectarian interests.
- **Constructive conflict resolution:** In the international arena Track II diplomacy (involving non-governmental bodies) plays a crucial role in creating an environment of trust and confidence.
- **Acts as Safety Valve:** NGOs also provide a voice for marginal groups and social movements, offering a safety valve that prevents the country's millions of local mutinies from becoming uprisings.
- **Enriches Democratic Functioning**: NGOs foster pluralism, diversity and freedom. They also perform the role of Capacity Builders – providing education, training and spreading awareness.

Key Provision of FCRA Bill, 2020 are:

- Aadhaar has been made mandatory identification document for all the office bearers of an NGO or an association seeking foreign donations.
- Foreign contribution can now be received only in an account designated by the bank as "FCRA account" in a branch of the State Bank of India, New Delhi (as notified by the central government). No funds other than the foreign contribution should be received or deposited in this account.
- Limiting administrative expenses drawn from foreign donations to 20% as against the current 50%
- The amended Bill includes "public servant" and "corporation owned or controlled by the Government" among the list of entities not eligible to receive foreign donations

Criticism of the FCRA Bill, 2020

- The legislation may be used to target political opponents and religious minorities.
- **Cripples NGO Functioning**: Due to the 20% cap, many NGOs will shut shop and many people will become jobless.
- **Double Standards:** On one hand the government invites foreign funds, but when such funds come for educational and charitable purposes, it is prevented.
- **Licence-Raj on NGOs:**The Bill assumes that all NGOs receiving foreign grants are guilty and thus makes Aadhar of office bearers as mandatory requirement.
- **Open the doors for Bureaucratic Harassment:** There is a thin line between enforcing transparency and using rules to allow official interference and harassment in the sector. Much of the present bill crosses that line and introduces a questionable degree of micro-management.

Way Ahead

- The government should send the bill to a select committee of the Rajya Sabha.
- NGOs are a necessary component of civil society and this bill needs greater public debate and scrutiny.

Major Port Authorities Bill, 2020

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Ports

In news

- LokSabha passed the Major Port Authorities Bill, 2020.

Key takeaways

- The Bill seeks to provide for regulation, operation and planning of major ports in the country and provide greater autonomy to these ports.
- It seeks to replace the Major Port Trusts Act, 1963.
- The legislation provides for the creation of a Board of Major Port Authority for each major port.
- These Boards will replace the existing Port Trusts.
- The bill will help the ports develop world class infrastructure.
- It will also enhance transparency in their functioning.

On regulation of Digital media (Sudarshan TV Case)

Context: Government has filed an affidavit in Sudarshan TV case stating that the regulation of web-based digital media is the need of the hour.

What is Sudarshan TV Case?

- Sudarshan TV's 'BindasBol' programme had accused Muslims of "infiltrating" the civil services with the help of funding from terror-linked organisations abroad.
- Petitions were filed in Supreme Court where it was maintained that the episode is an example of vilifying a community and the content amounts to **hate speech.**
- The court had orally observed it would set up a committee of five citizens who can come up with standards for electronic media
- A three-judge Bench had asked the government for suggestions to improve the self-regulatory mechanism for electronic media.

What was government's response?

- Central government submitted that while regulations already exist for the print and television media, there was a **need to regulate digital media** as it has faster reach, and its content has the potential to go viral.
- The centre termed **digital media as 'parallel media'** which is 'completely uncontrolled', and uses spectrum or radio airwaves and the internet, which is public property
- The Centre also cautioned that regulating television content could have the **undesired impact of media organisations** pushing similar content on digital platforms, which are unregulated
- Regulatory policies for television and print media would also have to apply to digital media, and vice versa, to curb the spread of fake news and misinformation

Governments View on Self-regulation of electronic media

- The central government has opposed the apex court's idea of setting up a panel to suggest standards for electronic media.
- The government has argued that the self-regulatory mechanisms currently in place are effective, ensure impartiality and may only **require a little fine tuning** to remove the lacunae.

- Self-regulatory bodies at present can only govern those who voluntary choose to be its members. And for television channels which aren't members of the self-regulating bodies, the matter is taken up directly by the ministry
- There is, however, a need to regulate the digital media space

What are the issues involved in this case of regulating digital media?
- **Constitutional Rights involved**: The content of the episodes in question goes against and demeans the constitutional right of access to equality of employment
- **Balancing contending interests:** The court has to balance the right to freedom of speech versus right of dignity of a community and hate speech
- **Public interest issue:** Since the case deals on issues of "foreign funding" and "reservation", there has to consultation with government before any order
- **Role of Courts**: Constitutional values, human dignity are needed to be protected but the court cannot "become the enforcers of programme code" (which falls under the domain of Executive)
- **Extent of Courts Power:** There is debate on whether the court could order a blanket injunction of a programme or should restrict itself to only those portions which hurt a community.
- **Complex Nature of Hate Speech:** Hate speech comes dressed as small nuggets of facts, and a lot depends on the tenor, tone and manner of their presentation. Thus any regulation of speech has to be on case-to-case basis.
- **Sophisticated Nature of Media Space:** The lines between the different platforms for media and journalism today are increasingly blurring. For example, Sudarshan TV also has a dedicated YouTube channel, where all of its programs are uploaded.
- **Ineffective implementation of existing rules:** The laws to tackle incendiary content and hate speech that fuels violence is already in place. What is seen lacking is a will to uniformly apply these rules, irrespective of political affiliations.
- **Ability to survive legal scrutiny:** Earlier attempts at imposing a high degree of liability on intermediaries (like Google & Facebook) for content posted on their platforms have not survived legal scrutiny, with Section 79(1) of the IT Act, 2000, giving them some immunity in this regard.

Conclusion
An intervention that is light and well considered is what will work.
Connecting the dots
- Net Neutrality
- ShreyaSinghal Case

A culture of Secrecy
Context: While transparency is a cornerstone of democracy, today's India is cultivating secrecy

Some of the recent examples where culture of secrecy is being promoted
1. Electoral bonds introduced in February 2017
- They allowed anonymous donations to political parties and, therefore, protected the privacy of the donors.
- The Election Commission of India (ECI) criticised the opacity of this financial mechanism and described it as "a retrograde step".

- ECI held that Electoral Bonds would prevent the state from ascertaining whether a political party has taken any donation in violation of provisions under **Section 29B of the Representation of the People Act**, which prohibits the political parties from taking donations from government companies and foreign sources
- Electoral bonds also made it impossible to check whether a company was giving to parties more than what the Companies Act (2013) permitted, that is 7.5 per cent of the net average profit of the three preceding financial years.

2. Sealed Envelope Procedures

- Sealed envelope has become modus operandi in several Indian institutions, including the Supreme Court (SC)
- In the case of **political funding** (by electoral bonds or otherwise), SC in 2019 directed political parties to submit the details of donations received to the ECI in sealed cover.
- The Assam administration had to show the progress it was making in the implementation of the **National Register of Citizens** by submitting reports in sealed covers
- When **Justice Gogoi was accused of sexual harassment**, the panel formed by the SC found "no substance in the allegations" on the basis of a report it had received in a sealed cover that was not disclosed even to the complainant.

3. RTI Act diluted

- **Vacant Posts:** Government did not fill vacant information commissioner posts in the Central Information Commission (CIC) between 2016 and 2018
- After the SC intervened, some appointments were made in January 2019, but four posts remained vacant, a clear indication of the government's lack of interest.
- **Huge Backlogs**: The backlog of pending appeals had reached 30,000 cases in late 2019 as the CIC has become a rather dysfunctional body.
- **Restriction on RTI:** Queries about phone tapping are not responded to anymore by CIC.
- **High Rejection of RTI requests**: In 2016-17, the home and finance ministries rejected close to 15 per cent of the applications they received while the RBI and public sector banks rejected 33 per cent.
- The RBI, for instance, refused to give any information about the decision-making process that led to demonetisation.
- **Government amended the RTI Act to limit the power of the CIC**.
    - o The five-year fixed tenure for the Chief Information Commissioner and information commissioners was abolished.
    - o Their salaries were not fixed any more — as with Election Commissioners — but notified separately by the government.

4. Whistleblower's Protection Act diluted

- Whistleblowers can now be prosecuted for possessing the documents on which the complaint has been made.
- Issues flagged by them have to be in "public interest" and should not be "affecting the sovereignty and integrity of India", related to "commercial confidence" or "information received in confidence from a foreign government".

5. Data Phobia

- Data phobia has resulted in the non-publication or alteration of some statistical information by government organisations.
- 108 social scientists wrote an open letter in 2019 inviting the government to "re-establish institutional independence and integrity to the statistical organisations".
- The National Crime Records Bureau has been affected by delays (its 2017 report was released in October 2019) and deletions.

Conclusion

Transparency is not only necessary for maintaining a democratic polity, it is also necessary for making the economy work

Connecting the dots

- Critically assess the efficacy of the Right to Information (RTI) as a tool of accountability and transparency in governance.

MPs Suspended forunruly behaviour

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Parliament

In news

- Eight RajyaSabha MPs were recently suspended for unruly behaviour in the House.

Important value additions

- **Rule Number 373 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business**: It deals with the Power of the Speaker who, under his discretion, may direct MP to withdraw immediately from the House for the remainder of the day's sitting.
- **Rule 374**:The Speaker may name a Member who disregards the authority of the Chair or abuses the rules of the House by persistently and wilfully obstructing the business thereof.
- **Rule 374A**: It is invoked by Speaker for automatic suspension of member of the House – for five consecutive sittings or the remainder of the session, whichever is less in the event of grave disorder occasioned by a Member
- Unlike the Speaker, the RajyaSabha Chairman does not have the power to suspend a Member.

Homoeopathy Central Council (Amendment) Bill, 2020 passed

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Medicine

In news

- The LokSabha passed the Homoeopathy Central Council (Amendment) Bill, 2020 recently.
- RajyaSabha has already passed it.

Key takeaways

- The Bill amends the Homoeopathy Central Council Act, 1973.
- It replaces the Homoeopathy Central Council (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020 which was promulgated in April 2020.
- The Act sets up the Central Council of Homoeopathy which regulates homoeopathic education and practice.
- The period for the supersession of the Central Council has been increased from two years to three years.

Indian Medicine Central Council (Amendment) Bill, 2020 passed

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Medicine

In news

- The LokSabha passed the Indian Medicine Central Council (Amendment) Bill, 2020.
- RajyaSabha has already passed it.

Key takeaways

- The Indian Medicine Central Council (Amendment) Bill amends the Indian Medicine Central Council Act, 1970.
- It provides for the constitution of a Central Council which regulates the education and practice of the Indian medicine system including Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy.
- It replaces the Indian Medicine Central Council (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020 which was promulgated in April 2020.
- The council will be reconstituted within one year.
- In the interim period, the Central Government will constitute a Board of Governors, which will exercise the powers of the Central Council.
- The board will consist of up to ten members.

Indian Institutes of Information Technology Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2020 passed

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Schemes; Education

In news

- RajyaSabha passed the Indian Institutes of Information Technology Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2020.
- It has been already passed by LokSabha.

Key takeaways

- The Bill seeks amendment to the Indian Institutes of Information Technology Act, 2014 and the Indian Institutes of Information Technology (Public-private Partnership) Act, 2017.
- The Bill seeks to declare five IIITs set up under the PPP mode in Surat, Bhopal, Bhagalpur, Agartala, and Raichur as institutions of national importance.
- Currently, these institutes are registered as Societies under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 and do not have the power to grant degrees or diplomas.
- On being declared institutions of national importance, the five institutes will be granted the power to grant degrees.
- The central government will contribute 50% towards the expenses of institutes functioning under the PPP mode.
- 35% will be borne by the states and 15% by the industries.
- As a special impetus to North Eastern states, the central government will bear over 57% of the expenses whereas industries will contribute around 7% to the Institutes there.

Multi-stakeholder body recommended by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Telecommunication
In news

- Recently, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has recommended the creation of a multi-stakeholder body (MSB) to ensure that Internet access providers adhere to the provisions of net neutrality.

Key takeaways
The MSB should be set up as a non-profit entity.

- **Possible functions**: (1) To provide advice and support to the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) in the monitoring and enforcement of net neutrality principles; (2) To investigate complaints regarding the violation of net neutrality; (3) To help DoT in the maintenance of a repository of reasonable traffic management practices.
- MSB could include telecom service providers, Internet service providers, content providers, researchers, academic and technical community, civil society organisations, and the government.

A QUICK REMINDER
What is net neutrality?
All traffic on the internet should be treated equally.

NO BLOCKING — Your internet access provider (IAP) cannot block you from accessing legal content of your choice.

NO THROTTLING — Your IAP cannot intentionally throttle legal internet traffic to slower speeds than other traffic.

NO PAID PRIORITIZATION — Your IAP cannot sell 'fast lane' service to content providers who can pay more than others.

WEB WE WANT

WORLD WIDE WEB FOUNDATION

A demarcation in the interest of public order

Context: Delhi Violence of 2020
What was the violence/riots that took place in Feb 2020?

- Clashes between of pro- and anti-CAA protesters in Jafrabad, Delhi on February 23 night turned into communal violence and spread across northeast Delhi over the next four to six days.
- Forty-two people, including a policeman and an IB personnel, lost their lives, while hundreds were injured and shops and houses burnt or destroyed.
- Hundreds of people have been arrested or detained so far in connection with the violence.
- But till now, not even a single political leader that made hate speeches which advocated violence in the build-up to the riots has been prosecuted.
- Delhi Police faced criticism for ineffective handling of the riots.

- Delhi Police, having magisterial powers under the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) to take preventive action, failed to maintain public order.

What is the Public Policy issue associated with this issue?
- The Seventh Schedule of the Constitution distinguishes between 'police' and 'public order'.
- The Supreme Court has made a distinction between law and order and public order and emphasised that the two terms are not interchangeable.
- The two concepts have different objectives and legal standards.
- **Law and order** consists of the analysis made by police of the situation in an area and their commitment to firm action and penalties under criminal law.
- **Public order is** a duty imposed on the District Magistrate to assess whether it is necessary to rush to the spot where law and order has been breached to prevent violence spreading and ease tension.
- The District Magistrate's role is important in exceptional situations — for example, to prevent a breach of peace; and for grievance redress as in ShaheenBagh
- Kerala has both a District Magistrate responsible for public order and a senior police officer as city Police Commissioner focusing on crime.
- **If an official is allotted a dual role**, to both keep in place law and order and maintain public order, this could lead to the displacement of one goal in favour of the other.

The Supreme Court has formulated certain guidelines and rules when it comes to these distinct duties
1. Degree and Extent of the reach of an act (protest)
- Some disgruntled and agitated people going on a vandalising spree affect "public order" only when they affect a particular community as a whole.
- In *Ram ManoharLohia vs. State of Bihar*, in 1965, the Supreme Court held that in the case of 'public order', the public at large have to be affected by a particular action as it "embraces more of the community than 'law and order', which affects only a few individuals"

2. Imposition of restriction
- In the *MadhuLimaye* case, the Court reiterated that "the emergency must be sudden and the consequences sufficiently grave" for an imposition of restrictions.
- Extension of a restriction over a larger territorial area or for a longer duration requires a relatively higher justification and calibrated response.

3. Restrictions should not prohibit Democratic Rights
- In *AnuradhaBhasin vs. Union of India*, the Supreme Court held that prohibitive orders should not prevent legitimate expression of opinion, or grievance or exercise of democratic rights
- Specific restrictions have to be tailored to the goal, nature and stage of the emergency, requiring the adoption of the least restrictive measure.

4. Need to Set up oversight mechanism
- In *Aldanish Rein vs State of NCT of Delhi*, the High Court directed the setting up of an oversight mechanism to periodically review the exercise of magisterial powers by Delhi Police.
- The Supreme Court, in a PIL, is examining whether police officers can act as magistrates in certain cases.

Conclusion

- Prevention through grievance redress and reliance on the least blunt instruments are critical for legitimacy, eschewing an adversarial view.
- The National Police Commission also recognises the coordinating role of the District Magistrate, having more leverage than the police.

Connecting the dots

- Need for Police Reforms in India
- George Floyd Incident in USA

SOCIAL ISSUE/WELFARE

Digital Education

Context: COVID-19 pandemic has put spotlight on the need to push Digital Education as well as the challenges that lie ahead with it.

Challenges to Education Sector due to Pandemic
- **Suspension of Learning Centres**: Most schools and colleges campuses will be closed through 2020 due to an increasing number of COVID cases. This could even extend to 2021.
- **Safety and security** of students, teachers and staff will be challenging whenever educational institutes reopen
- **Increased Maintenance Cost**: Schools and Colleges need to ensure hygiene to check the COVID-19 spread and this involves increased usage of disinfectants and sanitizers
- **Redesign Classrooms**: Some of the educational institutes have started online classes to ensure continuum of learning. When these institutes reopen they need to upgrade their school digital infrastructure to deal effectively with future such breaks
- **Financial Difficulties**: Institutes are finding it difficult to pay teachers without students and parents are finding tough to pay fees without work

The answer to the education crisis during the pandemic has been to offer online education. However, there are serious issues related to it, some of which are
- **Internet Access**: It is estimated that only about 25 per cent of Indian households have an internet facility. For rural households, that number drops to 15 per cent.
- **Teacher Training:** Teachers are not adequately trained to impart education through online mediums.
- **Underprepared**: Government schools and colleges do not have the resources to provide digital education.
- **Regulation**: In India there is lack of a proper policy on digital education, infrastructure and multiple languages.
- **Parenting Issues**: Additional burden on parents to ensure that their Children attend the online classes and this impacts the productivity of their work
- **Students Discipline**: There is inadequate space and peace at home for students to concentrate on learning.
- **Logistical Issues**: Digital education requires uninterrupted broadband connectivity for several hours a day
- **Lacks Holistic Approach**: Digital education is not about videos of lectures on blackboards by teachers on the internet. It is about appropriate platforms, technology, tools, interactivity, curation, content and a lot more.

Government Initiatives in past to help digital education
1. NOFN — National Optical Fibre Network (Now called Bharat Network)
- The objective of this programme is to connect all 2,50,000 panchayats at the cost of over Rs 40,000 crore

- It was conceptualised as a bulk broadband common infrastructure for the country. Overlaying education and health services up to panchayats and villages was an important component of the strategy.
- It has reached many rural areas telecom operators did not want to serve due to lack of profitability. The Universal Service Obligation (USO) fund was used to build NOFN.
- However, the NOFN is still not completely operational, after almost eight year

2. National Knowledge Network (NKN)

- The NKN was established as a high bandwidth, low latency network to **connect all knowledge-creating organisations** comprising IITs, IIMs, universities, research labs and other e-governance institutions up to the district level.
- It was aimed at encouraging collaborative development and building a repository of knowledge in all fields.
- This network exists and is fully functional.
- However, only a few institutions take full advantage of it because of a lack of understanding, local facilities, funding and technical expertise.

Way Ahead

- The driving force behind NOFN and NKN was to build an IT-based teaching system, which could address the shortage of quality teachers and school infrastructure at the bottom of the economic pyramid
- There is need to relook at the NOFN and make it a core component of digital education ecosystem of our country.

Connecting the dots

- Criticism of Board Examination System

Empower the youth first

Context: It is argued that if India wants to achieve the goal of self-reliance we have to start with empowering the Youth

Status of Youth in India

- **Definition**: The 2014 National Youth Policy (NYP) defined youth as persons between 15 and 29 years.
- **Major Proportion in Total Population:** This segment of the society accounted for 27.5% of the population as per NYP, 2014.
- **Government Expenditure on Youth:** According to the NYP report, the Central government spends about ₹2,710 per youth on education, skill development, employment, healthcare and food subsidies.
- **Investment as percentage of GDP:** The total amount of Union government expenditure is pegged at more than ₹90,000 crore. Assuming that States spend an equal amount, the total investment in our youth would be under 1% of the GDP.
- **Opportunity Cost of investing in Youth:** A World Bank report pegged the projected cost (read: loss) of not investing in children and youth at 4% of the GDP every year. Of this, the costs of unemployment account for 0.6%

- **Labour Force Contribution**: As of 2017-18, youth participation in India's labour force was 38.3%.
- **High Unemployment:** Drawing from the 2018 State of Working India Report, the youth unemployment rate is pegged to be at least 18.3% (3.47 crore youths).
- **Unutilized Potential:** About 30% of youth fall under the 'neither in employment nor in education' category and 33% of India's skilled youth are unemployed
- **Needs Policy Attention in coming years**: Around 50 lakh youth are expected to be entering the workforce annually.
- **Less Time to prevent Demographic Disaster**: India has just a decade's time to seize the opportunity and realise this youth demographic dividend, else it will turn into demographic disaster with high unemployment rate & underutilized potential

Way Forward

1. Government should launch Indian Youth Guarantee (IYG) programme at the earliest

- It is similar to the European Union Youth Guarantee (EU-YG) but tuned to India's context.
- EU-YG emerged in 2010 at a time when youth unemployment rates were soaring above 20%.
- EU-Youth Guarantee is a commitment by all its Member States to ensure that all **young people under the age of 25** years, within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education, receive a good quality offer of
  - o employment
  - o continued education
  - o apprenticeship
  - o traineeship
- An IYG initiative, with statutory backing, can function as a facilitatory framework for ensuring gainful and productive engagement of youth.

2. Youth Component Plan

- Such a plan earmarks a specific percentage of funds under a separate head on the lines of the Special Component Plan for the Scheduled Castes and the Tribal Sub-Plan
- Objective of Youth Component Plan is to channelise flow of outlays and benefits proportional to the percentage of youth population based on sub-regional requirements.
- Existing youth schemes and skilling infrastructure need to be dovetailed and streamlined while leveraging industry to enable an **in situ empowerment of youth.**
- Rural youth employment can be instituted alongside MGNREGA as only about 4% of youth in the labour force have been impacted by MGNREGA

Conclusion

A focus on our youth is the first step towards self-reliance. It is time we summon the political will to guarantee our youth a viable future.

Connecting the dots

- Skill India Mission
- Need for Urban Employment Guarantee Programme

Report on Literacy Rate released

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Education

In news
- Recently, the report on 'Household Social Consumption: Education in India as part of 75th round of National Sample Survey - from July 2017 to June 2018' was released.
- It is based on the National Statistical Office (NSO) survey.
- It provides for state-wise detail of literacy rate.
- **Age surveyed**: 7 years and above.

Key takeaways
- **India's Overall Literacy Rate**: 77.7%.
- **Urban Areas**: 87.7%.
- **Rural areas**: 73.5%.
- **Male Literacy Rate**: 84.7%.
- **Female Literacy Rate**: 70.3%.
- The male literacy rate is higher than the female literacy rate among all states.
- **Best Performers**: (1) Kerala; (2) Delhi; (3) Uttarakhand; (4) Himachal Pradesh; (5) Assam.
- **Worst Performers**: (1) Uttar Pradesh; (2)Telangana; (3) Bihar; (4) Rajasthan; (5) Andhra Pradesh

Digital Literacy:
- **Those who possess computers**: 23% of urban households and 4% of rural households.
- **Those who can operate a computer:** Among persons of age 15-29 years, nearly 56% in urban areas and 24% in rural areas.
- **Those who use the internet:** nearly 25% in rural areas and 58% in urban areas in the same age-group

Do you know?
- The report comes before the International Literacy Day which is celebrated on 8th September every year.
- **Literacy Day 2020**: It will focus on the changes and challenges in learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **SDG 4**: ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning.
- As per UNESCO, India will achieve universal literacy by 2060.

International Day to protect Education from attack launched

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Education
In news
- The first-ever International Day to Protect Education from Attack is being celebrated on September 9, 2020.
- **Theme:** "Protect Education, Save a Generation."

Key takeaways
- The day was established by a unanimous decision of the UN General Assembly.
- UNESCO and UNICEF were called on to raise awareness of the plight of millions of children living in countries affected by conflict.
- According to the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), over the past five years, there have been more than 11,000 reported attacks on education in over 36 countries.
- 22,000 students, teachers and academics were killed, injured, arrested or otherwise harmed in attacks between 2015 and 2019.

- UNESCO and UNICEF will facilitate the annual observance of the Day in close collaboration with partners within and outside the UN system.

Cooperative Labour in Odisha Tribes

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I – Society
In news
- Recently, labour cooperatives among tribal communities in Odisha were in the news.
- The tribes include the DongriaKondh, Juanga, LanjiaSaura, Saura, Didayi, PaudiBhuyan and Kandh.
- These cooperatives ensure all families of the community have food and no fields remain barren. The feeling of collective belongingness is also strengthened.

Important value additions
DongriaKondh
- They derive their name from dongar, meaning 'hill'.
- They are the members of Khond Tribe.
- They are a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group.
- They reside in the Niyamgiri hill range of Odisha.
- **Language**: Kui language (Oral only, not written)
- They worship Niyam Raja, the god of the Niyamgiri Forests.
- They sustain themselves from the resources of the Niyamgiri forests, practising horticulture and shifting cultivation
- They are currently facing displacement and health problems due to the Bauxite mining in the Niyamgiri hills.

CAG Survey Report on School Toilets

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Education
In news
- Recently, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has flagged irregularities in the construction of toilets in schools by Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) in an audit report tabled before Parliament.

Key takeaways
- The CAG audit conducted a physical survey of a sample of 2,695 toilets built by CPSEs in 15 States.
- Out of the 1,967 schools surveyed, 99 schools had no functional toilets while 436 had only one functional toilet.
- Thus, the objective of providing separate toilets for boys and girls was not fulfilled in 27% of the schools.
- **Norm for daily cleaning (at least once a day) not followed**: 75% of toilets
- **No running water facilities inside:**72% of constructed toilets
- **No hand washing facilities**: 55% of the toilets
- Almost 40% of toilets were non-existent, partially completed or unused.

Do you know?

There are **10.8 lakh** government schools in the country. Overall, more than **1.4 lakh toilets** have been built by **53 CPSEs,** with significant support coming from **power, coal** and **oil companies** as part of the **SwachhVidyalayaAbhiyan.**

Important value additions

SwachhVidyalayaAbhiyan:

- **Launched by:** Ministry of Education in September 2014.
- **Aim:** To have separate toilets for boys and girls in all schools all over India.
- The programme norms required the CPSEs to build toilets with running water and hand washing facilities.

HEALTH ISSUE

Pandemic and Older People

Context: The most vulnerable persons during the COVID pandemic are the elderly

Do You Know?
- Globally, the population aged 65 and over is growing faster than other age groups.
- In 2018, for the first time in history, people aged 65 (680.94 million) or above outnumbered children under 5 years (678.87 million)
- The number of **persons aged** 80 years or **over** is projected to triple, from 143 million in 2019 to 426 million in 2050.

Difficulties faced by Older people due to COVID-19 Pandemic
- **High Vulnerability to COVID-19 mortality:** If infected, the odds of survival for older people are the lowest.
- **Danger of being neglected:** When isolated to save them from infection, they are likely to suffer from neglect — from lack of care and loneliness.
- **Denied healthcare for other diseases**: Outpatient treatment of nearly all major non-communicable diseases has been severely affected due to COVID care. Older people seem to be missing out on treatment for illnesses.
- **Vulnerable to Mental ill-health problems**: Lack of access to healthcare services could aggravate physical disabilities, hinder the effective management of communicable diseases and lead to mental ill-health problems amongst the elderly.
- **Dependence on Children/ others**: The precarious nature of economic work of older persons and inadequate salaries means that more than 80% of such people in the workforce are either partially or fully dependent on others, who are anyway facing difficult circumstances
- **Technology Challenges**: Internet play an important role in maintaining access to essential care, services etc. In India, only 7% of older people have smartphones. The literacy rate among this segment is also low, further limiting access to technology and important information.
- **Inadequate Government Support**: In its first relief package, the government announced a one-off payment of Rs 1,000 and an increase in the pension for 30 million widows and senior citizens. But this will reach only to about 20% of the older people. There was no support for senior citizens in the second relief package.

Way Ahead
- Healthcare schemes like the Ayushman Bharat Yojana should have special provisions for the elderly.
- Tele-health and mobile home-based health care check-ups should be conducted for them.
- Direct subsidies to pensioners, especially in healthcare matters, can also help them tide over these difficult times.
- Older people have an invaluable role to play in our collective future. We must keep older people engaged, not shut them out to protect their bodies from the virus.

The State of Young Child in India

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I- Social issues & GS-II - Health
In news

- Indian Vice President recently released 'The State of Young Child in India' report.
- It is a comprehensive account of the challenges related to early child development in India.

No kidding!
The index score was computed using indicators such as poverty rate, immunisation coverage, female literacy, sex ratio and percentage of households with protected water supply. India's average score was **0.585**

Best-performing States		Worst-performing States	
State	**Index score (2015-16)**	**State**	**Index score (2015-16)**
Kerala	0.858	Bihar	0.452
Goa	0.817	Uttar Pradesh	0.46
Tripura	0.761	Jharkhand	0.5
Tamil Nadu	0.731	Madhya Pradesh	0.526
Mizoram	0.719	Chhattisgarh	0.555

Key takeaways

- **Prepared by**: Mobile Creches. It is a policy advocacy organisation which works with the underprivileged children across India.
- Out of 159 million children aged below 6 years in India, 21% are undernourished, 36% are underweight and 38% do not receive full immunization.
- Huge returns on investment in Early Childhood Development (ECD) at the individual, household and country levels were also reported.
- **Top performers**: Kerala, Goa, Tripura and Tamil Nadu.
- **States with scores below the national average** - Assam, Meghalaya, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Kiran: Mental Health Rehabilitation Helpline launched

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Health

In news

- 24/7 toll-free helpline 'Kiran' was recently launched.
- **Launched by:** The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment
- **Objective**: To provide support to people facing anxiety, stress, depression, suicidal thoughts and other mental health concerns.
- **Coordinated by:** The National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Multiple Disabilities (NIEPMD), Chennai (Tamil Nadu) and National Institute of Mental Health Rehabilitation (NIMHR), Sehore (Madhya Pradesh).

Key takeaways

- It will cater to - People in Distress, pandemic induced psychological issues and Mental Health Emergency.
- It will offer mental health rehabilitation services with the objective of early screening, first-aid, psychological support, distress management, promoting positive behaviours, etc.
- It will be available in 13 languages and has 660 clinical/rehabilitation psychologists and 668 psychiatrists as volunteers.
- Helpline operators had been sensitised not to ask the caller for name or any identification details.

Do you know?
- Earlier, the Ministry of Education had launched the 'Manodarpan' initiative to provide psycho-social support and counselling to students for their mental health and well-being.

Gap in Vaccination of Children reported

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Health
In news
- 'Health in India' report was recently published.
- **Published by:** National Statistical Organisation (NSO)
- **Major finding:** Full immunisation programme is not completed among 40% of the children.
- The report is based on the 75th round of the National Sample Survey (July 2017-June 2018) on household social consumption related to health.

Key takeaways from the report about children under five years:
- **Fully immunised:** 59.2%
- **Received at least one vaccination** (mostly BCG or the first dose of OPV at birth): About 97%
- **Protected against measles:**67%
- **Polio booster dose:**58%
- **DPT booster dose:** 54%

More work needed | The table depicts the percentage share of children below 71 months who received immunisation as per the NSS health survey conducted in July 2017-June 2018

		% of children immunised
	BCG	94.1
Polio vaccine	Polio birth dose	93.9
	OPV-1	92.4
	OPV-2	87.8
	OPV-3	80.6
	Booster dose	58.1
DPT / Pentavalent*	DPT-1	91
	DPT-2	86.5
	DPT-3	78
	Booster dose	54
	Measles	67

*Prevents five diseases–diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, hepatitis B and Hemophilus influenza type B (Hib)

- **Best Performance under full immunisation**: Manipur (75%), Andhra Pradesh (73.6%) and Mizoram (73.4%)
- **Poor Performance**: Nagaland (12%), Puducherry (34%) and Tripura (39.6%).

National Commission for Homoeopathy Bill, 2020 passed

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Health
In news

- Recently, Indian Parliament has passed the National Commission for Homoeopathy Bill, 2020 and the National Commission for Indian System of Medicine Bill.

Key takeaways
The National Commission for Homoeopathy Bill, 2020
- It seeks to repeal the Homoeopathy Central Council Act, 1973.
- National Commission for Homoeopathy will also be set up.
- **Composition of the Commission:** 20 members including a Chairperson, the President of the Homoeopathy Education Board, the Director General of National Institute of Homoeopathy, the President of the Medical Assessment and Rating Board for Homoeopathy in addition to other members.

The National Commission for Indian System of Medicine Bill, 2020
- It seeks to repeal the Indian Medicine Central Council Act, 1970.
- National Commission for Indian System of Medicine will also be set up.
- **Composition of the Commission**: 29 members including a Chairperson, the President of the Board of Ayurveda, President of the Board of Unani, Siddha, and Sowa-Rigpa.

Do you know?
- The two bills also propose constitution of Advisory Councils for Homoeopathy as well as for Indian System of Medicine.
- These Councils will be the primary platform through which the states and union territories will put forth their views and concerns before the two Commissions.
- The Councils will also suggest measures to the Commission to determine and maintain standards of medical education in the country.
- The bills also envisage a National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test for admission to both undergraduate and Post-Graduate courses of Homoeopathy and for various disciplines of Indian System of Medicine.

PVTGs of Odisha infected with COVID-19

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Issues related to SCs & STs; Health
In news

- Six members of two Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (Bondas and Didiayis) in Odisha have recently contracted Covid-19.
- The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes has sought a report from the state government and has termed it a "matter of grave concern".

Important value additions
Bondas and Didiayis Tribes
- They are found in the Malkangiri district of Odisha

- The Bondas are believed to have come to India as part of the first wave of migration out of Africa about 60,000 years ago.
- The Didayis are an Austro-Asiatic tribe.
- The population of Didayis is 7,250 according to the 2011 Census.
- They live in the Konda Kamberu hills of Malkangiri.

Read more about Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group here

New Brucellosis Vaccine by ICAR

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Health; Policies & GS-III – Achievements of Indians in Science and technology

In news

- Brucellaabortus S19Δ per vaccine is developed recently by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research's -Indian Veterinary Research Institute (ICAR-IVRI) for brucellosis prevention in the dairy sector.

Important value additions

Brucellosis

- It is a bacterial zoonoticdisease caused by various Brucella species.
- It mainly infect cattle, swine, goats, sheep and dogs.
- It is also known as Malta fever or Mediterranean fever.
- It is endemic in India causing huge economic losses to dairy industry due to: (1) Infertility; (2) Abortion; (3) Birth of weak off springs; (4) Reduced productivity

National Medical Commission (NMC) constituted

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Health

In news

- The National Medical Commission (NMC), along with four Autonomous Boards was recently constituted.
- The old institution of the Medical Council of India (MCI) stands abolished.

Key takeaways

- Along with NMC, the four Autonomous Boards of UG and PG Medical Education Boards, Medical Assessment and Rating Board, and Ethics and Medical Registration Board have also been constituted.
- The Regulator is now 'selected' on merits, as opposed to an 'elected' Regulator.
- Dr S C Sharma (retd. Prof, ENT, AIIMS, Delhi) has been selected as the Chairperson for a period of three years.
- Besides the Chairperson, NMC will have 10 ex-officio members.

Epidemic Diseases (Amendment) Bill, 2020 passed

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Health

In news

- Parliament passed the Epidemic Diseases (Amendment) Bill, 2020 recently.

Key takeaways
- The bill amends the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897.
- The bill repeals the Epidemic Diseases (Amendment) Ordinance that was promulgated in April this year.
- It shall include protections for health care service personnel combating epidemic diseases.
- It expands the powers of the Central Government to prevent the spread of such diseases.
- The legislation makes harm, injury, hurt or danger to the life of health care service personnel as a cognizable and non-bailable offence.
- It has provisions of imprisonment from 3 months to 5 years and a fine between Rs. 50,000 to 2 lakh rupees.
- Persons convicted of offences under the bill will also be liable to pay compensation to the health care service personnel whom they have hurt.

Health in India report released

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Health

In news
- 'Health in India' report was recently released.
- **Released by:** The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation
- **Objective:** To gather basic quantitative information on India's health sector.

Key takeaways
- Around 7.5% of Indians reported that they were suffering from ailments.
- **Rural India:** 6.8%
- **Urban India**: 9.1%.

Religion based classification
- **Zoroastrian community:** Most susceptible to ailments. (31.1%)
- **Jains**: 11.2%
- **Sikhs:** 11%;
- **Christians:** 10.5%
- **Muslims:** 8.1%
- **Buddhists:** 8%
- **Hindus:** 7.2%

Sex based classification
- Women remain more susceptible to suffering from ailments than men.
- **Rural India:** 6.1% of males and 7.6% of women
- **Urban India**: 8.2% of males and 10% of females

Do you know?
Definition of 'ailment' by the survey
- The survey defines ailment as any deviation from a person's state of physical and mental well-being. The 'Proportion of Persons who Responded as Ailing' (PPRA) in a 15-day period when they were approached by the surveyors, were registered as those suffering from ailments.

MedSpark in Kerala

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Health; Schemes

In news

- MedSpark, one of the first medical device parks in the country will be set up in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.

Key takeaways

- **Established by**: (1) Department of Science and Technology (DST); (2) SreeChitraTirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology (SCTIMST), an autonomous institute of the DST; (3) Kerala State Industrial Development Corporation Ltd. (KSIDC)
- **Fundings**: From the state and central governments
- **Functions**: (1) Focus on the high-risk medical device sector; (2) Provide a full range of services for the industry like research and development support, testing, and evaluation of medical devices; (3) Create an enabling support system for manufacturing support, technology innovation, and knowledge dissemination.

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

Atal BimitVyaktiKalyanYojana extended

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-II – Policies & GS-III – Employment
In News:

- The Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) has extended the Atal BimitVyaktiKalyanYojana by one year to 30th June 2021.
- The ESIC has also relaxed eligibility criteria and enhanced the payment of the unemployment benefit under the Yojana.

Important value additions

Atal BimitVyaktiKalyanYojana

- It was introduced from 1st July 2018.
- Under it, unemployment benefit is paid to the workers covered under the Employees' State Insurance (ESI) scheme.
- The benefit is paid in the form of cash compensation upto 90 days, once in a lifetime.
- It can be claimed after three months (90 days) in one or more intervals for being unemployed.

Nod to 27 projects under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana (PMKSY)

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-III – Cold chain Industries; Supply chain management
In News:

- Recently, 27 projects under the PMKSY were approved.
- **Objective:** For development of integrated cold chains and value addition infrastructure in India.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Food Processing Industries

Key takeaways

- The new integrated cold chain projects will generate direct and indirect employment and benefit nearly lakhs of farmers.
- Cold chain facilities shall be created for the food processing sector across various states.
- **States included:** Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.

Important value additions

Central Sector Scheme of Integrated Cold Chain and Value Addition Infrastructure

- It is a component scheme under PMKSY.
- The government provides financial assistance in the form of grant-in-aid at the rate of 35% for general areas and the rate of 50% for North-Eastern States, Himalayan States, ITDP Areas, and Islands for storage and transport infrastructure.
- The assistance at 50% and 75% respectively are also given for value addition and processing infrastructure subject to a maximum grant-in-aid of Rs 10 crores per project.

Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana (PMKSY)

- The objective of PMKSY is to supplement agriculture, modernize processing and decrease Agri-Waste.
- The PMKSY has seven component schemes:

- Mega Food Parks
- Integrated Cold Chain and Value Addition Infrastructure
- Infrastructure for Agro-Processing Clusters
- Creation of Backward and Forward Linkages
- Creation/Expansion of Food Processing & Preservation Capacities
- Food Safety and Quality Assurance Infrastructure
- Human Resources and Institutions
- Under PMKSY, capital subsidy in the form of grants-in-aid ranging from 35% to 75% of the eligible project cost subject to a maximum specified limit is provided to investors.

PradhanMantriMatsyaSampadaYojana (PMMSY) launched

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Policies and Interventions &GS-III- Fisheries
In news

- PradhanMantriMatsyaSampadaYojana scheme was launched to bring about Blue Revolution through sustainable and responsible development of fisheries sector in India was recently launched.
- This scheme was first announced in Budget 2019-20 and then in AatmaNirbhar Bharat.
- The PMMSY is an umbrella scheme with two separate Components: (a) Central Sector Scheme (CS) and (b) Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS).

Key takeaways

- Total estimated investment will be of Rs. 20,050 crores to be implemented over a period of 5 years from FY 2020-21 to FY 2024-25.
- **Goal:**To double the fish exports in the next 3 to 4 years i.e. by 2024-25.
- **Objective:** (1)To address critical gaps in fish production and productivity; quality, technology, post-harvest infrastructure and management, modernisation and strengthening of value chain, traceability, establishing a robust fisheries management framework and fishers' welfare; (2) Harnessing of fisheries potential in a sustainable, responsible, inclusive and equitable manner; (3) enhancing contribution to Agriculture GVA and exports; (4) Social, physical and economic security for fishers and fish farmers; (5) Robust fisheries management and regulatory framework

Do you know?
Fisheries constitute 1.24% of National GDP and 7.28% of Agriculture GDP.

e-GOPALA app

It provides platform to farmers in the country for:

- managing livestock including buying and selling of disease free germplasm in all forms (semen, embryos, etc);
- availability of quality breeding services (Artificial Insemination, veterinary first aid, vaccination, treatment etc);
- guiding farmers for animal nutrition, treatment of animals using appropriate ayurvedic medicine/ethno veterinary medicine.

- There is a mechanism to send alert (on due date for vaccination, pregnancy diagnosis, calving etc) and inform farmers about various government schemes.
- It also enables cattle owners to buy and sell animals through this app.
- It will give farmers the freedom from middlemen and provide all information related to productivity, health and diet for the cattle.

Sanskrit Grams Programme: Uttarakhand

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Education; Policies and Intetventions
In news
- The Uttarakhand Government has decided to develop 'Sanskrit Grams' across the state.
- **Aim**: To teach people to use Sanskrit regularly.

Key takeaways
- Several villages were selected according to the availability of Sanskrit schools so that teachers may visit the villages often and motivate residents to learn and use Sanskrit.
- Villages were selected at the meeting of the Uttarakhand Sanskrit Academy, chaired by the Uttarakhand Chief Minister.
- The Academy shall also be renamed as Uttaranchal Sanskrit SansthanamHaridwar, Uttarakhand.
- **Focus:** School-going children so that they can learn the language from a young age.

Do you know?
- Sanskrit is the second official language in Uttarakhand after Hindi.
- Article 345 of the Constitution deals with the Official language or languages of a State.

Five Star Villages Scheme launched

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Welfare Schemes
In news
- Five Star Villagesscheme has been launched recently.
- **Ministry:** The Department of Posts, Ministry of Communications.

Key takeaways
- **Aim:** To bridge the gaps in public awareness and reach of postal products and services, especially in interior villages.
- **Objective**: To ensure universal coverage of flagship postal schemes in rural areas of the country.
- It has three components: (1) Product and Service Availability;(2) Product and Service Publicity; (3) Product and Service Marketing.
- Branch offices will function as one-stop shops to cater all post office related needs of the villagers.
- **Implemented by:** A team of five GraminDakSevaks. They will be assigned a village for marketing of all products, savings and insurance schemes.
- **Team will be headed by:** Branch Post Master of the concerned Branch Office.
- The scheme is being launched on pilot basis in Maharashtra. Based on the experience, it will be implemented nation-wide.

Biotech-KISAN Programme highlighted in LokSabha

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Welfare schemes &GS-III – Biotechnology

In news
- Recently, the importance of Biotech-Krishi Innovation Science Application Network (Biotech-KISAN) programme was highlighted in LokSabha during ongoing<u>Monsoon session.</u>
- The programme helps in taking innovative biotechnologies to the farmers.

Important value additions
Biotech-KISAN programme
- It is a farmer-centric pan-India scheme.
- **Developed by:** Department of Biotechnology, Ministry of Science and Technology.
- It follows a hub-and-spoke model.
- It stimulates entrepreneurship and innovation in farmers and also empowers women farmers.
- **Aim**: To understand the problems of water, soil, seed and market faced by the farmers and provide simple solutions to them.
- The programme links available science and technology to the farm by first understanding the problem of the local farmer and then providing scientific solutions to those problems.
- Currently, there are a total of eight Biotech-KISAN Hubs in different Agro-climatic Zones.

Samarth Scheme for Textile Sector being implemented
Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Welfare schemes & GS-III – Biotechnology
In news
- The Samarth-Scheme for Capacity Building in the Textiles Sectorwas recently in news.
- **Ministry:** The Ministry of Textiles

Important value additions
Samarth Scheme
- It was approved by Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) in 2017.
- **Objective:** (1)To ensure steady supply of skilled manpower in the labour-intensive textile sector; (2) Provide demand driven, placement oriented skills which shall be compliant to <u>National Skills Qualifications Framework</u> (NSQF); (3) To cover the entire value chain of textile, excluding Spinning and Weaving; (4) Promote skilling and skill upgradation in the traditional sectors of handlooms, handicrafts, sericulture and jute; (5) Enable provision of sustainable livelihood either by wage or self-employment.

YuWaah Platform launched
Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Welfare schemes
In news
- Recently, the Government has launched YuWaah.
- It is a multi-stakeholder platform to make young people career ready.
- **Launched by**: The Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
- A 'Statement of Intent' has also been signed to establish Generation Unlimited in India (YuWaah).

Objectives of YuWaah
- Providing career guidance support to young people through career portal.
- Job-readiness and self-exploration sessions to make young people career-ready.
- Supporting young people by providing entrepreneurship classes with successful entrepreneurs and experts.
- Creating linkages with aspirational economic opportunities to connect young people with jobs or self-employment. For this, innovative solutions and technology platforms will be engaged to maximize the scale and reach.
- Upskilling young people on 21st century skills, life skills, digital skills and supporting them through self-learning, for their productive lives and the future of work.

Important value additions

Generation Unlimited in India (GenU - YuWaah)
- It was founded in September 2018.
- **Aim:** To transform education, employment and entrepreneurial outcomes for young people around the world at a global and local level
- It was launched by UNICEF at the 73rd session of the UN General Assembly.

Social Security Code, 2020 passed

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I – Society &GS-II - Schemes

In news
- LokSabha passed the Social Security Code, 2020 recently.

Extending the reach of Employees' State Insurance Corporation:
- Efforts have been made to provide right to health security under ESIC to maximum possible workers
- The facility of ESIC would now be provided in all 740 districts. At present, this facility is being given in 566 districts only.
- Establishments working in hazardous sectors would mandatorily be linked with ESIC, even if there is only one worker working in it.
- Provision for linking unorganised sector and Gig workers with ESIC.

Extending the reach of Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO):
- EPFO's coverage would be applicable on all establishments having 20 workers.
- At present, it was applicable only on establishments included in the Schedule.
- Option to join EPFO is also being given to establishments having less than 20 workers.
- Schemes would be formulated for workers coming under the category of 'Self-employed' or falling under any other category under the aegis of EPFO.

Other key takeaways
- Provision has been made to formulate various schemes for providing comprehensive social security to workers in unorganised sector.
- A "Social Security Fund" will be created in order to implement these schemes.

- Provision for Gratuity has been made for Fixed Term Employee and there would not be any condition for minimum service period for this.

RashtriyaRaksha University, Bill 2020 passed

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Schemes; Education
In news
- Parliament has passed the RashtriyaRaksha University Bill 2020.

Key takeaways
- The Bill establishes the Raksha Shakti University, Gujarat established under the Raksha Shakti University Act, 2009.
- The Bill declares the University to be an institution of national importance.
- The Bill also repeals the 2009 Act.
- The Bill provides for several authorities under the University.
- These include: (1) The Governing Body to frame the broad policies and programmes of the University; (2) The Executive Council will be the principal executive body (3) The Academic Council will specify the academic policies of the University.
- The functions of the University include: (1) Providing instructions and research in police sciences, including coastal policing and cyber security (2) establishing and maintaining colleges (3) Prescribing courses, holding exams, and granting degrees and other distinctions.

National Forensic Sciences University Bill 2020 passed

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Schemes; Education
In news
- Parliament has passed the National Forensic Sciences University Bill, 2020 recently.

Key takeaways
- The Bill shall establish the Gujarat Forensic Sciences University (Gandhinagar) and the LokNayakJayaprakash Narayan National Institute of Criminology and Forensic Sciences (New Delhi) as a National Forensic Sciences University in Gujarat.
- The Bill declares the University to be an Institution Of National Importance.
- This university will work for the capacity building in the field of forensic science and promote research.

Foundation day of DeenDayalUpadhyayaGrameenKaushalyaYojana (DDU-GKY) celebrated

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Welfare Schemes
In news
- The foundation day of DeenDayalUpadhyayaGrameenKaushalyaYojana (DDU-GKY) was recently celebrated as "Kaushal Se KalBadlenge" (25th September).
- **Ministry**: Ministry of Rural Development

Key takeaways
- Agripreneurship (entrepreneurship in agriculture) Programme was inaugurated.

- Guidelines regarding Captive Employment under DDU-GKY were released.
- Guidelines for Promotion of Integrated Farming Cluster (IFC) were also released
- Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for capacity building of Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs)/StartUps and providing incubation support in rural areas was signed.

Do you know?

- Captive employers are businesses which can employ 500 or more in their own organisation or one of their subsidiaries and have suitable in-house training facilities.
- Integrated Farming is a combined approach aimed at efficient sustainable resource management for increased productivity in the cropping system.
- It has multiple objectives of sustainability, food security, farmer's security and poverty reduction by involving livestock, vermicomposting, organic farming, etc.

INTERNATIONAL

U.S.-Israeli delegation lands in Abu Dhabi on historic visit

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-II – International relations
In News:
- A U.S.-Israeli delegation arrived recently in Abu Dhabi on the historic first commercial flight from Tel Aviv, Israel.
- The visit marked the normalisation of ties between Israel and the UAE.
- **Objective of the visit:** To boost cooperation in areas including aviation, tourism, trade, health, energy and security.

Important value additions
- Israel's Health Ministry updated its list of "green countries" with low COVID-19 infection rates to include the UAE and eight other countries.
- This means that Israeli officials and journalists travelling to Abu Dhabi would be exempted from 14-day quarantine upon return.
- The UAE repealed a 1972 law which earlier boycotted Israel.
- Now, it will be permissible to enter, exchange or possess Israeli goods and products of all kinds in the UAE and trade in them.

Do you know?
- The UAE is the first Gulf country and only the third Arab nation to establish relations with Israel.
- Egypt made peace with its former battlefield enemy in 1979.
- Jordan followed in 1994.
- The UAE has never fought a war with Israel.

Criticism of WB's Ease of Doing Business Report

Context: World Bank's decision to halt its annual 'Doing Business' report on account of data authenticity issues of some countries. It has also decided to audit the 'Doing Business' report for the last five years

India and Ease of Doing Business
- India has sought to improve its ease of doing business index ranking, as a means to attract investments to achieve the targets set for 'Make in India'
- India's success in boosting its ease of doing business ranking is spectacular, to 63rd rank in 2019, up from the 142nd position in 2014.

Criticism of World Banks Ease of Doing Business report

1. The report is Politicised
- Chile's global rank went down sharply, from 34th position in 2014 to 67th in 2017.
- Chile's former Socialist President (2014-18), Michelle Bachelet, accused the World Bank of manipulating the index methodology to show her presidency in poor light, while showing improvement in the ranking during the regime of the right-wing party.

2. Admission by WB Chief Economist (Paul M. Romer) **to the mistakes**

- In 2017, he said, "Based on the things we were measuring before, business conditions did not get worse in Chile under the Bachelet administration"
- He further added, "I didn't do enough due diligence and later realised that I **didn't have confidence in the integrity** of the report's data."
- The World Bank's own internal watchdog, the Independent Evaluation Group, in its 2013 report, has widely questioned the reliability and objectivity of the index.

3. Robustness of methodology & calculation of Index is doubted

- Analytical and empirical foundations of the index are weak, if non-existent.
- The index is based on *de jure* measures, and not on *de facto* conditions.
- Example: The data for computing the index for India is obtained from larger enterprises in two cities only, Mumbai and Delhi, by lawyers, accountants and brokers — not from entrepreneurs.

4. Utility of the Index is questionable

- There is no credible association between improvement in ranking and a rise in capital formation & output growth.
- Russia's ease of doing business rank jumped from 120 in 2012 to 20 in 2018 ahead of China, Brazil, and India, but without becoming a magnet for investment inflows.
- China, on the contrary, attracted one of the highest capital inflows but its ease of doing business ranking was low and hovered between 78 and 96 for the years between 2006 and 2017.

5. Index is an ideologically loaded measure against the interest of workers

- To meet the ease of doing business targets, labour rights and safety standards of factories are often compromised.
- In 2016, the Maharashtra government abolished the annual mandatory inspection of steam boilers under the Boilers Act of 1923 and the Indian Boilers Regulation 1950.
- There is little economic evidence to suggest that minimally regulated markets for labour and capital produce superior outcomes in terms of output and employment

Implications for India

- Since 2015, the government has invested considerable political and administrative capital to improve India's ranking.
- While its Ease of Doing Business rank improved, it has meant nothing on the ground.
- The share of the manufacturing sector has stagnated at around 16-17% of GDP, and 3.5 million jobs were lost between 2011-12 and 2017-18.
- India should do some soul searching as to why the much trumpeted rise in global ranking has failed miserably on the ground.

Connecting the dots

- World Competitive Index

UN's guidelines on access to social justice for people with disabilities

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-II – Global Groupings; Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections
In News:

- The first-ever guidelines on access to social justice for people with disabilities have been released.
- **Released by:** United Nations
- **Objective:** To make it easier for them to access justice systems around the world.

Key takeaways

- The guidelines outline a set of 10 principles
- **Principle 1**: All persons with disabilities have legal capacity. No one shall be denied access to justice on the basis of disability.
- **Principle 2**: Facilities and services must be universally accessible to ensure equal access to justice without discrimination.
- **Principle 3**: They have the right to appropriate procedural accommodations.
- **Principle 4**: They have the right to access legal notices and information in a timely and accessible manner on an equal basis with others.
- **Principle 5**: They are entitled to all substantive and procedural safeguards recognized in international law on an equal basis with others, and States must provide the necessary accommodations to guarantee due process.
- **Principle 6**: They have the right to free or affordable legal assistance.
- **Principle 7**: They have the right to participate in the administration of justice on an equal basis with others.
- **Principle 8**: They have the rights to report complaints and initiate legal proceedings concerning human rights violations and crimes, have their complaints investigated and be afforded effective remedies.
- **Principle 9**: Effective and robust monitoring mechanisms play a critical role in supporting access to justice for them.
- **Principle 10**: All those working in the justice system must be provided with awareness-raising and training programmes addressing the rights of persons with disabilities, in particular in the context of access to justice.

Russia is jumping the gun with its vaccine

Context: Russian President Vladimir Putin announced the 'approval' of Russian COVID-19 vaccine, Sputnik V

Three Stages of Clinical Trials to test the safety & efficacy of drug

- **Phase I**: with an average sample size of less than 100, it is the preliminary study of safety, where the objective is to find the acceptable dose level which will not cause serious side-effects.
- **Phase II** is a study of safety and efficacy together, with a few hundred people or even fewer.
- **Phase III-** It is a detailed evaluation of effectiveness in comparison to some existing treatment or some similar-looking treatment having no effect (called placebo). This involves hundred to thousands of people. This stage even allows scientists to look for rare side-effects that can't be spotted in smaller, earlier stage trials

What happens after three phases of Clinical Trials?

- After the three phases, if the vaccine is found to be safe and effective, the study report is forwarded to the regulatory agency, which, if convinced, permits its usage en masse.
- Phase IV is the postmarketing surveillance stage. Such surveillance can only be conducted after the drug is marketed.

Concerns with Russian Vaccine

- **Standard Procedure not followed:** The approval came before phase III of the required clinical trial was even started.
- **Inadequately vetted vaccine:** Russia has claimed to have tested its vaccine on just 76 people in the first two phases.
- **Lack transparency:** No research article is available in the public domain about the Russian vaccine.
  - o Researchers worldwide who are developing vaccines for COVID-19 publish their studies in peer-reviewed journals, which are constantly scrutinised by the relevant scientific community. The community, in effect, enhances the credibility of these studies.
- **Short Duration:** Russian vaccine is dangerously rushed — it got approval in less than two months of starting the trial.
  - o Top scientists and even WHO have repeatedly maintained that a vaccine is not expected before 12-18 months.
- **Durability of Vaccine unknown**: Nobody knows the durability of the antibody created by the Russian vaccine — is it durable for a few years or a few weeks?
- **Impact on different segments of population untested:**
  - o A carefully conducted clinical trials might even show that a vaccine could be harmful for a section of the population.
  - o For example, a new type of measles vaccine in the early 1990s was found to be detrimental to baby girls, and so it was never licensed for the general population.
- **Lacks Support of Russian Doctors**:
  - o In a survey of 3,040 Russian doctors and health specialists, conducted by the Doctor's Handbook app, 52% said they were not ready to be vaccinated; only 24.5% said they were
  - o A leading respiratory doctor in Russia has quit the Health Ministry citing "gross violations" of medical ethics in the development of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Consequences of Russian Vaccine

- It is potentially dangerous for the people who receive it
- It could also impede global efforts to develop quality COVID-19 immunisations.
- Reduces the trust factor in vaccination programmes.
- Leads to Vaccine Nationalism (dealt in separate Article)
- People taking the Russian vaccine at this stage would effectively be part of a grand phase III clinical trial.

Qatar brings in reforms in labour laws

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- International relations
In news

- Recently, Qatar has brought about a change in its labour laws.

Key takeaways

- **First reform:** It has abolished the unjustified 'kafala system' (requirement for a "no objection certificate). Under this system, migrant workers needed to get NOC from their employers before changing jobs.

- Now, workers will have to serve a one-month notice period if they have worked for less than two years and notice period of two months if they have worked longer
- **Second reform:** Itinvolves increasing the minimum wage by 25 per cent to $274 or 1000 Qatari riyals and an additional 300 QAR for food and 500 QAR for accommodation in case not provided by the company.
- These reforms are now applicable to workers of all nationalities and in all sectors, including domestic workers.

Do you know?
- The International Labour Organisation (ILO) notes that Qatar is the first country in the region to dismantle the "kafala" sponsorship system that is common in the Gulf region.

UNSC Rejects to Designate Indians as Terrorists

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Global groupings; International Relations
In news

- The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has rejected all Pakistan's requests to list four Indians as designated terrorists under its 1267 Committee for Counterterrorism Sanctions.

Important value additions
UNSC Resolution 1267 Sanctions Committee
- This committee oversees the implementation of sanctions pursuant to UNSC resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015).
- It was adopted unanimously on 15th October 1999.
- It is one of the most important and active UN subsidiary bodies working on efforts to combat terrorism, particularly in relation to Al Qaeda, Taliban and the Islamic State group.
- It prepares a consolidated list of people associated with these organizations.
- It discusses UN efforts to limit the movement of terrorists, especially those related to travel bans, the freezing of assets and arms embargoes for terrorism.

Sri Lanka's coming constitutional changes

Context: Sri Lankan President GotabayaRajapaksa Political party SLPP garnered a historic two-thirds majority along with its allies in the recently held parliamentary polls.

During the address to newly elected Parliament, President announced that
- Their first priority is to get rid of the 19th Amendment, and replace it with the 20th Amendment
- He also told about his plan to rewrite the Constitution under the rubric of a 'one country, one law' principle

What is the 19ᵗʰ Amendment of Sri Lankan Constitution?
- The 19th Amendment was brought in by the previous President MaithripalaSirisena and Prime Minister RanilWickremesinghe.
- It rolled back the 18th amendment that had been brought in by the preceding President MahindaRajapaksa.

- The 18th amendment had removed the two-term bar on running for office, and centralised more powers in the hands of the President. Repealing it was an election promise made by Sirisena
- Some of the prominent provisions of 19th Amendment were
  - It curbed the executive President's vast powers by restoring a **two-term limit**
  - It reduced the term of the **presidency to five years** from the six years
  - It also placed a **ceiling on the number of ministers** and deputy ministers.
  - It made it difficult for the legislature to be dissolved at the President's whim. The President also **lost his power to sack the Prime Minister**.
  - It also sought to protect the **independence of oversight institutions** by decentralising the appointments to the nine commissions including the Elections Commission, the National Police Commission, the Public Service Commission, among others to a Constitutional Council.
  - In addition to having parliamentarians, the Council also had **civil society representation.** This was seen as one of the most progressive parts of the 19th amendment.
  - It also barred dual citizens from the office.
- **Due Process Followed:** The amendment was based on a popular mandate for change in the 2015 presidential election, and received more than the required two-thirds support in the previous Parliament
- **Significance of 19th Amendment**: It was hailed as restoring Democratic spirit into Constitution and freeing the country from the clutches of Rajapaksha family who had concentrated power.

What is 20th Amendment?
- The 20th amendment Bill reverses almost everything in the 19th Amendment.
- It only retains from it the two-term bar on the presidency, and the five-year term.

Critical Analysis of the 20th Amendment Bill
- **Fundamental shift in the nature of the Sri Lanka** state that signalled the return of the country to 1978 in a bizarre form of 'forward to the past'. The 1978 Constitution introduced the office of the Executive President in Sri Lanka, making it one of the most powerful of similar systems in the world.
- **Erodes the Power of Parliament**:Parliament is disempowered against the executive by the restoration of the President's power to dissolve Parliament at will at any time after the first year of its term.
- **Removes Checks on Executive**: The checks on presidential power within the executive are abolished by the removal of the requirement of the Prime Minister's advice for the appointment and dismissal of Cabinet and other Ministers
- **Reversing Democratic Spirit**: It abolishes the binding limitations on presidential powers in relation to key appointments to independent institutions that used to happen through the deliberative process of the Constitutional Council.
- **Leads to Politicisation of Institutions:** It effectively provides sweeping powers to the President to appoint individuals to key institutions, and with it, politicising institutions that are meant to function independently of the political executive and for the benefit of citizens.
- **Rights of Citizens Curtailed:** It has also removed the opportunity for citizens to challenge the executive actions of the President through fundamental rights applications, suggesting that the President is above the law.

- **Undermine the accountability of government:** The weakening of checks and balances to the executive presidency would adversely impact the efficient, effective, and transparent use of public funds.
- **Neglecting Minorities:** The President's address was also notable for the absence of any reference to ethnic minorities.

Note: Its Impact on India (as well as brief background on Tamil issue) will be dealt in Part II of the article

Sri Lanka's coming constitutional changes – Part II

For First part of the article click here

Concern for India about SriLanka's 20th Amendment

- **Fear of China's incursion in India's sphere of Influence**: The Rajapakshas have shown greater inclination towards China in the past when they were in Power. With China becoming aggressive in the region, it may find suitable partner in present SriLankan government to further its interests at the cost of India's interests
- **Concentration of Power doesn't end here**: Armed with a two-third majority in Parliament, the Rajapaksas may not be content only with bringing in the 20th Amendment.
- **Tamils will be impacted**: The fear, especially among the Tamil minorities in SriLanka is that the 13th Amendment will go too. An internal problem of Sri Lanka will have repercussions on India given the Tamil ethnic linkage between two countries.

Brief History of Sri Lanka's Civil War

- In the years following independence, the Sinhalese, who resented British favoritism toward Tamils during the colonial period, disenfranchised Tamil migrant plantation workers from India and made Sinhala the official language.
- As ethnic tension grew, in 1976, the LTTE was formed under the leadership of V. Prabhakaran, and it began to campaign for a Tamil homeland in northern and eastern Sri Lanka, where most of the island's Tamils reside.
- When war between Sri Lankan Tamils and the Sinhalese majority erupted in 1983, India took an active role to avoid the refugee like situation experienced during the formation of Bangladesh (1971 War)
- Indo-Sri Lankan Accord was signed in 1987 to provide a political solution to Sri Lanka's conflict.
- It proposed the establishment of provincial council system and devolution of power for nine provinces in Sri Lanka (also known as **The Thirteenth Amendment)**.
- The ethnic war (civil war) ended in 2009 when LTTE was eliminated by the then MahindaRajapaksha government.

What is the 13th Amendment that caters to Tamil issue in SriLanka?

- The 13th Amendment was a consequence of the Indian intervention in Sri Lanka between 1987-1990.
- It flowed from the India-Sri Lanka Accord of July 29, 1987.
- Sri Lanka is a unitary country, and the 1978 Constitution had concentrated all powers in the centre.
- The agreement was aimed at finding a way forward on **devolution of political powers to the then North-Eastern province,** comprising the Tamil dominated areas of the island country.

- Under the terms of the Accord (also known as the Jayawardene-Rajiv Gandhi agreement), the Sri Lankan parliament brought in the 13th Amendment, which provided for a system of **elected provincial councils across Sri Lanka**

What is the progress with 13ᵗʰ Amendment?

- This system of Provincial Councils was proposed specifically for the north and the east to tackle issues there. However, it was implemented in other provinces too.
- **Short lived NE Council:** The irony was that while the North-Eastern provincial council could barely survive the violent and bloody circumstances of its birth and died after a short-lived futile struggleagainst both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government, each of the remaining provinces in the Sinhala dominated areas have had elected provincial councils.
- **Perceived as Indian Agenda:** The irony was all the greater as there had been much opposition by Sinhala nationalists to the 13th amendment as an Indian imposed provision.
- **Not Implemented in Spirit:** Devolution of powers to the councils was only in name as the Centre retained all financial powers.
- **Long Struggle**: It was only well after the war ended, under much pressure from India, and after the first elections were held to the Northern provincial council in 2013.

Why there is opposition to 13ᵗʰ Amendment?

- **Demands of Majority:** As it came up in a specific response to the Indian-mediated Tamil demand for power sharing, there has always been a strong lobby by majority Sinhala population in favour of repealing the provision.
- **Seen as encouraging Separatism**: As with Article 370 in the Indian Constitution, the 13th Amendment is seen as encouraging Tamil separatism and secessionism. It is the only provision in the Constitution that is a slight nod in the direction of Sri Lanka's Tamil national question.
- **Resurgent Majoritarianism**: The demand for doing away with 13ᵗʰ Amendment comes up every now and then, especially in times such as now, of a resurgent Sinhala Buddhist nationalism.

What are the challenges with regard to 20ᵗʰ Amendment vis a vis Tamils?

- **Fear of abolishing Provincial Councils:** The Minister for Provincial Councils and Local Government is an ardent campaigner for the repeal of the 13th Amendment and the abolition of Provincial councils.
- **MahindaRajapaksha's sincerity is in doubt:** MahindaRajapaksha expansively spoke of a 13 Plus solution for Tamil demands for political power sharing but his sincerity was in doubt.

Conclusion

While the abolition of the executive presidency appears no more realistic, it will be retrograde if the idea of sharing more power with the provinces is abandoned altogether.

Connecting the dots

- Kalapani Issues with Nepal
- India's neighbourhood first policy

NAM and India's alignment

Context: In the wake of the current stand-off with China, there have been calls for India's foreign policy to shed its inhibitions and make a decisive shift towards the United States, as the only viable option to counter China.

What has been the government's calls to such call?
- The government has been more nuanced in its approach.
- The External Affairs Minister clarified that a rejection of non-alignment does not mean a rush to alignment: India will not join an alliance system.

What was non-alignment foreign policy?
- Non-alignment was a policy fashioned during the Cold War, to retain an autonomy of policy (not equidistance) between two politico-military blocs.
- The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) provided a platform for newly independent developing nations to join together to protect this autonomy.
- It was a disparate group from many continents, with varying degrees of proximity to, and dependence on, one or the other bloc.
- NAM's flagship campaigns were de-colonisation, universal nuclear disarmament and against apartheid.

How did NAM's relevance decline post 1991?
- One of the blocs (USSR) was disbanded at the end of the Cold War.
- De-colonisation was largely complete by then, the apartheid regime in South Africa was being dismantled and the campaign for universal nuclear disarmament was going nowhere.
- **Freed from the shackles of the Cold War**, the NAM countries were able to diversify their network of relationships across the erstwhile east-west divide. Non-alignment lost its relevance, and NAM its original *raison d'être*.

Has India completely abandoned Non-Alignment Policy?
- For a few years now, non-alignment has not been projected by our policymakers as a tenet of India's foreign policy.
- However, India has not yet found a universally accepted successor as a signature tune for our foreign policy.
- Successive formulations have been coined and rejected.
  - **Strategic autonomy** was one, which soon acquired a connotation similar to non-alignment, with an anti-U.S. tint.
  - **Multi-alignment** has not found universal favour, since it may convey the impression of opportunism, whereas we seek strategic convergences.
  - **Seekingissue-based partnerships** or coalitions is a description that has not stuck.
- **"Advancing prosperity and influence"** is a description Dr.Jaishankar (Minister of External Affairs) settled for, to describe the aspirations that our network of international partnerships seeks to further

Has the rise of China revived the concept of alliance?
- The fact is that 'alliance' is as much a Cold War concept as non-alignment.
- During the Cold War, the glue that held countries of an alliance together was composed (in varying proportions) of ideological convergence and an existential military threat.
- With the disintegration of USSR and the Warsaw Pact, this glue dissolved and the international options of alliance partners widened, just like those of NAM countries
- As a result, in today's times the strategic interests of Nations are no longer fully congruent. This is evident in the recent rifts between US & Europe (NATO)

- Alliances in the Asia-Pacific face a bigger definitional dilemma. The threat to the alliance partners today is from an assertive China, which they are reluctant to define as a strategic adversary, because of their economic engagement with it and the huge military asymmetry.
- In the immediate-term, Indian and U.S. perspectives are less convergent in India's continental neighbourhood (like Afghanistan & Central Asia)

Conclusion
- Former National Security Adviser ShivshankarMenon has described today's world order as militarily unipolar, economically multipolar and politically confused.
- COVID-19 may scramble the economics and deepen the confusion further.
- India will acquire a larger global profile next year, when it commences a two-year term on the UN Security Council. The strategic choices that it makes in its bilateral partnerships (like US, Russia, Iran) will be closely watched.

Connecting the dots
- Cold War
- US-China Trade War

Turkey- Russia Military Drill in Eastern Mediterranean announced

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- International Relations

In news

Recently, Turkey has announced that Russia will hold live-fire naval exercises in the eastern Mediterranean.

- Already there has been escalating tensions between Turkey and its coastal neighbors Greece and Cyprus over the rights to search for energy resources in the region.

Key takeaways
- Turkey and Russia will also coordinate closely on their military presence in Syria.
- Turkey has also purchased Russia's advanced S-400 missiles and has agreed to go with a Russian-built nuclear power plant on its southern coast.

Image source: Click here

Do you know?
- Russian exercises will take place during September 8-22 and September 17-25.
- Turkish seismic research vessels are already operating in the Mediterranean region.
- Recently, the U.S. had said that it was partially lifting a 33-year-old arms embargo against ethnically divided Cyprus.

G-20 Foreign Ministers' Meet held

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Global Groupings; International Relations

In news
- Recently, Saudi Arabia hosted the G-20 foreign ministers' meeting.
- **Focus:** Cross-border movement amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

Key takeaways
- The foreign ministers acknowledged the importance of opening borders, and promoting measures to allow the economy to thrive in light of the protective measures for the Covid-19 pandemic.
- India updated the G-20 foreign ministers about steps taken by India including Vande Bharat Mission and creation of travel bubbles for the welfare and protection of foreign citizens stranded in India as well as its own citizens abroad.

Important value additions

G-20
- It is an informal group of 19 countries and the European Union.
- Representatives of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are also part of G-20.
- It represents about 2/3rd of the world's population, 85% of global GDP, 80% of global investment and over 75% of global trade.
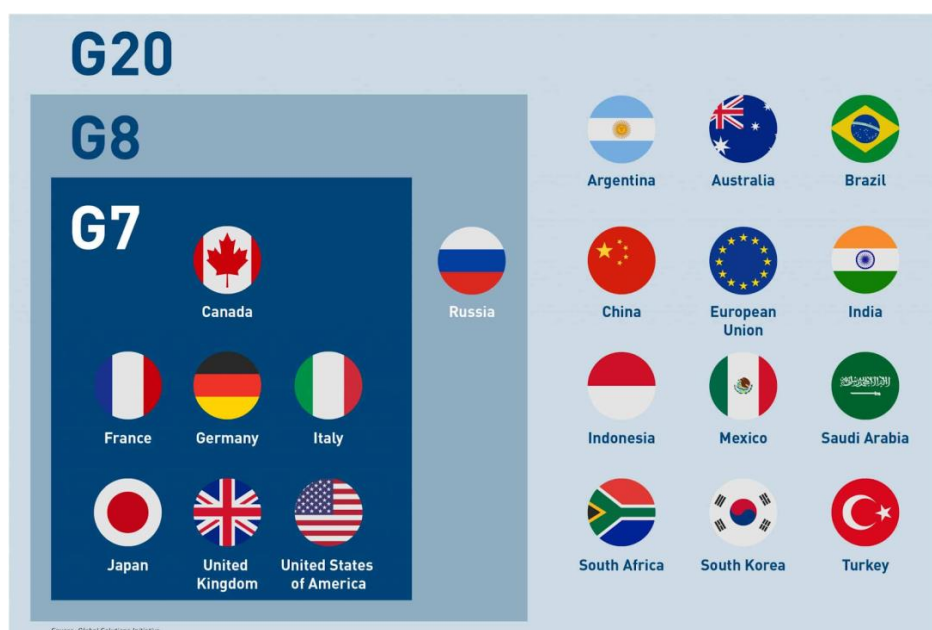
Do you know?
- It does not have any permanent secretariat or headquarters.
- Currently, Saudi Arabia holds the presidency of G-20.
- It is the first Arab nation to take over the G20 Presidency.

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) | A counter-coalition of Eurasian power

Context: External Affairs Minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar's visit to Russia to participate at the SCO foreign ministers' meet during which India and China agreed to de-escalate the tension which was flared up along Indo-China border in recent months.

For a brief background on the border tension issue: click here and here

What was SCO founded and what is its historical background?
- **Built on Shanghai Five:** Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan (Kyrgyz Republic) and Tajikistan popularly known as Shanghai Fivehad come together in the post-Soviet era in 1996, in order to work on regional security, reduction of border troops, and terrorism.
- **Initial Success in resolving Boundary Disputes:** The 1996 meeting of the Shanghai Five resulted in an 'Agreement on Confidence-Building in the Military Field Along the Border Areas' between China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which led to an agreement on the mutual reduction of military forces on their common borders in 1997.
- **Inclusion of Uzbekistan:**Subsequently, Shanghai Five helped resolvedisputes between Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan on border issues and the Ferghana Valley enclaves.
- **Institutionalisation**: Subsequently a permanent intergovernmental international organisation called SCO was founded in June 2001. It is Eurasian political, economic, and security alliance of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
- **Expansion**: Its membership was expanded to include India and Pakistan in 2017.
- **Observer States**: The SCO also has four observer states — Afghanistan, Iran, Belarus and Mongolia — which may be inducted at a later date.

What is the Organisational Structure of SCO?
- The organisation has two permanent bodies — the SCO Secretariat based in Beijing and the Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) based in Tashkent.
- The SCO Secretary-General and the Director of the Executive Committee of the SCO RATS are appointed by the Council of Heads of State for a term of three years.
- However, the venue of the SCO council meetings moves between the eight members

How does West perceive SCO?
- The SCO describes one of its main goals as moving towards the establishment of a democratic, fair and rational new international political and economic order.
- In 2005, the **Astana declaration** called for SCO countries to work on a "joint SCO response to situations that threaten peace, security and stability in the region", indicating the group's strategic ambitions
- As a result, the SCO was eyed with some misgivings by the U.S. and Europe. It was even dubbed the **"Anti-NATO"** for proposing military cooperation.

- Western and NATO concerns were heightened when they placed heavy sanctions against Russia for its actions in Crimea, but China came to Russia's aid, signing a 30-year, $400 billion gas pipeline framework agreement.

What are the Contradictions with India joining SCO?
- **Not aligned with QUAD**: India joining the SCO has been seen as puzzling foreign policy move, as it has come at a time when New Delhi is looking more keenly at the West, and in particular at the maritime 'Quadrilateral' with the U.S., Japan and Australia.
- **On the issue of Pakistan:** Since 2014, India and Pakistan have cut all ties, talks and trade with each other, and India has refused to attend the SAARC summit due to tensions with Pakistan, but both their leaderships have consistently attended all meetings of the SCO.
- **On the issue of Terrorism:** Despite the fact that India accuses Pakistan of perpetrating cross-border terrorism at every other multilateral forum, at the SCO, Indian and Pakistani armed forces even take part in military and anti-terrorism exercises together

How does SCO deal with bilateral tensions?
- The SCO Charter doesn't allow any bilateral dispute to be taken up, but it provides a comfortable platform for finding common ground and eventually, creating conditions for dialogue between countries.
- In 2009, India and Pakistan held the first talks after the Mumbai attacks on the sidelines of the SCO summit in Astana, where then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and former Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari met and tried to resolve tension through talks
- In 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi met then Pakistani PM Nawaz Sharif at the SCO summit in Ufa, for a meeting that even resulted in a joint statement.
- In 2020, SCO host, Russia, encouraged and facilitated meetings between between India and China to discuss the stand-off at the LAC

Conclusion
- SCO seeks to build a continental coalition that, its founders hope, may one day be as strong as some of the other coalitions that exist to its west and south.

Connecting the dots
- Future of SAARC and BIMSTEC
- India's Non-Alignment Policy in the times of increasing Polarisation in world

Hybrid Data Warfare by China

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – International relations & GS-III – Cybersecurity
In news

- The Chinese company Zhenhua Data Information Technology Co. Limited is monitoring over 10,000 Indian individuals and organisations in its global database of foreign targets.
Key takeaways
- Zhenhua monitors the digital footprint of its targets using Artificial Intelligence tools across social media platforms, maintains an information library.
- The library includes content from news sources, forums, papers, patents, bidding documents and positions of recruitment.

- **Targets:** Individuals and institutions in politics, government, judiciary, art and sports, business, technology, media, and civil society.
- The Company counts the Chinese government, intelligentsia and military among its clients. However, the Chinese government has denied this.
- **Threat:** This information can be used for strategic and intelligence services of China for hybrid warfare.

Important value additions
Hybrid Warfare

- It refers to using non-military tools to achieve dominance or damage, subvert or influence.
- These tools include information pollution, perception management and propaganda.
- Hybrid warfare was used in the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War by the Hezbollah group.
- It was also used by Russia against Ukraine in the 2014 annexation of Crimea

The Abraham Accords: "The new dawn of a new Middle East"?

The Abraham Accords:

- Has been signed recently by **the UAE, Bahrain and Israel**, under U.S. President Donald Trump's mediation.
- It marks a new beginning in the relations between the Sunni-ruled Gulf kingdoms and the Jewish state.
- Under the agreement, the UAE and Bahrain would normalise ties with Israel, leading to better economic, political and security engagement.
- The agreements have the backing of Saudi Arabia, arguably the most influential Arab power and a close ally of the UAE and Bahrain. More Arab countries are expected to follow suit.
- This is the first agreement between Israel and Arab countries since the 1994 Jordan-Israel peace treaty.

Concerns:
Though of historical and geopolitical significance, it is too early to say whether the accords will have any meaningful impact on West Asia's myriad conflicts.

- **The Palestinian question remains largely unaddressed**: With Arab countries signing diplomatic agreements with Israel bilaterally, the Arab collective support for the Palestinian movement for nationhood, which has been the basis of the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, is collapsing.
- **Shia-Sunni conflict:**
  A union of Israel, UAE, and Bahrain, alongside the US could be a move to contain Iran. With this deal, Israel has joined hands with the Gulf's Sunni Arab monarchies. Iran, on the other hand, is dominated by Shiites.
  For decades, one of the main sources of instability in West Asia has been the cold war between Saudi Arabia (Sunni) and Iran (Shia). This accord may make the rift wider and more violent.

Indian context:
India should use this opportunity to give itself a bigger role in a region which is its strategic backyard.

- Ramping up defence and security relations with the UAE. Israel is already a very close defence partner. India should restart joint exercises with the UAE, and even Saudi Arabia.
- India can ensure that any future deal on a regional security framework gives adequate space to Iran.
- The deal opens up new opportunities for India to play a much larger role in the regional security and stability in the Gulf, where New Delhi enjoys special relations with both Abu Dhabi and Jerusalem.

Conclusion:

In order to bring peace in the region as they have claimed, the signatories and the US should **address the more structural issues**, which include the unresolved question of Palestine.

Connecting the dots:

Who are the signatories to the Abraham Accords. Will it have any meaningful impact on West Asia's myriad conflicts? Comment.

India joins Djibouti Code of Conduct/ Jeddah Amendment (DCOC/JA)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations

In news

- India has joined the Djibouti Code of Conduct/ Jeddah Amendment, DCOC/JA, as an Observer.

Important value additions

Djibouti Code of Conduct/ Jeddah Amendment

- DCOC/JA is a grouping on maritime matters comprising 18 member states adjoining the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, the East Coast of Africa and Island countries in the Indian Ocean Region.
- The DCOC was established in January 2009.
- **Aim:** Repression of piracy and armed robbery against ships in the Western Indian Ocean Region, the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea.
- Japan, Norway, the UK and the US are also the Observers to the DCOC/JA.

Indo-Pacific Trilateral Dialogue held

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations

In news

- Recently, India, Australia and France held a dialogue for the first time under a trilateral framework.
- The three sides have agreed to hold the dialogue on an annual basis.

Key takeaways

- **Focus**: Enhancing cooperation in the Indo-Pacific Region.
- India also has logistics agreements with both countries which provide for easier access to supplies of goods and services.
- The trilateral cooperation will help to take on China's aggressive behaviour in the Indo-Pacific region. E.g in South China Sea.
- It is an addition to the Quad which comprises the USA, Japan, Australia and India.
- Possibility of enhancing maritime security cooperation between the three countries.
- Cooperation on marine global commons shall also take place. It includes blue economy, marine biodiversity and environmental challenges such as marine pollution.

Important value additions

Significance of the Indo-Pacific Region

- It is a very rich region in terms of natural resources (fisheries, oil, and gas) as well as mineral resources.
- Trade of some of the major economies like China, Japan, Korea or the west coast of the United States goes through this region.
- About 50% of India's trade is conducted through the South China Sea.
- India has been one of the major players in the region.
- India conducts many naval exercises with the United States, countries of ASEAN, Japan, Korea and Vietnam.
- The international community including India wants freedom of navigation, freedom of over flights in the region.

Singapore Convention on Mediation

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations

In news

- Recently, the United Nations Convention on International Settlement Agreements Resulting from Mediation has come into force.
- It is also known as the Singapore Convention on Mediation.
- It is the first UN treaty to be named after Singapore.

Key takeaways

- The convention will provide a more effective way of enforcing mediated settlements of corporate disputes involving businesses in India and other signatories.
- India approved the signing of the Convention in July 2019.
- The Convention has 53 signatories which include China and the USA as well.

Significance
- It will promote mediation as an alternative and effective method of resolving trade disputes.
- The settlement reached by parties shall bebinding and enforceable.
- Mediated settlement agreement across borders can be done by applying directly to the courts of countries that have signed and ratified the treaty.
- It will save time and legal costs.
- Businesses in India and around the world will now have greater certainty in resolving cross-border disputes through mediation.
- It will boost India's 'ease of doing business' credentials by enabling swift mediated settlements of corporate disputes.
- It will also provide a positive signal to foreign investors about India's commitment to adhere to international practice on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).

USA-Maldives Framework on Defence and Security Relationship signed

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations
In news
- Recently, a Framework on Defence and Security Relationship has been signed between the USA and the Maldives.

Key takeaways
- The move is seen as consistent with the growing alignment of the USA and Indian interests in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and Indo-Pacific.
- **Objective:** To deepen engagement and cooperation in support of maintaining peace and security in the Indian Ocean.
- Both countries agreed to reiterate their commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific that promotes the security and prosperity of all nations in the region.
- The Framework outlines a range of bilateral activities - senior-level dialogues, engagements etc. in areas such as maritime domain awareness, natural disasters and humanitarian relief operations.

Intra-Afghan Talks

Introduction:
In-tra--Afghan talks bringing the Taliban face--to--face with representatives of the Afghanistan govern-ment and Afghan civil society has finally started in Doha. The talks are a key outcome of the U.S. - Taliban and U.S. - Afghanistan agreements.

The initiation of intra-Afghan talks was a key element in the U.S.-Taliban peace deal signed in February between the U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Ambassador ZalmayKhalilzad, and the Taliban deputy leader.

Important tasks at hand:

- The first task for the negotiators is to declare a permanent ceasefire, and stop violence in Afghanistan that has claimed another 1,300 civilian lives in the first half of 2020.
- To decide the course of how Afghanistan's future will be shaped.
- To decide whether they can retain the constitu-tion and political processes while bringing the insur-gents into the mainstream.
- Other key elements- An end to violence by declaring a ceasefire and the Taliban cutting ties with terrorist organisations such as al Qaeda, also needs to be discussed.

Evolving Indian stand:

India's stand has always been that the peace process must be "Afghan led, Afghan owned and Afghan controlled".

Indian policy has evolved from its earlier hands-off approach to the Taliban. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar attended the inaugural ceremony in Doha via videoconferencing. It was the first ever address by an Indian official at a gathering that includes the Tali-ban (that India still maintains is a terror group).

India has made it clear that India hopes that peace in Afghanistan should not come at the cost of gains made by Afghanistan in the post-Taliban era, including democracy, institutions of gover-nance, and the rights of minorities and women.

Conclusion:

India's vision of a sovereign, united, stable, plural and democratic Afghanistan is one that is shared by a large constituency in Afghanistan.

A more active engagement will enable India to work with like-minded forces in the region to ensure that the vacuum created by the U.S. withdrawal does not lead to an undo the gains during the last two decades.

Connecting the dots:

- India's stand of "Afghan led, Afghan owned and Afghan controlled" peace process is evolving. Comment.

The Customs (Administration of Rules of Origin under Trade Agreements) Rules, 2020 (CAROTAR, 2020) to come into force

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Policies and interventions; International Relations

In news

- The **Customs (Administration of Rules of Origin under Trade Agreements) Rules, 2020** (CAROTAR, 2020), will come into force from 21st September 2020.
- It was notified on 21st August 2020.
- The new rules will make the importer to correctly ascertain the country of origin, properly claim the concessional duty and assist customs authorities in smooth clearance of legitimate imports under FTAs.

Key takeaways
- Importers will have to ensure that imported goods meet the prescribed 'rules of origin' provisions to avail concessional rate of customs duty under Free Trade Agreements (FTAs).
- Importers have to prove that imported products have undergone value addition of at least 35% in the countries of origin.
- Earlier, merely a country of origin certificate, issued by a notified agency in the country of export was sufficient to avail the benefits of FTAs.
- Customs officials suspect that China diverts its supplies to India through ASEAN nations by abusing rules of origin so that it illegally takes advantage of duty-free market.

Do you know?
- Major imports to India come from five ASEAN countries — Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam.
- The domestic industry will be protected from misuse of FTAs.

Important value additions
- Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with ASEAN means goods coming from these countries will face zero or less customs/import duties at our borders.
- The name of the document which shows that goods are coming from a particular country is called "Certificate of Origin".
- Country will be treated as Origin/Originating country through "Rules of Origin". They vary between country to country and FTA to FTA.

Three cases regarding Rules of origin:
- **Goods totally produced/manufactured in ASEAN**: "Certificate of Origin" will mention that goods originated from ASEAN and they will get preferential/zero duty.
- **Inputs purchased from China, value addition happened in ASEAN and then goods are reaching into India**: Goods will be considered originating from ASEAN, if the value addition in China is less than 60%.
- **Some value addition happened in ASEAN, then goods/inputs purchased by China and then entering into India**: It will always be treated as goods originating from China and they will not get benefits under ASEAN FTA.

UN and the new Multilateralism

Context: September month ought to have been a moment of celebration for the United Nations — the 75th anniversary of its founding. The coronavirus has exposed the structural weakness of UN system that was set up amidst the ruins of the Second World War

Criticism of UN in the wake of Pandemic
- The UN has been unable to respond effectively to the once-in-a-century global crisis triggered by the coronavirus.

- At the UN Security Council, China blocked a serious discussion on the origin and sources of the crisis.
- While the World Health Organisation did move a bit in that direction, the US was not satisfied with the outcome and walked out of the forum.

How has International Politics affected UN functioning over the years?
- **Realism at the core of UN System**: UN, was meant, by design, to be a concert of great powers who had a permanent seat in the Security Council. Cooperation among the great powers was the precondition for its success in the security arena.
- **During the Cold War**, Washington and Moscow were at each other's throats and the UNSC was deadlocked.
- **During the brief unipolar moment of the 1990s**, post-Soviet Russia was willing to acquiesce to the sweeping US agenda for global security. China was feeling its way around multilateral institutions and avoided any challenge to the US and West.
- **In 2000s**, Russia and China began to offer resistance to US dominance.
- **Present Situation is that of Political Fragmentation:** The conflict between the US on the one hand and China and Russia on the other has become full-blown. To make matters more complicated, the West itself is divided

What are India's prospects vis-a-vis UN in coming days?
- **Pessimist thinking:** The current political fragmentation augurs poorly for India's two-year tenure at the UNSC starting next January 2021.
- **Optimist thinking**: This is an opportunity to restructure India's traditional approach to the UN.
- **Activist thinking**: There are huge possibilities for enhancing India's multilateral standing.

What steps should India take in future with regard to UN?
- **Understand the Reality:** India should shed the illusion of expansion of UNSC in near future. It should accept the reality that UNSC reform is unlikely to happen soon
- **Develop Multilateral Agenda:** India should develop a multilateral agenda of its own despite UNSC being dysfunctional like it did in the past (decolonisation, disarmament and new international economic order during Cold War era)
- **Understand the Objective of Multilateralism:** The primary objective of India's present multilateralism must be to ensure its territorial integrity in the wake of aggressive China & Pakistan
- **Play Active role in rule making:** The rules governing economic, technological and environmental areas are now up for a significant overhaul and India should help set the agenda.
- **Increase India's share in UN Budget**: Delhi can't hope to expand its international influence on the cheap. India's share in the UN budget stands at 0.7 per cent. The shares of China, Japan and the US are at 8, 10 and 22 per cent respectively. Raising Delhi's contribution to at least one per cent might convince its partners that India is serious about pursuing a more vigorous multilateralism.

Conclusion

In writing the new rules and reshaping the global order, India needs to strengthen its recent turn to a more dynamic coalition building.

Connecting the dots
- US Withdrawal from WHO
- WHO and its funding

FinCEN and FIU-IND

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations & GS-III – Money Laundering

In news
- Recently, over 2100 Suspicious Activity Reports (SARs) were filed by banks with the United States Department of the Treasury's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN).
- The FinCEN files shall identify at least USD 2 trillion in transactions between 1999 and 2017 flagged as possible evidence of money laundering or other criminal activity by compliance officers of banks and financial institutions.
- Individuals and companies being probed by Indian agencies in different cases are part of the SAR flagged to FinCEN.
- Like, transactions of Indian entities named in scams such as the 2G scam, the Agusta-westland scandal, etc. cases have all been listed with the FinCEN.

Important value additions

FinCEN
- It was set up in 1990.
- It serves as the leading global regulator in the battle against money laundering.
- It collects and analyzes information about financial transactions in order to combat domestic and international money laundering, terrorist financing, and other financial crimes.

Suspicious Activity Report
- SAR is a document filed by banks and financial institutions to report suspicious activity to the USA FinCEN.
- These are used to detect crime but cannot be used as direct evidence to prove legal cases

Do you know?
- **Money laundering:** Concealing or disguising the identity of illegally obtained proceeds so that they appear to have originated from legitimate sources. It is frequently a component of crimes such as drug trafficking, robbery or extortion.
- The Financial Intelligence Unit-India (FIU-IND) performs the same functions as FinCEN in the USA. Under the Finance Ministry, this was set up in 2004 as the nodal agency for receiving, analyzing and disseminating information relating to suspect financial transactions.

Queen Elizabeth II to be dropped as monarch by Barbados

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations

In news
- Queen Elizabeth II, who is the head of state in the UK and 15 other Commonwealth realmswill be dropped as monarch by Barbados in 2021.

Key takeaways

- Barbados aims to complete the process of becoming a republic before its 55th anniversary of independence from Britain, in November 2021.
- With this, it will become the first country in almost three decades to sever ties with the British royal family and become a republic.

Do you know?

- Barbados, a former British colony, gained its independence in 1966.
- Although it is an independent state, Queen Elizabeth remains its constitutional head.
- Itshall remain a member of the Commonwealth of Nations.
- Commonwealth of Nationsis the 54-nation club of mostly former British colonies which is led by the Queen, and includes India.

Direct Cargo Ferry Service Between India & Maldives launched

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations

In news

- Direct cargo ferry service between India and Maldives was recently e-launched.
- **Ministry:** IndianMinistry of Shipping and Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation of Maldives
- **Operated by:** The Shipping Corporation of India

Key takeaways

- During its maiden voyage, a vessel from Tuticorin to Kochi on September 21, 2020, from where it will proceed to Kulhudhuffushi port in North Maldives and then to Male port.
- This ferry service shall run twice a month.
- It will provide a cost effective direct and alternate means of transportation of goods between India and Maldives.
- It will further enhance people-to-people contact and boost bilateral trade.

SAARC and CICA Meetings held

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations

In news

- Recently, the Foreign Ministers' meetings of the SAARC and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) took place in a virtual manner.

Key takeaways

- India called the SAARC countries to collectively resolve to defeat the scourge of terrorism, including the forces that nurture, support and encourage an environment of terror and conflict.
- Pakistan also made a detailed statement on the resolution of "long-standing disputes"
- All SAARC nations built a common stand on the need to cooperate in battling the coronavirus pandemic.
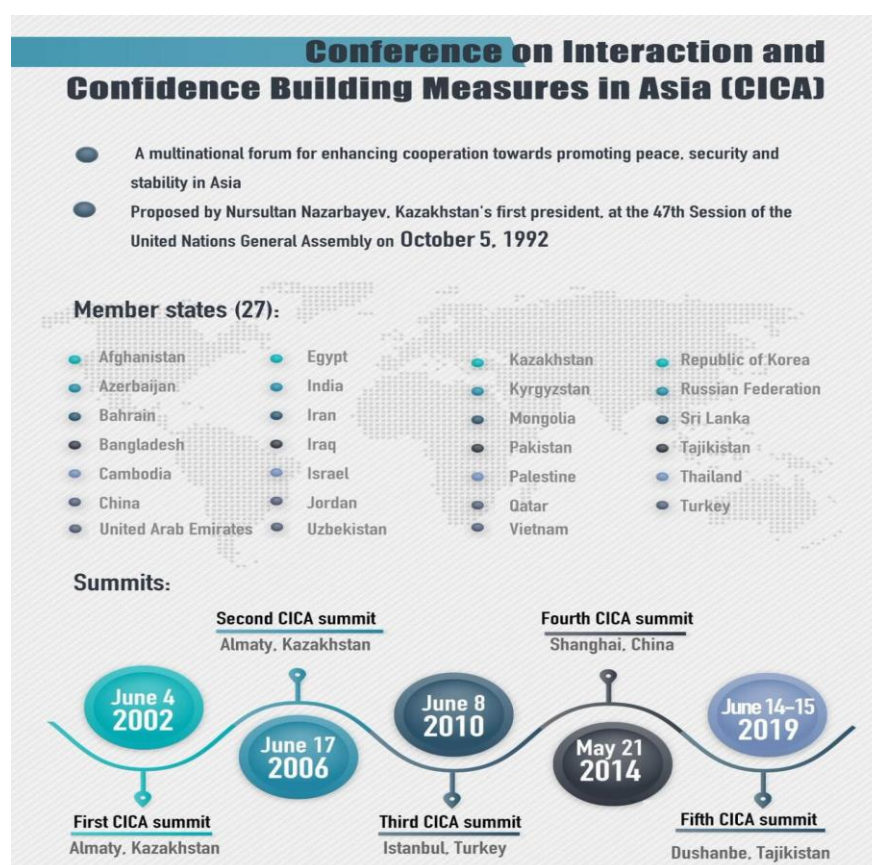
Important value additions

Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA)

- It is a multi-national forum for enhancing cooperation towards promoting peace, security and stability in Asia.
- The First Ministerial Meeting of CICA took place in September, 1999.
- It consists of 27 member nations from Asia including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Egypt, India etc.

- Japan, Indonesia, USA etc. are some of its Observer Nations.
- Republic of Tajikistan is the CICA Chairman for the period 2018-2020.

Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict (Map-based)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations
In news
- Recently, territorial dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region has re-erupted with heavy clashes.
- Armenia and Azerbaijan are part of Transcaucasia or South Caucasia. It is a geographical region in the vicinity of the southern Caucasus Mountains on the border of Eastern Europe and Western Asia consisting of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.
- The Caucasus are a strategically important mountainous region in south-east Europe. For centuries, different powers in the region - both Christian and Muslim - have vied for control there.

Do you know?
- Nagorno-Karabakh region has 95% of the population as ethnically Armenian and is controlled by them but it is internationally recognised as part of Azerbaijan.

Image source: [Click here]

Gilgit-Baltistan to Become a Pakistani Province (Map-based)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations

In news

- Recently, Pakistan has decided to elevate Gilgit-Baltistan's status to that of a full-fledged province.
- Gilgit-Baltistan is one of the disputed territories of India.

Key takeaways

- Gilgit-Baltistan is an autonomous region now and with this elevation, it will become the 5th province of the country.
- Currently, Pakistan has four provinces - Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh.
- This elevation will lead to adequate representation from the province on all constitutional bodies, including the National Assembly and the Senate.
- The Government will also start working on the Moqpondass Special Economic Zone (SEZ) under the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).
- India has held that the Government of Pakistan or its judiciary has no locus standi on territories illegally and forcibly occupied by it.

UN and the retreat from multilateralism

Context: The United Nations commemorated its 75th anniversary on September 21, 2020.
Challenges to UN are

1. Leadership withdrawal from West

- The challenge to multilateralism is coming not from the have-nots, but the main stakeholders of the system.
- The U.S., which created the international system as we know today, is no longer willing to be its "guarantor of last resort".
- U.S. President Donald Trump has stressed repeatedly on "America First" and suggested that others too should put their countries first.

- The U.S. is not alone in withdrawing from multilateralism. Brexit has shown that nationalism remains strong in Europe

2. China not poised to occupy the space left by US
- China's assertion of a role on the world stage is not an embrace of the idea of multilateralism.
- Its flagship Belt and Road Initiative consists of a series of bilateral credit agreements with recipient countries with no mechanism for multilateral consultation or oversight

3. Increasing Polarisation of World
- President Trump has often highlighted China's culpability in the spread of the pandemic.
- He pointed out that China had banned internal flights but allowed international flights from Wuhan to continue. This set the stage for the spread of COVID-19.
- President Xi's sought to project the fight against COVID-19 as a matter of collective responsibility of the international community.
- US-China Trade war has further increased the animosity between two countries and threatens to split the world into two economic camps

4. Resource Crunch for UN
- Over 40 UN political missions and peacekeeping operations engage 95,000 troops, police, and civil personnel. To be effective, they have to be put on a sound financial basis.
- The UN peacekeeping budget, a little over $8 billion, is a small fraction of the $1.9 trillion military expenditure governments made in 2019.
- There was an **outstanding assessed contribution of $1.7 billion** for peacekeeping activities by the end of the financial year

5. Prospects for Public-Private partnership model for UN seems bleak
- Most of the humanitarian assistance, developmental work, and budgets of the UN specialised agencies are based on voluntary contributions. Hence, there are calls for increasing public-private partnerships
- The UN provides 'public goods' in terms of peace and development often in remote parts of the world and there may not be enough appetite on the part of corporations to fund UN initiatives

6. SDGs and Climate Goals are threatened
- COVID-19 pandemic has brought in its wake the deepest recession the world has seen since the 1930s
- This has made it more difficult to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) the UN had adopted.

Way Ahead
- The retreat from multilateralism would undermine the UN's capacity to face diverse challenges.
- We need to support reform not only to expand the permanent members' category of the Security Council but also to revitalise the role of the General Assembly, as it gives greater political space for developing countries.

Connecting the dots
- Declining Significance of SAARC – reasons and consequences

Arrest under Official Secrets Act

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations& GS-III - Security
In news

- Recently, Delhi police has arrested a strategic affairs analyst under the Official Secrets Act (OSA), 1923 for passing information such as the deployment of Indian troops on the border to Chinese intelligence officers.

Important value additions

Official Secrets Act (OSA)

- OSA broadly deals with two aspects — spying or espionage and disclosure of secret information of the government.
- However, the OSA does not define the secret information.
- Generally secret information includes any official code, password, sketch, plan, model, article, note, document, or information.
- If guilty, a person may get up to 14 years' imprisonment, a fine, or both. Both the person communicating the information and the person receiving the information can be punished under the OSA.

India-Sri Lanka Virtual Bilateral Summit held

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations
In news

- Recently, Indian Prime Minister and Sri Lankan PM held the first-ever India-Sri Lanka Virtual Bilateral Summit.

Key takeaways

- A grant assistance of 15 million dollars shall be provided to Sri Lanka.
- The grant will assist in deepening people-to-people linkages between the two countries in the sphere of Buddhism.
- They agreed that the Indian side would facilitate the visit of a delegation of Buddhist pilgrims from Sri Lanka in the first inaugural flight to Kushinagar.
- Both sides also agreed to explore opportunities in the areas of Ayurveda and Yoga.
- India and Sri Lanka have reached an understanding to extend the MoU on High Impact Community Development Projects for a five-year period beginning 2020.
- Both leaders agreed to continue the successful Indian housing project and gave instructions to the relevant officials to fast-track the construction of 10,000 houses in the plantation sector.
- Implementation of the 13th Amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution was also emphasised as it is essential for carrying forward the process of peace and reconciliation and realizing the expectations of Tamils for equality.

Do you know?

- Kushinagar Airport was designated as an international airport recently recognizing its importance as a Buddhist site.

Increase in Frequency of Medicanes

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations
In news
- Recently, scientists have warned that extra-tropical storms in the Mediterranean Sea, known as 'Medicanes' or 'Mediterranean Hurricanes', could become more frequent due to human-induced climate change.

Important value additions

Medicanes
- Medicanes are tropical-like cyclones formed over the Mediterranean Sea.
- With the surrounding dry climate and the relatively shallow waters of the sea, the occurrence of tropical-like cyclones is infrequent.
- They typically form in the fall or winter months and occur once or twice a year.
- On September 18, 2020, a medicane named Lanos made landfall along the coast of Greece and caused heavy rainfall and flooding in Greece and surrounding islands.

World Bank's Human Capital Index 2020

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Human Resources
In news
- Recently, the World Bank released the Human Capital Index (HCI) report for 2020.
- India has been ranked at the 116th position in the HCI 2020.
- Last year India was ranked 115 out of 157 countries.
- India's score increased to 0.49 in 2020 from 0.44 in 2018.

Key takeaways
- **Parameters Used in HCI**: Health and education data of children for 174 countries up to March 2020.
- It covers 98% of the world's population.
- The pandemic puts at risk the decade's progress in building human capital, including the improvements in health, survival rates, school enrollment, and reduced stunting.
- More than 1 billion children have been out of school and could lose out, on average, half a year of schooling.
- It has created significant disruptions to essential health services for women and children, with many children missing out on crucial vaccinations.
- It has increased income inequality, its economic impact has been particularly deep for women and for the most disadvantaged families, leaving many vulnerable to food insecurity and poverty.

INDIA AND THE WORLD

AIIB Loan for Mumbai Urban Transport Project -3

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-II – International Relations; Global Groupings

In News:
- A loan agreement for a USD 500 million for Mumbai Urban Transport Project-III (MUTP-III) was signed recently..
- **Signatories:** Central Government, Maharashtra Government, Mumbai Railway Vikas Corporation and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)

Important value additions

Mumbai Urban Transport Project-III (MUTP-III)
- It is a project supervised and implemented by the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA).
- **Objective:** To enhance the network capacity, service quality and safety of Mumbai's suburban railway system.
- **Deadline for completion:** 2022.
- **Major Objectives**: (1) Improve traffic and transportation situation in MMR. (2) Institutional development and strengthening.
- Network capacity in the region will increase.
- Mobility will increase.
- Journey time and fatal accidents of commuters will reduce.
- Carbon emissions will reduce since passengers will shift away from higher-carbon road transport.

Do you know?

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
- It is a multilateral development bank that aims to improve economic and social outcomes in Asia.
- The bank currently has 103 members as well as 21 prospective members from around the world
- India is the largest beneficiary of AIIB financing for infrastructure projects. Some major AIIB-approved projects in India:
  a. Bangalore Metro Rail Project (USD 335 million).
  b. Gujarat Rural Roads (MMGSY) Project (USD 329 million).
  c. India Infrastructure Fund.
  d. Andhra Pradesh 24×7 – Power For All Project.
  e. USD 750 Million for Covid-19 support for India.

17th India-Vietnam Meeting held

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-II – International Relations

In News:
- Recently, the 17th meeting of India-Vietnam Joint Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation was held.

- Recent developments in India-Vietnam Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (since 2016) were reviewed.

Key takeaways

- Both countries agreed to enhance their bilateral cooperation in line with India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI).
- Both sides agreed to coordinate closely at multilateral and regional forums like the UN Security Council (UNSC) and ASEAN.
- They agreed to explore closer cooperation in emerging areas such as civil nuclear energy, space, marine sciences and new technologies.
- India also invited Vietnam to take advantage of India's new economic capacities and demands

Important value additions

Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)

- **Launched by:** Indian Prime Minister at the East Asia Summit (2019).
- **Focus:** Maritime Security, Maritime Ecology, Maritime Resources, Disaster Risk Reduction and Management, Maritime Transport, etc.

Do you know?

- Both India and Vietnam will serve concurrently as non-permanent members of UNSC in 2021.

Image source: Click here

Global Innovation Index 2020 released

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Innovation

In news

- Global Innovation Index (GII) 2020 was recently released.
- **Released by:** World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

Key takeaways

- **India's rank**: 48th
- India has climbed 4 spots.
- With this, India ranked in the top 50 countries for the first time in the Global Innovation Index.
- **World's most-innovative economies**: (1) Switzerland, (2) Sweden, (3) USA, (4) UK and (5) Netherlands.
- India ranks in the top 15 in indicators such as ICT services exports, government online services, graduates in science and engineering and R&D-intensive global companies.
- India is the lower middle-income economy with the highest innovation due to universities like IIT Delhi and Bombay, IIS Bengaluru and other top scientific publications.

Do you know?

- India was at the 52nd position in 2019 and was ranked 81st in the year 2015.
- The WIPO had also accepted India as one of the leading innovation achievers of 2019 in the central and southern Asian region.
- The 2020 edition of the GII presents the annual innovation ranking of 131 economies.
- Its 80 indicators explore a broad vision of innovation, including political environment, education, infrastructure and business sophistication.
- **The theme of GII, 2020** - Who Will Finance Innovation?

India-Bangladesh Inland Waterways

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- International relations
In news

- The trial run on a new river route from Daudkandi in Bangladesh to Sonamura in Tripura started recently.
- Distance covered will be 93 km through river Gumti or Gomati.
- The route will connect Tripura with Bangladesh using the inland waterways for the first time.
- It will greatly enhance connectivity between Bangladesh and the North Eastern states of India boosting bilateral trade with Bangladesh.
- The opening of the new route follows the signing of the 2nd addendum to the Protocol for Inland Water Trade & Transit (PIWTT) in May 2020 which opened two new routes.

Do you know?

- The PIWTT was signed between India and Bangladesh in 1972 to connect the two countries through inland waterways.

Eighth East Asia Summit Economic Ministers' Meeting

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Global Groupings; International relations & GS-III - Trade
In news

- Recently, the 8th East Asia Summit Economic Ministers' Meeting (EAS-EMM) was held virtually.
- **Attended by:** 10 ASEAN members and eight other nations, including India, the USA, and China.

Key takeaways

- The importance of strengthening regional supply chains to make them resilient in times of Covid-19 pandemic and to increase economic growth was highlighted.
- Any trade-restrictive emergency measures put in place to address the impact of Covid-19 must be consistent with the WTO rules.
- They must not create unnecessary barriers to trade.
- Support for the necessary reforms in the WTO was also discussed.
- Facilitating the essential movement of people across borders.
- Commitment to facilitate supply chain connectivity and inclusion of essential goods.
- Harness the opportunities of the digital economy to overcome the challenges posed by restricted movement.

Important value additions

East Asia Summit

- It was established in 2005.
- It is a forum of 18 regional leaders for strategic dialogue and cooperation on the key political, security, and economic challenges facing the Indo-Pacific region.
- India is one of the founding members of the East Asia Summit.
- **Membership**: ASEAN members and 8 other countries namely Australia, China, Japan, India, New Zealand, South Korea, Russia and USA.
- It is an ASEAN-centred forum so it can only be chaired by an ASEAN member.
- **ASEAN members:** Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

East Asia Summit
Leaders' summit in Naypyidaw, Myanmar on November 12-13

■ Members of Association of Southeast Asian Nations
Sources: Asean/Australia DFAT

ASEAN-India Economic Ministers' Consultations

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- International relations; Global Groupings
In news

- Recently, the 17th ASEAN-India Economic Ministers Consultations was held virtually, co-chaired by India and Vietnam.

Key takeaways

- The meeting was attended by the Trade Ministers of all the 10 ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries.
- The Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to take collective actions in mitigating the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- They also resolved to ensure macroeconomic and financial stability and resilient supply chain connectivity.
- The report of the ASEAN India Business Council (AIBC) was placed.
- It was also recommended that the ASEAN India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) be reviewed for mutual benefit.
- Discussions on review of the ASEAN India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) took place.

Important value additions

- **ASEAN India-Business Council (AIBC)** was set up in March 2003 as a forum to bring key private sector players from India and the ASEAN countries on a single platform for business networking and sharing of ideas.
- The **AITIGA** is a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) among ASEAN countries and India which came into force in January, 2010.
- **ASEAN countries**: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.
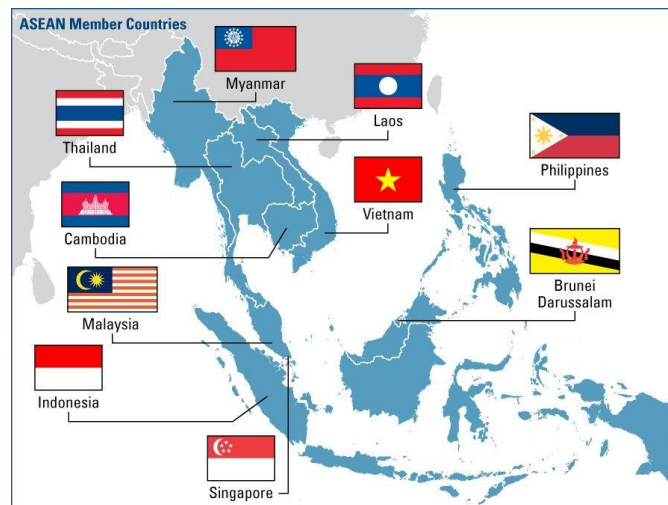
Image source: Click here

Proposal of Supply Chain Resilience Initiative

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Supply chain management
In news

- Covid-19 and trade tensions between China and the USA are threatening supply chains.
- Thus, Japan has mooted the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI) as a trilateral approach to trade, with India and Australia as the key-partners.

Important value additions

Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI)

- The initiative aims to reduce the dependency on a single nation (at present China).
- SCRI is a direct response to individual companies and economies concerned about Chinese political behaviour and the supply chain disruption.
- The initiative also potentially sees other Asian and Pacific Rim nations later.

Objective:
- To attract foreign direct investment to turn the Indo-Pacific into an "economic powerhouse".
- To build a mutually complementary relationship among partner countries.
- To work out a plan to build on the existential supply chain network.

The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) urges for a review of criminal contempt laws in India

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- International relations; Important Organisations; Judiciary
In news

The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) has urged for a review of criminal contempt laws in India,
It has expressed its concerns over the Supreme Court's decision to convict Advocate PrashantBhushan for criminal contempt.

Key takeaways
- For the ICJ, the conviction appears to be inconsistent with international standards on freedom of expression and the role of lawyers.
- It goes against the general protection of free speech and expression in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- It is also inconsistent with the freedom of expression law guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- It goes against the principles enshrined under the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers.

Important value additions
Contempt of Court
- Article 129 and 215 of the Indian Constitution empowers the SC and High Courts respectively to punish people for their respective contempt.
- **Article 142:** It empowers the SC to punish for its contempt.
- However, what is contempt of court per se has not been defined by the Indian Constitution.
- The Contempt of Court Act, 1971, elaborately deals with the concept of contempt of court.
- The Act divides contempt into civil and criminal contempt.

Do you know?
- The SC had recently found PrashantBhushan guilty of 'scandalizing the court' on a suo-motu consideration of his two tweets. It has fined him with Rs. 1.

To understand the controversy, click here.

First World Solar Technology Summit

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- renewable sources of energy
 In news
 The first World Solar Technology Summit (WSTS) is being organized by the International Solar Alliance (ISA) on 8th September, 2020.

- **Organized by**: The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI).
- FICCI is also the convenor of ISA Global Leadership Task Force on Innovation.

Key takeaways

- More than 26000 participants from 149 countries have registered to join the virtual Summit.
- It is expected to bring the spotlight on accelerating affordable and sustainable clean green energy.
- Three agreements shall be announced: (1) ISA and International Institute of Refrigeration, (2) ISA and and Global Green Growth Institute and (3) ISA and National Thermal Power Corporation.
- A tripartite agreement between India's Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, the World Bank and the International Solar Alliance is also set to be inked.
- ISA's technology journal, Solar Compass 360 will also be launched during the summit.

To read more about it, click here
Important value additions
International Solar Alliance (ISA)

- The launch of ISA was announced by the Indian Prime Minister and former French President on 30th November 2015, at the 21st session of the United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP-21) in Paris, France.
- **Headquarter:** Gurugram, India
- **Aim:** Lower the cost of technology and finance and thereby facilitate deployment of over 1,000 GW of solar energy and mobilize more than USD 1,000 billion into solar power by 2030 in Member countries.
- It was conceived as a coalition of solar-resource-rich countries (which lie either completely or partly between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn) to address their special energy needs.
- 67 countries have signed and ratified the ISA framework agreement.
- The Assembly of the ISA is the apex decision-making body which comprises representatives from each Member Country.
- It could play a significant role in achieving the universal energy access goal (SDG 7).

ADB signs $500 million loan for Delhi-Meerut RRTS Corridor

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- International Relations; Global Groupings
In news

- The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Government of India signed a $500 million loan, to build a modern, high-speed 82-kilometer Delhi-Meerut Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) corridor**.**

- It is the first tranche of a total $1 billion facility**.**
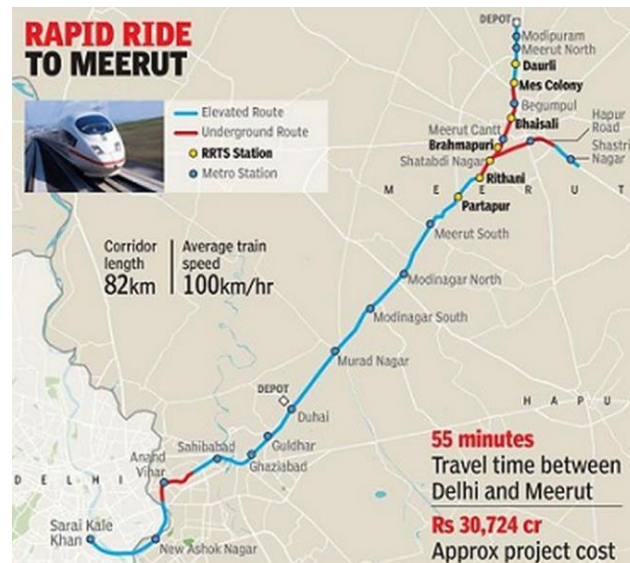
Key takeaways

- It will improve regional connectivity and mobility in India's national capital region (NCR).
- The first tranche loan will support construction of the first of three priority rail corridors planned under the NCR Regional Plan 2021 to connect Delhi to other cities in adjoining states.

Important value additions

Asian Development Bank (ADB)

- It is a regional development bank established on 19 December 1966, which is headquartered in **Manila, Philippines**.
- ADB aims to promote social and economic development in Asia.
- The bank admits the members of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) and non-regional developed countries.

Do you know?

- The ADB was modeled closely on the World Bank, and has a similar weighted voting system.
- From 31 members at its establishment, ADB now has 68 members.
- ADB is an official United Nations Observer.
- India was a founding member of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in 1966 and is now the bank's fourth largest shareholder and top borrower.
- As of 31 December 2019, ADB's five largest shareholders are Japan and the United States (each with 15.6% of total shares), the People's Republic of China (6.4%), India (6.3%), and Australia (5.8%).

Indo-China Defence Ministerial Meet held

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II- Global Groupings; International Relations

In news

- The Indo-China Defence Minister level meet recently took place on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Defence Ministers' meeting in Moscow, Russia.

Key takeaways

- India stressed upon a peaceful, stable and secure region of SCO member states.
- India also expressed concern at the security situation in Afghanistan
- India called upon the Gulf countries to resolve differences between them by "dialogue based on mutual respect.
- India unequivocally condemned terrorism in all forms and manifestations.
- It also asserted the need to build institutional capacity to deal with both traditional and non-traditional threats.

FACTS ABOUT SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION
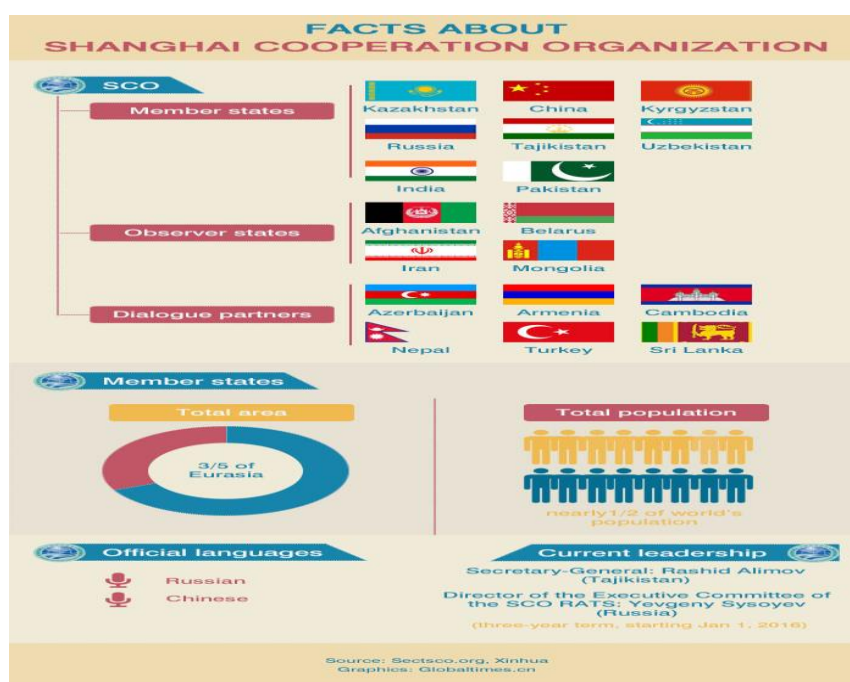
Important value additions

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

- **Formation**: 2001
- **Type**: Mutual security, political, economic organisation
- **Headquarters**: Beijing, China.
- It is a major Eurasian organization that represents half of the world's population.
- It is a permanent intergovernmental international organisation.
- India joined SCO in 2017.
- **The organisation has two permanent bodies** — the SCO Secretariat (Beijing, China) and the Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) (Tashkent, Uzbekistan).
- **Significance**: It has the capacity to counterbalance the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

India &China agree on Five Point Plan

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – International relations & GS-III – Cybersecurity
In news
- Recently, India and China have agreed on a five points plan to disengage troops and reduce tensions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- Indian and Chinese troops have been engaged in a four and a half month long stand-off.
- The talks were held on the margins of a Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) meeting in Russia.

Five Point Plan
- Both sides should take guidance from Wuhan and Mahabalipuram summits on developing India-China relations. Differences should not be allowed to become disputes.
- Border troops should continue their dialogue, quickly disengage, maintain proper distance and ease tensions.
- The two sides shall abide by all the existing agreements and protocols on China-India boundary affairs and avoid any action that could escalate matters.
- Continuing communications through the Special Representatives mechanism, and meetings of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) on border affairs.
- Working to conclude new confidence-building measures.

Do you know?
- The Special Representatives (SRs) on the Boundary Question was established in 2003.
- It provided important guidance for ensuring peace and tranquility in border areas in a challenging situation.
- WMCC was established in 2012.

5th BRICS Culture Ministers' Meet held

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations; Global Groupings
In news
- The 5th BRICS Culture Ministers' Meeting was held through a video conference.
- **Chairmanship:** Russian Federation.

Key takeaways
- Impact of the Covid-19 situation on the cultural sphere in the BRICS countries was discussed.
- Possible implementation of joint cultural online-projects within BRICS was reviewed.
- India also suggested exploring possibilities of hosting a Digital Online Exhibition on a shared theme towards the end of 2021 under the auspices of BRICS Alliance of Museums.
- The National Gallery of Modern Arts, New Delhi will host the BRICS Joint Exhibition titled 'Bonding Regions & Imagining Cultural Synergies' under the auspices of the BRICS Alliance of Art Museums and Galleries in 2021.

Important value additions
BRICS
- BRICS is an association of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.
- All are members of G20.
- Represent over 3.1 billion people, 41% of the world population.
- As of 2018, BRICS have US $40.55 trillion (32% of World's GDP PPP).
- Bilateral relations among BRICS nations are conducted on the basis of non-interference, equality, and mutual benefit.

- There are two components that make up the financial architecture of BRICS: (1) New Development Bank (NDB) (BRICS Development Bank); (2) Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA).

Do you know?
- The chairmanship of the forum is rotated annually among the members, in accordance with the acronym B-R-I-C-S.
- During the Sixth BRICS Summit in Fortaleza (Brazil) in 2014, the leaders signed the Agreement establishing the New Development Bank (NDB - Shanghai, China).
- They also signed the BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement to provide short-term liquidity support to the members.

India elected as the member of the Commission on Status of Women

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I – Society; Women Empowerment & GS-II – International Relations
In news
- India has been elected as the member of the Commission on Status of Women (CSW), a body of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).
- India will be a member for four years (2021 to 2025).

Important value additions
Commission on Status of Women (CSW)
- The CSW is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.
- It is a functional commission of the ECOSOC.
- It was established by ECOSOC resolution 11(II) of 21 June 1946.
- It promotes women's rights, highlights the reality of women's lives throughout the world and helps in shaping global standards on gender equality and the empowerment of women.
- 45 member states of the United Nations serve as members of the Commission at any one time.

India-Japan Logistics Agreement

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations
In news
- Recently Logistics Agreement was signed between India and Japan.
Key takeaways
- It is aimed at greater maritime cooperation.
- It can upgrade India-Japan naval exercises.
- It establishes the enabling framework for closer cooperation between the armed forces of both countries in reciprocal provision of supplies and services.
- It will also enhance the interoperability, assistance in maintaining regional security and further increase the bilateral defence engagements.
- It will remain in force for 10 years and will be automatically extended for periods of 10 years unless one of the parties decides to end it.

India and the Abraham Accords

Context: The White House ceremony on 15th September 2020 marking the formal normalisation of Israel's ties with UAE and Bahrain has created a significant inflection point in regional history and geopolitics.

Under the agreement, the **UAE and Bahrain would normalise ties with Israel**, leading to better economic, political and security engagement.

To understand the Politics behind this deal: Click here and here.

Do You Know?

- Except with Jordan and Egypt, Israel does not have diplomatic relations with Gulf Arab states owing to its long-standing conflict with Palestinians
- Israel had signed peace agreements with **Egypt in 1979 and with Jordan in 1994.**

How is the September 15 reconciliation different from previous peace agreements (1979 & 1994)?

- Firstly, UAE and Bahrain **do not have any territorial dispute** with Israel, nor have they ever been at war with it.
- Although formally committed to an **Arab consensus** (two-state resolution of the Palestine cause) UAE & Bahrain have steadily moved towards having substantive links with Israel in recent years.
- Hence, the 'Abraham Accords' entered with the UAE and Bahrain are 'peace-for-peace' deals without any physical quid pro quo by Israel.

Implications of Abraham Accord for India

- **India's Stance:** Geopolitically, India has welcomed the establishment of diplomatic relations between the UAE and Israel, calling both its strategic partners
- **Foreign Policy Significance:** India has stronger, multifaceted and growing socioeconomic engagements with Israel and the Gulf countries. Therefore, any changes in regional dynamics will impact the India's Strategic interests in the region.
- **Eases India's Balancing Act:** The new accord widens the moderate constituency for peaceful resolution of the Palestine dispute, easing India's diplomatic balancing act.
- **New Arena of Proxy War:** The possibility of the southern Gulf becoming the new arena of the proxy war between Iran and Israel cannot be ruled out, particularly in Shia pockets. India would have to be on its guard to monitor such conflicts.
- **Backlash on Jihadi Fringe movement**: The Israel-GCC ties may provoke new polarisations between the Jihadi fringe and the mainstream.
- **Economic Challenges**: India has acquired a large and rewarding regional footprint, particularly as the preferred source of manpower, food products, pharmaceuticals, gem and jewellery, light engineering items, etc. This position could be challenged by Israel which has niche strength in defence, security, solar power, horticulture etc.
- **India-Iran Relations impacted:** For decades, one of the main sources of instability in West Asia has been the cold war between Saudi Arabia (Sunni) and Iran (Shia). This accord may make the rift wider and more violent, thus testing India-Iran relations.

Conclusion

- India should use this opportunity to give itself a bigger role in a region which is its strategic backyard.

- The deal opens up new opportunities for India to play a much larger role in the regional security and stability in the Gulf, where New Delhi enjoys special relations with both Abu Dhabi and Jerusalem.
- In the evolving scenario, there may be scope for a profitable trilateral synergy, but India cannot take its preponderance as a given.

Connecting the dots:

- Israel-Palestine Conflict
- USA's West Asia Peace plan

SAARC – Uniting to combat COVID-19

Context: With the pandemic showing no signs of abating, growth prospects for the world's fastest-growing region, South Asia, appear grim.

COVID-19 in South Asia

- India has the second largest number of COVID-19 cases in the world (over 55 lakh) after the U.S
- Bangladesh has around 3.5 lakh cases.
- Bhutan and the Maldives have managed to largely contain community transmission and avoid prolonged lockdowns due to a higher testing rate.
- **Low Mortality:** Unlike other regions, South Asian countries are experiencing a lower mortality rate despite having a higher infection rate.
- **Reasons for Low Mortality**: The region's tropical climate, protection offered by a tuberculosis vaccine (BCG), exposure to malaria, and a weaker strain of the virus are considered as some of the reasons for low mortality

Have the governments in South Asia announced stimulus package?

- **India**, in late March, announced a $22.5 billion relief package to ensure food security and cash transfers to save the livelihoods of an estimated 800 million people living in poverty. RBI slashed the repo and reverse repo rate to create liquidity for businesses.
- **Bangladesh**, in early April, announced a stimulus package worth about $8 billion in addition to an earlier $595 million incentive package for export-oriented industries.
- **Pakistan**, in late March, unveiled a comprehensive fiscal stimulus package of $6.76 billion. Its central bank also slashed the interest rate.
- **Maldives**, in late April, mobilised a $161.8 million emergency fund and **Afghan** government allocated about $25 million to fight COVID-19.

Concerns:

- **Inadequate Testing:** Countries facing a surge in cases, such as India, could have flattened the curve by increasing the number of tests
- **Data Reliability:** South Asia houses one-fourth of the global population and one-third of the global poor, many COVID-19 deaths might have gone unnoticed, unreported or even under-reported.
- **Implementation of Economic Package:**Although countries like India and Bangladesh announced financial and material stimulus packages, distribution concerns remain unaddressed
- **Inoperative SAARC COVID-19 fund:** The fund was created following Indian PM Narendra Modi's call to South Asian leaders, but governments are yet to decide on its modus operandi.
- **Narrow Geopolitical Rivalry:**This crisis is likely to result in prolonged economic slowdown in South Asia which will be further complicated by narrow geopolitical rivalry.

Way Ahead - **A coordinated response mechanism**

- South Asia region could leverage its existing institutional framework under the umbrella of SAARC to effectively respond to the crisis.
- For instance, SAARC Food Banks could be activated to tackle the imminent regional food crisis,
- The SAARC Finance Forum can be activated to formulate a regional economic policy response

Connecting the dots

- BIMSTEC
- Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

World Rhino Day

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment; Biodiversity; Conservation

In news

- World Rhino Day was celebrated on September 22.
- **Objective:** Generating awareness about the threats faced by Rhinoceroses all over the world.

WORLD RHINO DAY
22 September
Celebrating
the FIVE species of rhinoceros

Sumatran rhino

Black rhino

Greater one-horned rhino

Javan rhino

White rhino
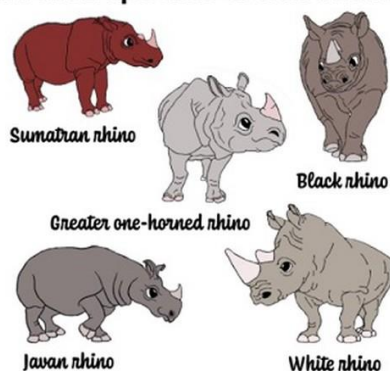
Important value additions

- World Rhino Day was first announced by World Wildlife Fund (WWF) - South Africa in 2010.
- It celebrates all five species of rhino - Black, white, greater one-horned, Sumatran and Javan rhinos.
- It also generates awareness of issues regarding their well-being.
- **Threats**: Poaching, urbanization and pollution.
- It is the only large mammal species in Asia to be down-listed from endangered to vulnerable in the IUCN Red list in 2008.

Do you know?

- Indian Environment Ministry has launched the National Rhino Conservation Strategy in 2019 to conserve the greater one-horned rhinoceros.
- This is a first of its kind for the species in India which aims to work for the conservation of the species.
- **Objectives:** (1) Strengthening protection; (2) Expanding the distribution range; (3) Research and monitoring; (4) Adequate and sustained funding.
- India is home to the largest number of Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros in the world
- Its population is in the range of 3000 animals in Assam, West Bengal and UP.

ECONOMY

India's GDP falls 23.9% in first quarter: NSO data

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-III – Economy

In News:

- As per National Statistical Office (NSO), April-June 2020-21 Quarter GDP growth at constant prices (Real GDP) is -23.9%.
- It was measured from the same quarter previous year 2019-20.

Key takeaways

- All the sectors have shown negative growth except agriculture where the growth was 3.4%.
- India will face negative growth in the present quarter (July to Sept) also measured from July-Sept 2019-20.
- As we all know that the Demand of GDP in the economy comes from four sectors: Household (Consumption - C), Private Sector (Investment - I), Government (Consumption + Investment represented by G), Export - Import (X-M)
- In the Present Scenario, recession has been triggered because due to Lockdown, production was stopped then people lost jobs and their (consumer) demand decreased.
- Then, the businessmen reduced production and their demand for capital goods/raw material/ intermediate goods decreased.

Do you know?

- Once a country faces two consecutive quarters of negative real growth (measured from the same quarter previous year), then it is declared recession.
- India is also expected to see a full year contraction in real GDP in the present year by around 5%.
- India till now has faced recession four times in 1957-58 (-1.2% - drought), 1965-66 (-3.66% - drought), 1972-73 (-0.32% - Oil crisis) and 1979-80 (-5.2% - oil crisis/drought).

GST reform needs a new grand bargain

Context: 40th GST Council meeting and growing voices about compensation to states.

Do you know?

- Before GST, States had the power to levy some indirect taxes on economic activity. Therefore, after GST regime was introduced (in 2017), the Centre promised guaranteed compensation to the States for the first five years, for the revenues they lost after the shift from the earlier system.
- The compensation is calculated at a growth rate of 14% keeping 2015-16 as the base year.

Challenges for GST during the times of Pandemic

- **Shortfall**: The tax collection has dropped significantly, while expenditure needs are sharply higher, especially at the frontline of the battle, at the State level.
- **Centre abdicating responsibility**: Using an equivalent of the *Force Majeure* clause in commercial contracts, the Centre is abdicating its responsibility of making up for the shortfall in 14% growth in GST revenues to the states (compensation amount)
- **States are left for themselves**: It seems that the States have been told that they are on their own to meet the shortfall in revenues.

Why is Centre putting onus on States to finance themselves considered wrong?

- **Limited Avenues**: States do not have recourse to multiple options that the Centre has, such as issue of a sovereign bond (in dollars or rupees) or a loan against public sector unit shares from the RBI.
- **Less bargaining Power:** The Centre can anyway command much lower rates of borrowing from the markets as compared to the States.
- **Rating Agencies don't differentiate:** In terms of aggregate public sector borrowing, it does not matter for the debt markets, nor the rating agencies, whether it is the States or the Centre that is increasing their indebtedness.
- **Macroeconomic Stability is Centre's domain**: Fighting this recession through increased fiscal stimulus is basically the job of macroeconomic stabilisation, which is the Centre's domain.
- **Erodes Federal Trust:** Most importantly, breaking the important promise of compensation, using the alibi of the COVID-19 pandemic causes a serious dent in the trust built up between the Centre and States.

Way Forward – GST 2.0

- **Widening of Tax Base**: GST is a destination-based consumption tax, which must include all goods and services with very few exceptions, such as food and medicine
- **Low and stable single rate**: Widening of the tax base itself will allow us to go back to the original recommendation of a standard rate of 12%, to be fixed for at least a five-year period.
- **Some extra elbow room for the States' revenue autonomy**can be obtained by allowing the States non VATable surcharges on a small list of "sin" goods such as liquor, tobacco, polluting goods such as SUVs, and industrial fuels such as diesel, aviation turbine fuel and coal.
- **Sharing with Third Tier of Government:** Of the 12% GST, 10% can be equally shared between the States and the Centre, and 2% must be earmarked exclusively for the urban and rural local bodies, which ensures some basic revenue autonomy to them. The actual distribution across panchayats, districts and cities would be given by respective State Finance Commissions.

Conclusion

GST is a crucial and long-term structural reform which can address the fiscal needs of the future, strike the right and desired balance to achieve co-operative federalism and also lead to enhanced economic growth.

Connecting the dots

- Lessons from GST for One Nation One Ration Card

Adjusted Gross Revenue to be Paid in 10 Years

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Taxation

In news

- Recently, the SC allowed telecom companies (telcos) 10 years' time to pay their Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) dues to the government.

Key takeaways

- The telecom operators would make the payment of 10% of the total dues as demanded by the Department of Telecom by 31st March 2021.
- The yearly instalments would commence from 1st April, 2021 up to 31st March, 2031.
- The instalments need to be paid by 31st March every year.
- In the event of any default in making payment of annual instalments, interest would be levied as per the agreement along with penalty and interest on penalty automatically without reference to court.

- Besides, it would be punishable for contempt of court.
- Compliance with the court order should be reported by the telcos and the telecom department every year on 7th April.
- The sale of spectrum by telcos facing insolvency proceedings shall be decided by the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT).

Important value additions

Adjusted Gross Revenue

- AGR is a fee-sharing mechanism between the government and the telcos who shifted to the 'revenue-sharing fee' model in 1999, from the 'fixed license fee' model.
- In this course, telcos are supposed to share a percentage of AGR with the government.
- The telecom sector was liberalised under the National Telecom Policy, 1994 after which licenses were issued to companies in return for a fixed license fee.

Capping of MEIS Scheme Benefits

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Economy; Import and Export

In news

- The Central government has taken a decision to cap export incentives under Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) at Rs. 2 crore per exporter on outbound shipments made during September-December, 2020.

Key takeaways

- The ceiling would be subject to a downward revision to ensure that the total claim doesn't exceed the allocated Rs. 5,000 crore for the period.
- The new Import Export Code (IEC) obtained on or after 1st September will be ineligible to submit any MEIS claim for exports.
- The Indian government has announced a new WTO-compliant scheme called Remission of Duties or Taxes On Export Product (RoDTEP) which will replace MEIS starting 1st January 2021.

Important value additions

Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS)

- It was introduced in the Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) 2015-20
- **Objective:** To offset infrastructural inefficiencies and associated costs involved in exporting goods/products which are produced /manufactured in India including products produced/manufactured by MSME Sector

Remission of Duties or Taxes On Export Product (RoDTEP)

- The new scheme is implemented from 1st January 2020.
- It creates a fully automated route for Input Tax Credit (ITC) in the GST to help increase exports in India.
- It will reimburse all the taxes/duties/levies being charged at the Central/State/Local level which are not currently refunded under any of the existing schemes but are incurred at the manufacturing and distribution process.

- The Ministry of Finance has set up a committee under the chairmanship of former commerce and home secretary GK Pillai to finalise the rates under RoDTEP.

RBI's Contingency Fund (CF)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Economy

In news

The RBI has retained an amount of Rs 73,615 crore within the RBI by transferring it to the Contingency Fund (CF).

- It shall lead to a sharp fall in the transfer of surplus to the government in the current year.

Important value additions

Contingency Fund (CF)

- It is a specific provision meant for meeting unexpected and unforeseen contingencies.
- It includes depreciation in the value of securities, risks arising out of monetary/exchange rate policy operations, systemic risks and any risk arising on account of the special responsibilities enjoined upon the Reserve Bank.
- This amount is retained within the RBI.
- **Section 47 of the RBI Act:** Profits or surplus of the RBI are to be transferred to the government, after making various contingency provisions.
- **RBI's's main risk provision accounts:** Contingency Fund, Currency and Gold Revaluation Account (CGRA), Investment Revaluation Account Foreign Securities (IRA-FS) and Investment Revaluation Account-Rupee Securities (IRA-RS).

The Currency and Gold Revaluation Account (CGRA)

- It is maintained by the RBI to take care of currency risk, interest rate risk and movement in gold prices.
- Unrealised gains or losses on valuation of foreign currency assets (FCA) and gold are not taken to the income account but instead accounted for in the CGRA.

RBI'S Loan Recast Plan specified

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Economy

In news

- The RBI specified five financial ratios and sector-specific thresholds for resolution of COVID-19-related stressed assets in 26 sectors, including auto components, aviation and tourism.

Key takeaways

- The circular issued for resolution of the stressed assets is based on the recommendations of the K.V. Kamath Committee.
- The 26 sectors include automobiles, power, tourism, cement, chemicals, gems and jewellery, logistics, mining, manufacturing, real estate, and shipping among others.
- Five financial metrics need to be taken into account while deciding on a recast plan: (a) total outstanding liabilities/ adjusted tangible net worth, (b) total debt/Ebitda, (c) current ratio, (d) debt service coverage ratio, and (e) average debt service coverage ratio.

- For each of these parameters, RBI has prescribed either a floor or a ceiling.
- The committee has set 180 days to implement the plan and make an inter creditor agreement (ICA) mandatory.
- The tenure of a loan may be extended by a maximum of two years, with or without a moratorium.
- The resolution process shall be treated as invoked once lenders representing 75% by value and 60% by number agree to invoke the same.

Monetisation of assets of POWERGRID

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Economy; Infrastructure
In news

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved monetisation of assets of POWERGRID.
- It is a Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) under the Ministry of Power, through the Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvIT) model.
- This is the first time any PSU in the Power Sector will undertake asset recycling by monetising its assets through the InvIT model.
- It will use the proceeds to fund the new and under-construction capital projects.
- This approval would help POWERGRID to monetise in the first lot, assets with gross block value of more than 7000 crore.
- These assets, which are mainly High Voltage Transmission lines and substations, are held by POWERGRID in form of Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs).

Important value additions
Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvIT)

- It is like a mutual fund.
- It enables direct investment of small amounts of money from possible individual/institutional investors in infrastructure to earn a small portion of the income as return.

Do you know?

- POWERGRID, a public limited company under the administrative control of the Ministry of Power, Government of India, started its commercial operation in the year 1992-93 and is today, a Maharatna company, engaged in the business of power transmission.

Revised Priority Sector Lending Guidelines

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Banking; Economy
In news

- Recently, the RBI released revised Priority Sector Lending (PSL) guidelines.
- The guidelines align with emerging national priorities and also bring sharper focus on inclusive development.

New additions to Priority Sector Lending (PSL) sectors

- Bank finance to start-ups up to Rs. 50 crore.
- Loans to farmers for installation of solar power plants for solarisation of grid connected agriculture pumps and loans for setting up Compressed BioGas plants.
- Higher credit limit for Farmers Producers Organisations (FPOs) undertaking farming with assured marketing of their produce at a predetermined price.

- The credit limits for renewable energy, health infrastructure, including the projects under 'Ayushman Bharat', have been doubled.
- It seeks to address the issues concerning regional disparities in the flow of priority sector credit at district level which includes:
- Ranking districts on the basis of per capita credit flow to the priority sector.
- Building an incentive framework for districts with comparatively low flow of credit and a dis-incentive framework for districts with comparatively high flow of priority sector credit.
- Higher weightage has been assigned to priority sector credit in 'identified districts' where priority sector credit flow is comparatively low

Important value additions

Priority Sector Lending

- The RBI mandates banks to lend a certain portion of their funds to specified sectors, like agriculture, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), export credit, education, housing, social infrastructure, renewable energy among others.
- All scheduled commercial banks and foreign banks (with a sizable presence in India) are mandated to set aside 40% of their Adjusted Net Bank Credit (ANDC) for lending to these sectors.
- Regional rural banks, co-operative banks and small finance banks have to allocate 75% of ANDC to PSL.
- The idea behind this is to ensure that adequate institutional credit reaches some of the vulnerable sectors of the economy, which otherwise may not be attractive for banks from the profitability point of view.

Pandemic may force the government to borrow more

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Economy

In news

- Revenue shortfalls in India due to COVID-19are likely to force the government to borrow more but it will only consider monetizing its deficit as a last resort.
- Borrowing plans for the second half of the financial year will be reviewed by government and RBI officials letter September.
- The possibility of monetizing the debt has already been discussed but not yet decided.

Key takeaways

- Earlier Government used to 'Monetize the deficit'.
- This practise was stopped in 1997 by signing an agreement between RBI and Govt. of India.
- This was also included in the FRBM Act 2003.
- Right now Governmentdoes not prefer deficit monetization but it can consider it as the last resort.

Do you know?

- Deficit monetization leads to extra money reaching into the economy which leads to inflation and it also may lead to 'Sovereign Ratings' downgrade which then hurts investments in the country.
- RBI can pump liquidity in economy through open market operation.

- This will lead to decrease in interest rate (more money supply means less interest rate), which will basically help government in raising money from the market ('deficit financing' rather that 'monetisation of deficit') at lesser interest rate.

Important value additions

Monetising the Deficit/Monetizing the Debt/Deficit Monetization
- It means that if Government has deficit, then it will ask RBI to print notes and give it to Government and in return Government will give its Bonds to RBI.
- So, it will be basically debt on Government.
- Actually the word 'monetize' has relation with currency/notes/cash.

Deficit Financing
- It generally means that Government is having deficit (expenses are more than receipts) and it will arrange for its financing of the deficit.
- This deficit can be financed from market borrowing or borrowing from abroad orGovernmentmay ask RBI to finance its deficit by printing more money.
- So, in deficit financing there can be various options to finance and one of the options could be from RBI by printing money.

NITI Aayog at an advanced stage for preparation of a Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Poverty and related issues &GS-III- Economy
In news
- NITI Aayog is at an advanced stage for preparation of a Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) parameter dashboard to rank states and Union Territories, along with a State Reform Action Plan (SRAP).

Key takeaways
- As the Nodal agency for the MPI, NITI Aayog has constituted a Multidimensional Poverty Index Coordination Committee (MPICC).
- The MPICC, chaired by Ms SanyuktaSamaddar, Adviser (SDG) has members from relevant Line Ministries and Departments.
- The committee held its first meeting on September 2, 2020.

Important value additions

The Global MPI
- The Global MPI is part of the government's decision to monitor the performance of the country on 29 select global indices.
- It is an international measure of multidimensional poverty covering 107 developing countries.
- It was first developed in 2010 by Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative and United Nations Development Programme.
- It is released at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development of the United Nations in July, every year.
- The dimensions of poverty range from deprivations of health facilities, education and living standards.

- It is computed by scoring each surveyed household on 10 parameters based on -nutrition, child mortality, years of schooling, school attendance, cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing and household assets.
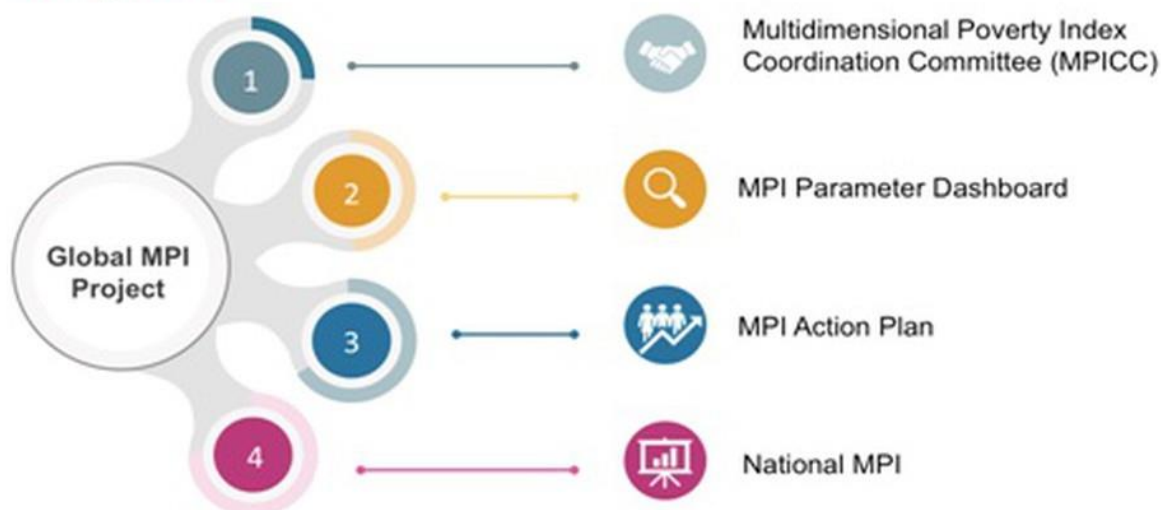
Impact of Lockdown on Indian Corporates

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy; Corporate sector
In news

- Recently a credit rating agency analysis looked into the effect of prolonged nationwide lockdown on Indian corporate sector.

Key takeaways
- Around 500 companies were surveyed.
- They have shown aggregate revenues contracting by 31.1% year-on-year basis in the first quarter of Financial Year 2021.
- **Sectors which were most-impacted:** Consumer-oriented sectors, airlines, hotels, retail, automotive and consumer durables, Industrial and infrastructure-oriented sectors, non-pharma exporters, real estate and construction companies and Banking Sector.
- **Sectors which were less impacted:** FMCG, consumer foods, IT, telecom, sugar and pharmaceuticals

Ease of Doing Business Rankings of the States: DPIIT

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Ease of Doing Business
In news

- 4th edition of Ease of Doing Business Rankings based on the State Business Reform Action Plan (State BRAP) was recently released.
- **Released by:** The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry

- **Top Performers:** (1) Andhra Pradesh; (2) Uttar Pradesh; (3) Telangana; (4) Madhya Pradesh; (5) Jharkhand.
- **Worst performers**: (1) Tripura; (2) Sikkim; (3) Odisha

S. No.	State/UT	Rank 2019
1	Andhra Pradesh	1
2	Uttar Pradesh	2
3	Telangana	3
4	Madhya Pradesh	4
5	Jharkhand	5
6	Chhattisgarh	6
7	Himachal Pradesh	7
8	Rajasthan	8
9	West Bengal	9
10	Gujarat	10
11	Uttarakhand	11
12	Delhi	12
13	Maharashtra	13
14	Tamil Nadu	14
15	Lakshadweep	15
16	Haryana	16
17	Karnataka	17
18	Daman and Diu	18
19	Punjab	19

S. No.	State/UT	Rank 2019
18	Daman and Diu	18
19	Punjab	19
20	Assam	20
21	Jammu and Kashmir	21
22	Andaman & Nicobar	22
23	Dadra & N. Haveli	23
24	Goa	24
25	Mizoram	25
26	Bihar	26
27	Puducherry	27
28	Kerala	28
29	Arunachal Pradesh	29
30	Chandigarh	29
31	Manipur	29
32	Meghalaya	29
33	Nagaland	29
34	Odisha	29
35	Sikkim	29
36	Tripura	29

Important value additions

Ease of Doing Business (EODB)

- **Joint initiative by:** The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) and the World Bank
- **Objective**: To improve the overall business environment in the States.

Business Reform Action Plan

- **Launched in:** 2015.
- BRAP 2019 contains a list of 80 reforms (187 reform action points) to be implemented by 19 State departments.
- These reforms cover 12 business regulatory areas such as Access to Information, Single Window System, Labour, Environment, etc.
- **Objective**: To encourage a healthy competition between states.
- This would help in attracting investments and increasing Ease of Doing Business in each State.

SAROD-Ports: Dispute Resolution Mechanism launched

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Ease of Doing Business

In news

- 'SAROD-Ports' (Society for Affordable Redressal of Disputes - Ports) through virtual ceremony in New Delhi was recently launched.
- **Launched by**: The Union Ministry of Shipping

Key takeaways

- **Established under:** Societies Registration Act, 1860.
- 'SAROD-Ports' is similar to provision available in Highway Sector in the form of SAROD-Roads constituted by National Highways Authority of India (NHAI).
- **Composition:** Members from Indian Ports Association (IPA) and Indian Private Ports and Terminals Association (IPTTA).
- Functions: (1) SAROD-Ports will advise and assist in settlement of disputes through arbitrations in the maritime sector.
- Benefits: (1) SAROD-Ports will become the pivotal mechanism of ummeed (hope), vishwas (trust) and nyaya (justice) in the Port sector of India; (2) It will lead to saving huge amounts of legal expenditure and time; (3) Enforcement of concession agreements in the letter and spirit.

Do you know?
- A concession agreement is a contract that gives a company the right to operate a specific business within a government's jurisdiction or on another firm's property, subject to particular terms.
- It will promote ease of doing business in the maritime sector because of the fast, timely, cost effective and robust dispute resolution mechanism.
- It will inspire confidence in the private players.

Shrinking Economy and Urban Jobs

Context:
As per the economy and employment's recent data on the contraction of the economy, the shrinking sectors that have been affected the most — construction (–50%), trade, hotels and other services (–47%), manufacturing (–39%), and mining (–23%) — are those that create the maximum new jobs in the economy.

Given the contraction and lack of demand in the economy, there would be a significant dip in urban employment generation.

Vulnerable employment in India:
- Vulnerable employment is characterised by **inadequate earnings, low productivity and difficult conditions of work** that undermine the basic rights of workers.
- It is higher in India than that of the world or the South Asia region. According to the International Labour Organization, **75%** of the labour force in India in 2019 will have poor quality jobs.

India presents a curious case as capital and labour are moving from low value added activities in a sector to another sector, but not to higher value added activities. This leads to a situation where a large proportion of the jobs being created are of poor quality.

Multi pronged strategy to tackle the issue of urban jobs:
- Given the scale of urbanisation, the focus on urban employment generation programmes should be **in coordination with local governments**. Actors at the local level need to have more resources at their disposal.

- **Employment intensive investment policies** should embrace both private entrepreneurs as well as by the government. Private investments need to be facilitated by conducive contractual relations between labour and capital. Small and micro enterprises need extra support to balance the interests between labour and capital.
- **Prioritising labour intensive urban infrastructure**: A labour intensive approach to building municipal infrastructure can be a cost effective alternative to capital intensive approach as wage rates are low. Infrastructure investments will generate employment and earnings. Construction of low cost housing, building large scale medical, health and sanitation infrastructure in cities and towns across India can be carried out using labour intensive methods.
- While MGNREGA or its substitutes will not be able to absorb a significant proportion of workers (given millions of workers have returned to their home States due to a loss of livelihoods during the pandemic situation), **MGNREGA needs to be strengthened and their capacity increased**. It can be expanded by both increasing the budgetary allocations and the guaranteed minimum number of days of work.

Conclusion:

For workers in urban areas more jobs need to be generated and vulnerabilities need to be reduced by providing decent wages and some form of job security.

Connecting the dots:

- What do you mean by vulnerable employment? With India having one of the highest poor quality jobs tackling the issue of urban jobs becomes important. Comment.
- Recent data highlights the contraction of the Indian economy. In this light tackling the issue of urban jobs requires multi-pronged strategy. Comment.

Limits on Multi-Cap Fund Investments

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Investment

In news

- Recently, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has imposed some limits on multi-cap funds.

Key takeaways

- A multi cap fund will be required to invest a minimum of 75% of its total assets in equities and equity-related instruments.
- At present, the rule is to invest a minimum of 65% in equities.
- Minimum investment of 75% has to be allocated in between large cap companies, mid cap companies and small cap companies, with a minimum share of 25% in each.
- The rest 25% can be invested as per the investor's choice.
- Till now, fund managers of multi cap mutual funds were investing across market capitalisation as per their choice.

Important value additions

Multi-Cap Fund

- Multi-cap funds are those that diversify their investments into all three categories (small, medium, and large-cap).

- These funds invest by market capitalization of shares.
- **Large cap stocks**: Stocks of top 100 listed companies in terms of full market capitalisation.
- **Mid-cap stocks**: Stocks of top 101 to 250 companies in terms of full market capitalisation.
- **Small-cap stocks**: Stocks of companies above 251 in terms of full market capitalisation.

Do you know?
- Market capitalization is the aggregate valuation of the company based on its current share price and the total number of outstanding stocks.
- It is calculated by multiplying the current market price of the company's share with the total outstanding shares of the company.

Contraction in July Factory Output: IIP

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy; Industries
In news
- Recently, the National Statistical Office (NSO) has released data which highlighted the decline in the factory output (also called Industrial Production) for the fifth consecutive month.
- July 2020 posted a contraction of 10.4% compared to July 2019.
- The data also recorded a sequential improvement from 15.8% contraction seen in June. This reflects some resumption in industrial activity with the lifting of lockdown restrictions.

Important value additions
Index of Industrial Production (IIP)
- It is an indicator that measures the changes in the volume of production of industrial products during a given period.
- It is compiled and published monthly by the National Statistical Office (NSO).
- **Ministry**: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
- Base Year for IIP is 2011-2012.
- Core Sector Industries comprise 40.27% of the weight of items included in IIP.
- **The eight core Industries in decreasing order of their weightage**: (1) Refinery Products; (2) Electricity; (3) Steel; (4) Coal; (5) Crude Oil; (6) Natural Gas; (7) Cement; (8) Fertilisers.

Do you know?
- Significance of IIP: (1) It is used by government agencies for policy-making purposes; (2) It is extremely relevant for the calculation of the quarterly and advance GDP estimates.

Unleashing Digital Economy in India

Six Regulators:

Digital businesses in India are staring at the prospect of control by no less than six regulators

- An expert committee on non-personal data (NPD) has suggested the creation of an NPD Authority. It will be a supervisory body that will enable data sharing and enforce data requests.

- A recently notified Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) would grant it oversight of digital businesses.

- A regulator for personal data as well as e-commerce has been proposed.

- The Competition Commission of India (CCI) and The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) as a future licensor of digital applications already exist.

Fast moving technology and not-so agile governance frameworks:

Technology has catalysed fundamental changes over the last decade, resulting in new digital channels of creative expression, communication and knowledge formation. These developments have made it important to have new governance frameworks to guide transitions and respond to market failures.

Digital businesses innovate to compete and survive, and consequently their functions and capabilities change rapidly.

Conventional governance frameworks are not agile enough to keep up.

Confused policymaking:

India lacks a unified and cogent strategy to govern the transformational potential of digital markets, and this has resulted in confused policymaking.

- The proposed NPD Authority is expected to supervise data-sharing arrangements between businesses and government.
  A similar provision in the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 empowers the regulator to provide data. The e-commerce regulator proposed under the recent draft e-commerce policy also has similar powers.

- Jurisdictional overlaps: The CCPA will oversee misleading advertisements online, as well as the disclosure of personal information to third parties. The draft of the National E-Commerce Policy proposes similar measures.

- Rules that demarcate supervisory boundaries of government departments also remain ambiguous.
  Example- The department for promotion of industry and internal trade is entrusted with all matters related to e-commerce.
  However, the administration of the Information Technology Act, 2000, which provides legal recognition to e-commerce, rests with the ministry of electronics and information technology.

If jurisdictional confusion persists, disputes are likely to follow. Such disputes are problematic because they erode economic value and trust in the supervisory capacity of the state.

Way forward:

India requires **a "whole of government" approach** to rule-making to address institutional challenges raised by technology.

- The Economic Survey of 2018-19, noted that "**reducing economic policy uncertainty** is critical because both domestic investment and foreign investment are strongly deterred by increases in domestic economic policy uncertainty".

- Increased dialogue and coherence among government bodies.

- Multi-stakeholder consultations and the promotion of self-regulation by the industry are equally necessary for light-touch governance that incentivizes innovation.

- Good practices like regulatory impact assessments and international cooperation to address the cross-border dimensions of technology.

- India must avoid creating any constraints on private investment and chart a clear path for a trillion- dollar digital economy.

- The accountability of new institutions is critical to improve the quality of regulation.

Conclusion:
Improving governance around regulation of the digital economy is a stepping stone on the country's journey to becoming a digital superpower and should be worked upon.

Connecting the dots:
India lacks a unified and cogent strategy to govern the transformational potential of digital markets, and this has resulted in confused policymaking. Comment.

Start-Up Village Entrepreneurship Programme

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Start-ups; Entrepreneurship
In news
- Women Self Help Groups (SHGs) under the Start-Up Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP) stepped up as effective frontline responders during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Important value additions
Start-Up Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP)
- SVEP is a sub-scheme of the DeendayalAntyodayaYojana-National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM).
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Rural Development.
- **Implemented:** 2016.
- It has extended business support services and capital infusion to 153 blocks of 23 states as of August 2020.
- **Partner**: Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India (EDII), Ahmedabad.

- **Aim:** (1) Support the rural poor to come out of poverty; (2) Support the people to set up enterprises and provide support until the enterprises stabilise; (3) Providing self-employment opportunities with financial assistance and training
- It addresses three major pillars of rural start-ups namely finances, incubation and skill ecosystems.

Ranking of States on Support to Startup Ecosystems: DPIIT

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Start-ups; Entrepreneurship
In news
- The Results of the 2nd edition of Ranking of States on Support to Startup Ecosystems were released recently.
- **Ministry**: Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce & Industry.
- DPIIT has recently released the Ease of Doing Business Rankings of the States-2019 based on the State Business Reform Action Plan.

Key takeaways
- **Objective**: To foster competitiveness, mutual learning and propel States and Union Territories (UTs) to work proactively towards uplifting the startup ecosystem.
- **Framework**: The 2019 Ranking Framework has seven broad reform areas consisting of 30 action points - institutional support, easing compliances, relaxation in public procurement norms, incubation support, seed funding support, venture funding support, and awareness and outreach.
- **Participation**: 22 States and 3 Union Territories.
- **2 Categories of States and UTs**: (1) Category Y: All UTs except Delhi and all States in North East India except Assam; (2) Category X: All other States and UT of Delhi.
- **Best Performers**: (1) Gujarat; (2) Karnataka; (3) Kerala.
- **Lowest performance**: (1) Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.
- **Best performer in Category Y**: Andaman & Nicobar Islands
- **Worst performer in Category Y:** Sikkim
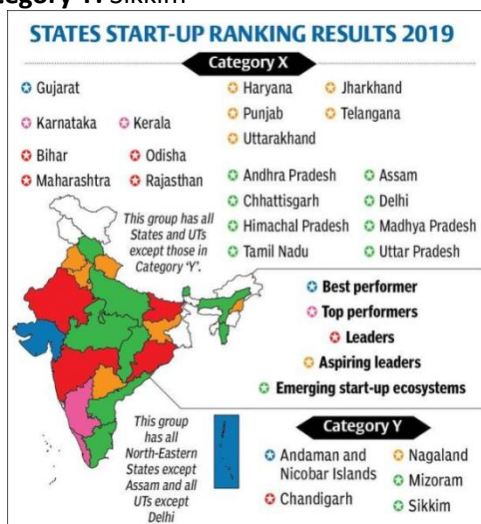
New FDI Policy in Defence Sector approved

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Defence; FDI

In news
- Recently, the Union Cabinet approved a new Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) policy in the defence sector.
- It allows the FDI through automatic approval to be increased from 49% to 74%.
- However, the new policy has a 'National Security' clause as a condition which has been proposed by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Key takeaways
- Through more liberalised FDI policy the government is seeking to attract foreign players to set up manufacturing units in India.
- It has been focusing on the defence sector to act as an engine for boosting manufacturing.
- It is aiming to achieve a turnover of Rs 1.75 lakh crore, including exports worth Rs 35,000 crore, by 2025.

Do you know?
- The government has brought a draft Defence Production and Export Promotion Policy 2020 (DPEPP 2020).
- The government has also brought a negative imports list for defence equipment.
- A dedicated budget for capital acquisition from the domestic industry is also prepared.

The government has inaugurated two defence industrial corridorsto boost the flagship 'Make in India' programme.

Aatmanirbhar Bharat ARISE-Atal New India Challenge launched

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Start-ups; Innovation
In news
- The Aatmanirbhar Bharat ARISE-Atal New India Challenge (ANIC) Program was recently launched.
- It is a national initiative.

Key takeaways
- **Objective:** (1) To promote research & innovation; (2) To increase competitiveness of Indian startups and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs); (3) To proactively collaborate with Ministries and the associated industries to facilitate innovative solutions to sectoral problems.
- The initiative will be carried under the Atal Innovation Mission.
- **Carried out by:**Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) and four ministries: (1) Ministry of Defence; (2) Ministry of Food Processing Industries; (3) Ministry of Health and Family Welfare; and (4) Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.
- **Features**: (1) Promote techno-preneurs because of their immense potential; (2) 15 sector-specific challenges where three challenges are for each ministry; (3) A grant-of-aid of up Rs. 50 lakh for a period of 9 to 12 months for startups to develop a minimum usable prototype.

Important value additions
Atal Innovation Mission (AIM)
- AIM is Government of India's flagship initiative.
- **Objective:** (1) To promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship; (2) To develop new programmes and policies for fostering innovation in different sectors of the economy; (3) To provide platform and collaboration opportunities for different stakeholders; (4) To create awareness and create an umbrella structure to oversee the innovation ecosystem of the country.

Bilateral Netting of Qualified Financial Contracts Bill, 2020 passed

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

In news

- Parliament has passed the Bilateral Netting of Qualified Financial Contracts Bill, 2020 with theRajyaSabha approving it.

Key takeaways

- The bill provides a legal framework for bilateral netting of qualified financial contracts.
- **Applicable to:** Qualified Financial Contracts between two qualified financial market participants where at least one party is an entity regulated by the specified authorities RBI, SEBI, IRDAI, PFRDA or the IFSCA.

Significance

- Without bilateral netting, Indian banks have had to set aside higher capital against their trades in the over-the-counter market, which impacts their ability to participate in the market. Moreover, it also increases the systemic risk during defaults.
- Bilateral netting would also help reduce hedging costs and liquidity needs for banks, primary dealers and other market-makers, thereby encouraging participation in the over-the-counter derivatives market.
- It would also help develop the corporate default swaps market, which, in turn, would provide support to the development of the corporate bond market.
- It would also improve investor confidence and to expand the scope of credit default swaps.

Do you know?

- Bilateral netting is a legally enforceable arrangement between a bank and a counterparty that creates a single legal obligation covering all included individual contracts.
- This means that a bank's obligation, in the event of the default or insolvency of one of the parties, would be the net sum of all positive and negative fair values of contracts included in the bilateral netting arrangement.
- Netting refers to offsetting of all claims arising from dealings between two parties to determine a net amount payable or receivable from one party to another.

Special Report on Sustainable Recovery released

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy

In news

- Special Report on Sustainable Recovery' was recently released.
- **Presented by**: International Energy Agency (IEA) and NITI Aayog

Key takeaways

- It is a part of IEA's flagship World Energy Outlook series.
- It proposes a number of actions that could be taken over the next three years to revitalize economies and boost employment while making energy systems cleaner and more resilient.
- According to report, Post the 2008–09 financial crisis, green measures accounted for around 16% of the total stimulus measures.

- To recover from the pandemic, it is important to be more ambitious and decisive towards clean investments.
- **Key sectors for creating jobs**: Electricity, transportation, buildings, industry and sustainable biofuels and innovations.

Do you know?

- The International Energy Agency is an intergovernmental organisation established in the framework of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1974 in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis.
- It is Headquartered in Paris, France.

Non-utilisation of Cesses & Levies

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Taxes

In news

- Recently, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) told Parliament that the Centre has only transferred 60% of the proceeds from cess/levies in Fiscal Year 2018-19 to the relevant Reserve Funds and retained the balance in the Consolidated Fund of India (CFI).

Do you know?

- Cesses and levies collected are required to be first transferred to designated Reserve Funds and utilised for the specific purposes intended by Parliament.
- Funds collected through Central taxes along with cesses and other levies go to the CFI. Taxes and surcharges in CFI are parked in a divisible pool and 42% of the total is given to States as devolution.

Important value additions

Consolidated Fund of India

- It was constituted under **Article 266 (1)** of the Constitution of India.
- **Composition:**
- All **revenues received** by the Centre by way of **taxes** (Income Tax, Central Excise, Customs and other receipts) and all **non-tax revenues.**
- All **loans raised by the Centre** by issue of Public notifications, treasury bills (internal debt) and from foreign governments and international institutions (external debt).
- **All government expenditures are incurred from this fund** except exceptional items which are met from the **Contingency Fund** or the **Public Account**.
- No amount can be withdrawn from the Fund without **authorization from the Parliament.**
- The CAG audits the fund and reports to the relevant legislatures on the management.

Cess

- Cess is a **form of tax** levied over and above the base tax liability of a taxpayer.

Surcharge

- A surcharge is an **extra fee, charge, or tax** that is added on to the cost of a good or service, beyond the initially quoted price.

Tribal welfare: GI tag can help ST entrepreneurs thrive

Context: In the era of Inclusive development the empowerment of scheduled tribes (ST), which are largely economically and socially backward, has assumed special significance.

A sustainable way to empower Schedule Tribes is help them become self-employed entrepreneurs.

Self-employment is already high amongst STs

- According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2018-19 report, a large proportion of scheduled tribe workers (57%) are self- employed, basically in the agriculture & allied activities and handicrafts.
- Around 30% are casual and agricultural labour and only around 13% are engaged in salaried employment.
- Hence, it is essential to explore skilling avenues which would help them earn more in the same occupation.

Would the GI tag help the tribes to become entrepreneurs?

- A geographical indication (GI) is a sign used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation that are due to that origin
- GI holds the potential for **increasing thevalue and market price** of a wide variety of potential GI forest products for local ST communities.
- Many communities have benefited enormously economically from the GI recognition granted to their traditional products.
- For instance, post the GI tag, the price of **Kadaknath Chicken,** a native breed of the Dhar and Jhabua districts in Madhya Pradesh and primarily nurtured by the **Bhil tribals**, has gone up significantly.
- The **GI tagged aromatic Araku Valley Coffee**, originally produced by the tribal population of **Andhra Pradesh**, is now being exported as a premium lifestyle and health product

Will getting the GI tag be enough to economically upstage the tribal population?

There are various challenges associated post giving GI Tag to traditional products of STs, some of which are:

- **Challenges of Middlemen:** The benefit of the GI registered tribal product, in many cases, accrues not to the artist but to traders or middlemen.
- **Issue of duplicate and fake products**: Traditional hand-woven designs are often duplicated and sold at a lower price through mass production, which deprives the tribes of their legitimate income
- A case in point is the GI registered unique hand-woven embroidery and textile designs made by the Toda tribe of the Nilgiris.
- **Challenges of Marketing and brand promotion:** The GI tag enhances the value—in terms of sales and profits—of only those products which are known, are already profitable

Way Ahead

- **Proactive State Governments**: States should try to identify traditional products, which incorporate the knowledge and skills of the scheduled tribes, and strive to get GI tag for such products
- **Effective Implementation of GI Provisions**: Any infringement of GI provisions, such as cases of proliferation of duplicate and fake products, should be dealt severely.

- **Inclusive GI Tag recognition:** There is a need to upgrade the GI Act, 1999, and make it more inclusive and responsive to ground realities so that more products are GI registered.
- **Civil Society Support:** It is also critical that NGOs and corporates support the branding and marketing of GI products. In fact, the credit for establishing Araku Valley coffee as an international brand owes essentially to the marketing efforts of an NGO and select corporates.
- **Enterprise-facilitatingplatform** such as a chamber of commerce, governmental help desk or a voluntary organisation dedicated to GI must be constituted. This would help connect the buyer with the original seller/tribal, thereby helping in reducing the exploitative gap between owner and seller within the GI ecosystem
- **Legal Support:** The inclusion of legal support services within the chamber of commerce and voluntary organisations also helps protect the rights of tribes.

Conclusion

At a time when the government is working on the 'One District, One Product' plan and considers the use of GI tag for better results, the experience of scheduled tribes could hel

IFSCA Committee Report on Development of International Retail Business

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy; Trade; Investment

In news

- The International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA) Expert Committee on international retail business development has submitted its interim report.
- **Aim of the Committee:** To suggest how to develop international retail business in International Financial Services Centre (IFSC).

The committee suggests that the IFSC can aim at:

- Becoming a gateway to India growth story for international investors and business
- Providing Indian diaspora and individuals from Asia and Africa with a comprehensive range of financial services from the IFSC
- Serving domestic residents availing liberalized remittance scheme.

Important value additions

- The Government of India had constituted the IFSCA with Shri I.Srinivas as its Chairperson.
- **Objective:** To develop and regulate the financial services market in the IFSC in India; (2) To make GIFT City a global hub for international financial services on the lines of London, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Dubai.

Gujarat International Finance Tec (GIFT) City

- It is located on the banks of the Sabarmati River.
- It is India's first operational smart city and international financial services centre.
- It was promoted by the Government of Gujarat as a Greenfield project.

Domestic Systemically Important Insurers (D-SIIs)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Insurance

In news

- The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has identified the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), General Insurance Corporation of India (GIC) and The New India Assurance Co. as Domestic Systemically Important Insurers (D-SIIs) for 2020-21.

Key takeaways
- The three public sector insurers shall raise the level of corporate governance, identify all relevant risks and promote a sound risk management culture.
- As D-SIIs, they will also be subjected to enhanced regulatory supervision.
- D-SIIs shall be listed on an annual basis.
- Size in terms of total revenue, including premium underwritten and the value of assets under management are among the parameters on which the insurers are identified.

Important value additions
- D-SIIs refer to insurers of such size, market importance and domestic and global interconnectedness whose distress or failure would cause a significant dislocation in the domestic financial system.
- Their continued functioning is critical for the uninterrupted availability of insurance services to the national economy.
- D-SIIs are perceived as insurers that are too big or too important to fail. Such a perception and the expectation of government support may amplify risk taking, reduce market discipline, create competitive distortions and increase the possibility of distress in future.

Cess pool: On CAG report on GST

Context: The latest audit of the Union Government's accounts by Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), was tabled in Parliament

What is Cess?
- **Definition**: Cess is a form of tax charged/levied over and above the base tax liability of a taxpayer.
- **Used for Specific Purpose:** A cess is usually imposed additionally when the state or the central government looks to raise funds for specific purposes. For example, the government levies an education cess to generate additional revenue for funding primary, secondary, and higher education.
- **Temporary Tax**: Cess is not a permanent source of revenue for the government, and it is discontinued when the purpose levying it is fulfilled.
- **No Sharing with States**: The central government does not need to share the cess with the state government either partially or in full, unlike some other taxes.
- **Easy to enact**: The procedure for introducing cess is comparatively simpler than getting the provisions done for introducing taxes, which usually means a change in the law. Cess is also easier to modify and abolish.
- **Levied on both types of Tax**: Cess can be levied on both indirect and direct taxes
- **Proceeds of Cess:** While all taxes go to the Consolidated Fund of India (CFI), cess may initially go to the CFI but has to be used for the purpose for which it was collected.
- **Unspent Cess Amount**: If the cess collected in a particular year goes unspent, it cannot be allocated for other purposes. The amount gets carried over to the next year and can only be used for the cause it was meant for

- **Purpose for which it is levied**: The government can impose cess for any purposes such as disaster relief, generating funds for cleaning rivers, etc. For example, after Kerala floods in the year 2018, the state government imposed a 1% calamity cess on GST and became the first state to do it
- **Cess & GST:** Under the GST (Goods and Services Tax) regime, certain sin goods and luxury items also attract a cess.

Key findings of the CAG report related to Cess

- Union Finance Ministry quietly retained over 40% of all cess collections in 2018-19 in the Consolidated Fund of India (CFI).
- As many as 35 different cesses, levies and charges yielded ₹2.75-lakh crore in the year, but just around ₹1.64-lakh crore was remitted to the specific reserve funds for which these cesses were levied.
- **Crude Oil Cess:** Over 10 years, not a paisa of the ₹1.25-lakh crore of cess collected on crude oil was transferred to an oil industry development body it was meant to finance
- Part of the hefty cess collected as additional excise duties on petrol and diesel, to finance roads and infrastructure, was similarly retained in the CFI.
- **A new 4% Health and Education Cess** on income tax was partly deployed towards education, but no fund was created for health. Same with a Social Welfare surcharge levied on customs.
- **The GST Compensation Cess** with ₹47,272 crore, was not remitted to its rightful account over the first two years of GST

Analysis of above findings

- **Distortion of Union's Fiscal Position:** Such type of Cess practices by Union government helped understate India's revenue and fiscal deficit numbers
- **Did not meet Cess Objective**: The purposes for which Parliament approved such cesses — be it health, education or infrastructure development — were not met.
- **Distortion of Fiscal Federalism:** Compensation cess transfers to States were accounted as Grants-in-aid to States, distorting the Centre-States fiscal math.
- **Increased reliance on Cess**: Centre's reliance on cesses and surcharges to raise revenue has increased significantly especially after the States' share of the divisible pool of taxes was raised to 42% in line with the 14th Finance Commission's suggestions.
- **Complicates tax structure:** There are debated over whether such levies are in sync with a nation trying to simplify its tax regime

Way Forward

- Cesses, starting with the excise duties on petrol and diesel, need to be rationalised.
- Transparency is needed in the management of cess receipts so that Parliament and the people do not need to wait for audit findings

Connecting the dots

- Analysis of the working of GST

Retrospective taxation: the Vodafone case

Context: The Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague gave a Unanimous ruling on Vodafone case.

What is the case?

- In May 2007, Vodafone International Holding (Dutch Firm) had bought a 67% stake in Hutchison Whampoa for $11 billion. This included the mobile telephony business and other assets of Hutchison in India
- In September 2007, the India government for the first time raised a demand of Rs 7,990 crore in capital gains and withholding tax from Vodafone
- Government argued that Vodafone should have deducted the tax at source before making a payment to Hutchison.
- Vodafone challenged the demand notice in the Bombay High Court, which ruled in favour of the Income Tax Department. Subsequently, Vodafone challenged the High Court judgment in the Supreme Court
- Supreme Court in 2012 ruled that Vodafone Group's interpretation of the Income Tax Act of 1961 was correct and that it did not have to pay any taxes for the stake purchase.

How did government tried to overrule Supreme Court Judgement?

- In 2012, the government of the day circumvented the SC's ruling by proposing an **amendment to the Finance Act**, thereby giving the Income Tax Department the power to retrospectively tax such deals.
- The case had by then become infamous as the 'retrospective taxation case'.
- Once Parliament passed the amendment to the Finance Act in 2012, the onus to pay the taxes fell back on Vodafone

What is retrospective taxation?

- As the name suggests, retrospective taxation allows a country to pass a rule on taxing certain products, items or services and deals and charge companies from a time behind the date on which the law is passed
- Countries **use this route to correct any anomalies** in their taxation policies that have, in the past, allowed companies to take advantage of such loopholes.
- **Global Norm:** Apart from India, many countries including the US, the UK, the Netherlands, Canada, Belgium, Australia and Italy have retrospectively taxed companies, which had taken the benefit of loopholes in the previous law.

Consequence of Retrospective Taxation on Market

- **Hurts Companies:** While governments often use a retrospective amendment to taxation laws to "clarify" existing laws, it ends up hurting companies that had knowingly or unknowingly interpreted the tax rules differently.
- **Hurts Investor Confidence:** The amendment was criticised by investors globally, who said the change in law was "perverse" in nature. This impacted the market sentiment and the flow of foreign funds to India.

How did government tried to handle Vodafone case post global outrage?

- Following international criticism, India tried to settle the matter amicably with Vodafone, but was unable to do so
- By 2014, all attempts by the telco and the Finance Ministry to settle the issue had failed.

- In 2014, the Vodafone Group initiated arbitration against India at the Permanent Court of Arbitration at the Hague, under Article 9 of the **Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT)** between India and the Netherlands.
- After the new NDA government came to power, it said it would not create any fresh tax liabilities for companies using the retrospective taxation route. But the provision in Finance Act remained.

What isthe Bilateral Investment Treaty?
- In 1995, India and the Netherlands had signed a BIT for promotion and protection of investment by companies of each country in the other's jurisdiction.
- The two countries would, under the BIT, ensure that companies present in each other's jurisdictions would be "at all times be accorded fair and equitable treatment and shall enjoy full protection and security in the territory of the other".
- The BIT between India and the Netherlands expired on September 22, 2016.

What did the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague say?
- The court ruled that India's retrospective demand of Rs 22,100 crore as capital gains and withholding tax imposed on Vodafone for a 2007 deal was "**in breach of the guarantee of fair and equitable treatment**".
- The court ruled that Indian order was in violation of United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL).
- The court has also asked **India not to pursue the tax demand any more** against Vodafone Group

Implication of the ruling
- **Policy Setback:** The ruling in favour of Vodafone signals a setback for the country's retrospective taxation policies.
- **Sets a precedence:** The ruling also raises the possibility of other cases under arbitration being decided on similar lines.

Connecting the dots
- [Protectionism in economically](#) interconnected world
- [Bilateral Investment Treaties](#) and Concerns

Industrial Relations Code, 2020 passed

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Industries
In news
- LokSabha passed the Industrial Relations Code, 2020.

Efforts made by the Government under the code for quickly resolving disputes

- Provision for two members instead of one member in the Industrial Tribunal.
- Provision for taking the matter straight to the Tribunal in case the dispute is not resolved at conciliation stage.
- Implementation of award in 30 days after Tribunal award.

- After recognition of Fixed Term Employment, workers will get the option of Fixed Term Employment instead of contract labour.
- Under this, they would get benefits of hours of work, salary, social security and other welfare benefits like a Regular Employee.
- A provision for "Negotiating Union" and "Negotiating Council" has been made for undertaking negotiation on any dispute.

Do you know?
- Provision has also been made for giving recognition to Trade Unions at Central and State level. Trade Unions would be able to contribute more affirmatively and more effectively.
- Provision for Re-Skilling fund has been made in the law for the first time for re-skilling those workers who have been fired from their jobs, so that they are able to get employment again.

Code On Occupational Safety, Health & Working Conditions Code, 2020 passed

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Industries
In news

- LokSabha passed the Code on Occupational Safety, Health & Working Conditions Code, 2020.

Key takeaways
- Free health check-up once a year by the employer for workers who are older than a certain age.
- Legal right for getting Appointment Letter to workers.
- Cine Workers have been designated as Audio Visual Worker, so that more and more workers get covered under the OSH code.

Economic Situation

Context: Global growth prospects for 2020 have been projected by a number of multilateral institutions and rating agencies including that for India.

Real GDP Growth Numbers

- **Pandemic Devastated Growth**: India's growth in the first quarter of 2020-21 at (-) 23.9% showed one of the highest contractions globally
- **Real GDP Growth Projection**: Reserve Bank of India's Survey of Professional Forecasters estimate 2020-21 real GDP growth for India in the range of -5.8% to whereas Goldman Sachs projects it as -14.8%.
- OECD in its September 2020 Interim Economic Outlook has projected a contraction of -10.2% in FY21 for India

Inflation Projection for this Fiscal

- The latest data released by the Ministry of Statistics indicate a Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation rate of 6.7% for August 2020.
- The average CPI inflation during the first five months of 2020-21 is estimated at 6.6%.
- Given the injection of periodic liquidity into the system and the inflation trends, the year as a whole may show a CPI inflation of close to 7%.
- Since deflator-based inflation tends to be lower than the CPI inflation, it may be about 5% or less.

Are there sectors which hold hope for growth revival?
- There was hope that some key sectors such as agriculture and related sectors, public administration, defence services and other services may perform normally or better than normal given the demand for health, relief and revival expenditures
- However, the recently released national income figures for Quarter I of 2020-21 hold no such hope
- The most surprising in the Q1 data is that the sector 'Public Administration, Defence and other Services' contracted at (-) 10.3%. This means that there was no fiscal stimulus.
- Independent estimates show that **States' capital spending fell by 43.5%.**
- The worsening of the fiscal deficit appears to be because of decline in revenue than increase in expenditure

Revenue Erosion
- In the first quarter of 2020-21, the **Centre's gross tax revenues contracted by (-) 32.6%** and the CAG-based data pertaining to 19 States show a contraction of (-) 45% in their own tax revenues.
- The revenue calculations of the Budget were made on the assumption that the nominal income of the country would grow at 10%.
- With the prospect of a contraction even in nominal growth (-5%), tax revenues of the Centre would show a considerable shortfall as compared to the budgeted amounts.
- Some estimates indicate that the tax and non-tax revenue and non-debt capital receipts in the current fiscal may fall well short of the budget estimates by an amount higher than ₹5-lakh crore
- **Only way out:** The combined fiscal deficit of the Centre and the States will have to make up for the shortfall in tax and non-tax revenues, if the level of budgeted expenditures is to be maintained.

Fiscal Deficit
- In order for the central government to maintain the level of budgeted expenditure and also provide for additional stimulus, its fiscal deficit may have to be increased to close to an estimated 8.8% of GDP.
- If one adds the Centre's and States' fiscal deficit, the combined fiscal deficit amounts to 13.8% of GDP.
- It may be noted that the Centre's fiscal deficit to GDP ratio for the Q1 of 2021 was 17.4%. The Centre's fiscal during the first four months of 2020-21 as a per cent of annual budgeted target was at 103.1%.

How to fund the high fiscal deficit?
- There are not adequate resources to support a fiscal deficit of nearly 14% of GDP.
- All this will therefore require substantial support from the RBI which will have to take on itself, either directly or indirectly, a part of the central government debt
- In the direct mode, the RBI takes on the debt directly from government at an agreed rate.
- In indirect mode the RBI would operate only in the secondary market through the OMO (open market operations) route. OMOs involve the sale and purchase of government securities to and from the secondary market by the RBI to adjust the rupee liquidity conditions
- Both direct monetisation of debt and OMOs involve expansion of money supply that can potentially result in inflation.

Conclusion

The economic situation warrants enhanced government expenditure; the policy challenge is to minimise the growth fall

Connecting the dots

- Balance of Payment Crisis of 1991
- 2008 Global Financial Crisis

The basis of MSP

Context: The newly passed <u>farm trade Bill - Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill - has raised concerns</u> that farmers may no longer be assured MSP for their crop

What is Minimum Support Price (MSP)?

- MSP is the price set by the government to purchase crops from the farmers, whatever may be the market price for the crops.
- MSP is declared by Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs before the sowing time on the basis of the recommendations of the **Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP)**
- Support prices generally affect farmers' decisions indirectly, regarding land allocation to crops, quantity of the crops to be produced etc
- MSP assures farmers agricultural income besides providing a clear price signal to the market
- The major objectives are to support the farmers from distress sales and to procure food grains for public distribution.

What is Procurement Price?

- Sometimes, the government procures at a higher price than the MSP. Here, the price will be referred as procurement price.
- The procurement price will be announced soon **after the harvest**.
- Normally, the procurement price will be higher than the MSP, but lower than the market price.
- The price at which the procured and buffer stocke food grains are provided through the PDS is called as issue price.

What are the Farmers demanding with regard to MSP?

- They are demanding for a provision in the new law safeguarding the continuance of the existing minimum support price (MSP)-based procurement regime.
- A mere sentence in the new law to the effect that nothing in this Act shall stop the government from announcing MSPs and undertaking crop purchases at these rates as before.

What does the new law say about MSP?

- The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill does not give any statutory backing to MSP.
- There isn't even a mention of either "MSP" or "procurement" in the Bill passed by Parliament
- Government has justified the move stating that the new legislation has "nothing to do with MSP". Instead, its objective is simply to grant farmers and traders the freedom of choice to sell & buy agricultural produce outside the premises of APMC mandis.
- MSP and procurement, according to government, are entirely separate issues
- MSP was not part of any law before. Nor is it part of any law today.

Is there any legal backing for MSP?

- The National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA), provides a legal basis for the public distribution system (PDS) that earlier operated only as a regular government scheme.
- The NFSA made access to the PDS a right, entitling every person belonging to a "priority household" to receive food grains at cheaper rates
- MSP, by contrast, is **devoid of any legal backing**. Access to MSP, unlike subsidised grains through the PDS, isn't an entitlement for farmers. They cannot demand it as a matter of right.
- The government can procure at the MSPs if it wants to. There is no legal compulsion. Nor can it force others (private traders, organised retailers, processors or exporters) to pay

What is the basis of MSP then?
- It is only a government policy that is part of administrative decision-making.
- The government declares MSPs for crops, but there's no law mandating their implementation
- The Centre currently fixes MSPs for 23 farm commoditiesbased on the CACP's recommendations —
    - **7 cereals** - paddy, wheat, maize, bajra, jowar, ragi and barley
    - **5 pulses** - chana, arhar/tur, urad, moong and masur
    - **7 oilseeds** - rapeseed-mustard, groundnut, soyabean, sunflower, sesamum, safflower and nigerseed
    - **4 commercial crops** - cotton, sugarcane, copra and raw jute
- CACP itself is not any statutory body but is an attached office of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.It can recommend MSPs, but the decision on fixing (or even not fixing) and enforcement rests finally with the government.

What is speciality about Sugarcane crop?
- The only crop where MSP payment has some statutory element is sugarcane
- This is due to its pricing being governed by the Sugarcane (Control) Order, 1966 issued under the Essential Commodities Act.
- That order, in turn, provides for the fixation of a 'fair and remunerative price' (FRP) for cane during every sugar year (October-September).
- But even the FRP — which, incidentally, was until 2008-09 called the 'statutory minimum price' or SMP — is **payable not by the government.**
- The responsibility to make FRP payment to farmers within 14 days of cane purchase lies solely with the sugar mills.

Has there been any move to give MSP legislative backing?
- The CACP, in its price policy report for the 2018-19 kharif marketing season, had suggested enactment of a legislation conferring on farmers 'The Right to Sell at MSP'.
- This, it felt, was necessary "to instil confidence among farmers for procurement of their produce".
- That advice was however not accepted by government.

Conclusion
Along with market reforms for agricultural marketing envisaged through new farm bills, government should also increase the public farm infrastructure which will pose a tough competition in the free market.
Connecting the dots
- Ashok Dalwai Committee on Doubling Farmer's income

- National Food Security Act

Insolvency And Bankruptcy Code (2nd Amendment) Bill passed

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Economy
In news

- RajyaSabha passed the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (2nd Amendment) Bill, thereby temporarily suspending initiation of Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process.

Key takeaways

- It amends the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016.
- The Bill seeks to temporarily suspend initiation of the corporate insolvency resolution process (CIRP) under the Code.
- When a default occurs, the Code allows the creditors of the company or the company itself to initiate CIRP by filing an application before the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT).
- The Bill provides that for defaults arising during the six months from March 25, 2020, CIRP can never be initiated by either the company or its creditors.
- The central government may extend this period to one year through notification. The Bill clarifies that during this period, CIRP can still be initiated for any defaults arising before March 25, 2020.

Vodafone Case: Perils of State Overreach

Context: The Vodafone Group has just won one of the most high-stakes legal battles involving a foreign investor and the Indian state under international law.

For a brief background on the issue: Click Here

Do You Know?

- **2012 Amendment of Income Tax Act:** The income deemed to be accruing to non-residents, directly or indirectly, through the transfer of a capital asset situated in India is taxable retrospectively with effect from April 1, 1962.
- This amendment was carried out to override the Supreme Court ruling in favour of Vodafone.
- The Court held that Vodafone didn't owe any tax to the Indian state on account of Vodafone acquiring a 67% stake in Hutchison Essar**through an offshore transaction.**

What was the ruling?

- An Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) tribunal, constituted under the India-Netherlands bilateral investment treaty (BIT), has ruled that India's imposition of tax liability amounting to ₹22,000 crore on Vodafone is in breach of India's BIT obligations.

Can the government challenge the award?

- It is likely that the government might challenge the award at the seat of arbitration or resist the enforceability of this award in Indian courts alleging that it violates public policy.
- If the government indeed follows these options, there's a long, gruelling road ahead for Vodafone.
- The government would be ill-advised to go down this road because it would mean that India does not honour its international law obligation

Key lessons from the case

- **Against the spirit of Democratic norms:**Unleashing tax inspectors to extract money out of foreign investors by constantly changing the rules of the game is not an attribute that a liberal democracy should be proud of.
- **Retrospective Amendment termed as Tax Terrorism:** The opposition of the day vehemently criticised the retrospective amendment calling it "tax terrorism".
- **Investor Sentiment:** India should learn that being a country that values the rule of law is an important quality to win over the confidence of foreign investors and international goodwill.
- **Usage of Taxpayer's Money:** The tribunal has ordered India to reimburse legal costs to the tune of more than ₹40 crore incurred by Vodafone in fighting this case, which will come from taxpayer's money
- **Cost of non-compliance:** If the order is not complied, it would send a deleterious signal to foreign investors reaffirming the sentiment that doing business in India is indeed excruciating.
- **Honouring international law:** All the three organs of the Indian state — Parliament, executive, and the judiciary — need to internalise India's BIT and other international law obligations. These organs need to ensure that they exercise their public powers in a manner consistent with international law.
- **Impact on other disputes:** This ruling might have an impact on the two other ISDS claims that India is involved in with Cairn Energy and Vedanta on the imposition of taxes retrospectively.
- **Restrain from further hardening BITs:** India unilaterally terminated almost all its BITs after foreign investors started suing India for breaching BITs. The belief in the Indian establishment is that the ISDS regime unduly intrudes into India's sovereignty. Hence it is quite possible that India might use this award to further harden its antagonistic stand against ISDS and BITs, which should be resisted.

Conclusion

- The case is a reminder that the ISDS regime, notwithstanding its weaknesses, can play an important role in fostering international rule of law
- If the government is serious about wooing foreign investment, India should immediately comply with the decision and repeal the retrospective provision which still remains in statute books.

Connecting the dots

- Protectionism in economically interconnected world
- Bilateral Investment Treaties and Concerns

AGRICULTURE

Kisan Rail

- Inaugural run of South India's 1st and country's 2nd Kisan Rail between Anantapur and New Delhi was flagged off recently.
- **Inaugurated by:** Union Minister of Agriculture & Farmer Welfare.
- The first Kisan Rail was flagged off between Devlali (Maharashtra) and Danapur (Bihar) as a weekly service.
- **Objective of Kisan Rail:** To provide priority to the farming sector and facilitate transportation of perishable agricultural products to various market places across the country.
- Anantapur is fast becoming the Fruit Bowl of Andhra Pradesh.
- The train service between Anantapur - New Delhi will cover a distance of 2150 kms in 40 hours.

An agriculture-led revival as flawed claim

Context: In the midst of India's COVID-19-induced economic slowdown there is claim that Agriculture will lead India's economic revival.

What are the arguments to support the above claim?

1. **Rabi Procurement:** The procurement of *rabi* wheat in 2020-21 was 12.6% higher than in 2019-20. India's food grain production in 2019-20 was 3.7% higher than in 2018-19.
2. **Inflation and Prices**: Food inflation in the Q1 of 2020-21, at 9.2%, was higher than in the previous year due to sustained demand for food. This shows a shift of terms of trade in favour of agriculture.
3. **Higher Kharif Sowing:** the area under *kharif* sowing in 2020-21 was 14% higher than in 2019-20. Higher *kharif* sowing was accompanied by higher tractor and fertilizer sales, which bodes well for economic recovery.
4. **Trickle From Package:** Government's economic package for agriculture — as part of the ₹20-lakh croreAtmanirbhar Bharat package — will further position agriculture as the engine of revival.

Critical Analysis of Each Claim

1. Rabi Procurement – Need to look at market Arrivals

- The higher procurement claim hides more than it reveals.
- As per official data, only 13.5% of paddy farmers and 16.2% of wheat farmers in India sell their harvest to a procurement agency at an assured Minimum Support Price (MSP). The rest sell their output to private traders at prices lower than MSP.
- One should, therefore, be looking not at procurement **but market arrivals**
    - The market arrivals of major 15 crops were lower in 2020 than in 2019.
    - In wheat, barley, potato, cauliflower, cabbage and lady's finger, market arrivals in 2020 were between 50% and 75% of market arrivals in 2019.
    - It was only in paddy, lentil, tomato and banana that market arrivals in 2020 constituted more than 75% of market arrivals in 2019.
- In addition, there were **major losses in the milk, meat and poultry sectors**; industry associations estimate the total loss for the poultry industry at ₹25,000 crore.
- Thus, the most important problem faced by farmers during the lockdown was the **loss of markets,** stemming from the disruption in supply chains, closure of *mandis* and a fall in consumer food demand.

- Higher procurement was hardly alleviating the loss faced by farmers

2. Inflation and Prices – Misplaced notion that it benefitted farmers

- Inflation rates estimated using consumer price indices are not representative of farmer's prices.
- Inflation was largely due to disruptions in supply chains and rise in trader margins
- The dark side of higher rural inflation in India is that small and marginal farmers are not net sellers, but net buyers of food. So, it was not just that farmer's prices fell; most were also forced to pay more for food purchases.

3.Higher kharif sowing – Rise in Rural Unemployment

- Given that *rabi*incomes fell during the lockdown, many rural households may have returned to farming or intensified farming for food- and income-security.
- Lakhs of migrant workers returned to their villages from urban areas. They may have taken up agriculture in previously fallow or uncultivated lands.
- It is no cause for celebration because the rural unemployment rates rose sharply in 2020, to 22.8% (April), 21.1% (May) and 9.5% (June).

4. Trickle from Package – Fresh Spending is meagre

- Agriculture contributes only about 15% to India's Gross Value Added (GVA). Thus, even if agriculture grows by 4%, it is likely to contribute only 0.6 percentage points to GVA growth.
- To contribute a full one percentage point to GVA growth, agriculture will have to grow by 6%, which is unlikely in 2020-21.
- Total fresh spending for agriculture in the package is a trickle: less than ₹5,000 crore. The rest are schemes already included in the past Budgets, announcements with no financial outgo or liquidity/loan measures routed through banks.

Way Ahead

- **Doubling Income Transfer**: Instead of frontloading the instalments of PM-KISAN, the government should have doubled the payments to farmers from ₹6,000 a year to ₹12,000 a year.
- **MSPs at Comprehensive Cost:** Instead of raising the MSP for *kharif* paddy by ₹53 per, or cotton by ₹260 per quintal, the government should have set all MSPs at 150% of the C2 cost (comprehensive cost) of production.
- **Waiver of Interest:** Instead of a moratorium on loan repayments, the government should have waived the interest on loans taken by farmers in 2019 and 2020.
- **Special Package for Animal Husbandry Sector:** Instead of vague loan-based schemes in animal husbandry, the government should have announced a package of direct assistance for the crisis-ridden poultry and meat sectors amounting to at least ₹20,000 crore.

Conclusion

- The government should discard its role as a passive observer, and decisively intervene in rural India with a substantial fiscal stimulus.

Connecting the dots

- PM KisanSammanNidhi
- Ashok Dalwai Committee on Doubling Farmer's Income

Bamboo Clusters launched

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Policies and Interventions & GS-III – Major Crops
In news
- Recently, 22 bamboo clusters in 9 states were virtually inaugurated
- **States covered:** Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Assam, Nagaland, Tripura, Uttarakhand and Karnataka.
- **Ministry:** Union Ministry for Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare
- A logo for the National Bamboo Mission (NBM) has also been released.

Important value additions
Government's Efforts
- India is the world's second-largest cultivator of bamboo after China, with 136 species and 23 genera spread over 13.96 million hectares, according to the State of Environment report 2018.
- The National Bamboo Mission, under the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare, has been initiated to provide a boost to livelihood and environmental acreage.
- Additionally, in 2017, Parliament 'declassified' bamboo as 'a tree' on non-forest lands.
- Similarly, a scheme called SFURTI (Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries) is being implemented by the Ministry of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) in order to boost traditional industries and bamboo artisans.
- Amendment has been brought about in the 100 year old Indian Forest Act brought about by the Central government in 2017, as a result of which, home grown bamboo has been exempted from it in order to enhance livelihood opportunities through bamboo.
- Bamboo Technology Parks were also set up in Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh.

Alternatives for paddy stubble utilisation

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Agriculture-related issues; Pollution and its mitigation
In news
- The Punjab Energy Development Agency (PEDA) in association with the Government of Punjab is creating alternatives for paddy stubble utilisation.

Alternativesfor paddy stubble utilisation
- Biomass power plants: In these plants, 8.80 lakh metric tonnes of paddy stubble is used annually to generate power
- Producing Bio CNG: These will need around 3-lakh metric tonnes of paddy stubble annually.
- Bioethanol Project: This will require 2 lakh metric tonnes of paddy stubble annually.
Advantages of these Projects

- After commissioning of all these projects, Punjab will be able to utilise 1.5 million tonnes (7% of the total) paddy stubble.
- Farmers can benefit hugely if they can sell paddy stubble to the industry instead of burning it.
- It will reduce the pollution caused by stubble burning.
- The fertility of the soil will also be preserved.
- The youth can start such projects under the 'start-up' concept, which will create entrepreneurship among them.
- Educated unemployed youth in rural Punjab can get big job opportunities.

Limitations
- Current usage of stubble in these plants is very small compared to the generation of stubble.

Image source: Click here

New Agriculture Bills and opposition to it

Context: Three Bills on agriculture reforms were introduced in the Parliament to replace the ordinances issued during the lockdown
- The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020
- The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020
- The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, 2020

Do You Know?
- Farmers and farmer associations across the country have protested against the ordinances. The tractor protest by farmers of Punjab and Haryana in July was in opposition to these.
- The Punjab Assembly on August 28 passed a resolution rejecting the Centre's ordinances.

What do the ordinances entail?
The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance has following provisions
- **Opens up agricultural sale and marketing** outside the notified Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) mandis for farmers
- Removes barriers to inter-State trade
- Provides a **framework for electronic trading** of agricultural produce.
- Prohibits State governments from collecting market fee, cess or levy for trade outside the APMC markets**.**

The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance **relates to contract farming.** It has following provisions

- Provides framework on trade agreements for the sale and purchase of farm produce.
- The **mutually agreed remunerative price framework** envisaged in the legislation is touted as one that would protect and empower farmers**.**
- The written farming agreement, entered into prior to the production or rearing of any farm produce, lists the terms and conditions for supply, quality, grade, standards and price of farm produce and services.

The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Ordinance

- Removes cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onion and potatoes from the list of essential commodities. The amendment will **deregulate the production, storage**, movement and distribution of these food commodities.
- The central government is allowed regulation of supply during war, famine, extraordinary price rise and natural calamity, while providing exemptions for exporters and processors at such times as well.
- **Imposition of any stock limit on agricultural produce** must be based on price rise. A stock limit may be imposed only if there is a 100% increase in retail price of horticultural produce; and a 50% increase in the retail price of non-perishable agricultural food items

Why are these bills being opposed?
1. Against the Spirit of Cooperative federalism

- Since agriculture and markets are State subjects – entry 14 and 28 respectively in List II – the ordinances are being seen as a direct encroachment upon the functions of the States
- The provisions are viewed as against the spirit of cooperative federalism enshrined in the Constitution.
- **Justification by Centre:** The Centre, however, argues that trade and commerce in food items is part of the concurrent list, thus giving it constitutional propriety.

2. End of MSP

- Critics view the dismantling of the monopoly of the APMCs as a sign of ending the assured procurement of food grains at minimum support prices (MSP).
- To the Centre's 'one nation, one market' call, critics have sought 'one nation, one MSP'.
- Critics argue that ensuring a larger number of farmers get the MSP for their produce and addressing weakness in the APMCs, instead of making these State mechanisms redundant is the need of the hour.

3. No mechanism for price fixation

- The Price Assurance Bill, while offering protection to farmers against price exploitation, does not prescribe the mechanism for price fixation.
- There is apprehension that the free hand given to private corporate houses could **lead to farmer exploitation**.
- Critics are apprehensive about formal contractual obligations owing to the unorganised nature of the farm sector and **lack of resources for a legal battle** with private corporate entities.

4.Food security undermined

- Easing of regulation of food items would lead to exporters, processors and traders **hoarding farm produce** during the harvest season, when prices are generally lower, and releasing it later when prices increase.
- This could undermine food security since the States would have no information about the availability of stocks within the State.
- Critics anticipate irrational volatility in the prices of essentials and **increased black marketing.**

Connecting the dots

- History of Agriculture Produce Market Committees (APMCs)

Bamboo shoots can be among cheapest immunity boosters

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Agricultural Marketing
In news

- Recently, focus of more than 25 experts from 11 countries who converged digitally to mark 'World Bamboo Day' was on the nutraceutical bamboo shoot.

Key takeaways

- Bamboo shoots are emerging as high-value and safe edibles.
- They are being grown globally along with all other value-added bamboo products.
- The protein content in fresh bamboo shoots, considered as nutraceutical, can range between 1.49-4.04%.
- They also contain 17 amino acids, eight of which are essential for the human body.

Important value additions

- According to the National Bamboo Mission, India has the highest area (13.96 million hectares) under bamboo and is the second richest country after China in terms of bamboo diversity with 136 species.
- The annual production of bamboo in India is 14.6 million tonnes and the bamboo-rattan industry in the country was worth ₹28,005 crore in 2017.
- Bamboo could be among the cheapest immunity boosters for increasing the human body's resistance to viral attacks.

Do you know?

- The bamboo is considered the grass of life in the northeast India.
- Bamboo has been a key ingredient in new antimicrobial soaps and hand mists developed by Filipino scientists to fight the novel coronavirus.
- The term 'nutraceutical' is used to describe medicinally or nutritionally functional foods.
- Bamboo shoots are the edible sprouts of the perennial grass.

MSP Raised for Rabi Crops

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Agricultural Pricing

In news

- Recently, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has marginally increased the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of six rabi crops for 2021-22.

Key takeaways

- MSP rates were hiked for wheat, barley, gram, masoor dal (lentil), safflower, and rapeseed and mustard.
- The increase in MSP is in line with the principle of fixing the MSPs at a level of at least 1.5 times of the All-India weighted average Cost of Production as announced in Union Budget 2018-19.

Important value additions

Minimum Support Price

- The MSP is the rate at which the government buys grains from farmers.
- It is to counter price volatility of agricultural commodities due to the factors like variation in their supply, lack of market integration and information asymmetry.
- The MSP is fixed for 23 crops based on the recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP), Ministry of Agriculture.
- The Food Corporation of India (FCI), the nodal central agency of the Government of India, along with other State Agencies undertakes procurement of crops.

Do you know?

- Rabi crops are agricultural crops that are sown in winter and harvested in the spring in India. Eg. Wheat, barley, mustard etc.

KRITAGYAhackathon planned for enhancing farm mechanization

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Agriculture

In news

- Ahackathon named "KRITAGYA" has been planned by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) under National Agricultural Higher Education Project (NAHEP).
- **Objective:** To promote potential technology solutions for enhancing farm mechanization with special emphasis on women friendly equipment.

Key takeaways

- **Eligibiliy:** Students, faculties and innovators/entrepreneurs from any university / technical institution across the country can apply and participate in the form of a group.
- Participating students can collaborate with local start-ups, students from technology institutes.
- Cash prizes are included.

Important value additions

National Agricultural Higher Education Project (NAHEP)

- The ICAR commenced NAHEP in 2017.
- It is a Government of India and World Bank project.

- **Objective:** To support the National Agricultural Research and Education System providing more relevant and better quality education to the students.

Sandalwood Spike Disease

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Issues related to agriculture
In news
- India's sandalwood trees are facing a serious threat due to Sandalwood Spike Disease (SSD).
- The natural population of sandalwood in Marymoor Sandal Forest of Kerala and various reserve forests in Karnataka, including MM Hills (MalaiMahadeshwara Wildlife Sanctuary), are heavily infected with SSD.

Importantvalue additions

Sandalwood Spike Disease

- It is an infectious disease which is caused by phytoplasma.
- Phytoplasmas are bacterial parasites of plant tissues.
- They are transmitted by insect vectors and involved in plant-to-plant transmission.
- There is no cure as of now for the infection.
- The infected tree will have to be cut down to prevent the spread of the disease.

ENVIRONMENT/POLLUTION

National Clean Air Programme to be modified

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Pollution & Climate Change

In news

- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) to modify the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)
- NCAP proposes 20-30% reduction of air pollution by 2024.

Key takeaways

NGT's directions

- Deadline to reduce air pollution by 20-30% by 2024 needs to be reduced.
- Increase the target of reduction.
- Review the action in terms of shift to e-vehicles and CNG vehicles, intensifying public transport systems, mechanical cleaning of roads, improvement in fuel quality, etc.
- Ensure the assessment and installation of the requisite number of Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Systems within six months.

Important value additions

NCAP

- It was launched by the MoEFCC in January 2019.
- It is the first-ever effort in India to frame a national framework for air quality management with a time-bound reduction target.
- It seeks to cut the concentration of PM10 and PM2.5 by at least 20% in the next five years, with 2017 as the base year for comparison.
- The plan includes 102 non-attainment cities, across 23 states and Union territories,
- They were identified by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) on the basis of their ambient air quality data between 2011 and 2015.

Early Migration of Butterflies

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Biodiversity; Climate change

In news

- The annual migration of butterflies from the hill ranges of the Eastern Ghats towards the Western Ghats has been observed earlier in 2020 (in the months of July and August).
- Usually, these butterflies breed during the southwest monsoon season on the eastern areas of South India and their progeny migrate back to the Western Ghats in October- November.

Key takeaways

- The Eastern Ghats complex of the Yercaud hills (Shevaroy hills), Pachamalai, Kolli hills, Kalvarayan are major originating places for the migrating species.
- **Possible Reasons for Early Migration**: Change in rainfall pattern, a considerable increase in the number of sunny days and a population outburst of butterflies.

Do you know?

- Four species of milkweed butterflies belonging to the Danainae subfamily are mainly involved in the migration — the Dark Blue Tiger, Blue Tiger, Common Crow and the Double-branded (commonly known as tigers and crows).

- The Ferns Nature Conservation Society (FNCS) initiated a citizen science project in 2018 to study the migration ecology of milkweed butterflies in south India,

Important value additions
Butterflies
- Butterflies are insects from the order Lepidoptera of phylum Arthropoda which also includes moths.
- Adult butterflies have large, often brightly coloured wings, and conspicuous, fluttering flight.
- Abundance of butterflies in any area represents the rich biodiversity.

Webinar organised on International Day of Clean Air For Blue Skies

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Pollution
In news
- Recently, a webinar on the occasion of the first-ever International Day of Clean Air For Blue Skies was organised.
- **Organised by:** The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)
- **Aim of the International Day of Clean Air For Blue Skies**: To demonstrate the close link of air quality to other environmental/developmental challenges and raise public awareness related to air quality at all levels.

Key takeaways
Indian Government's Efforts to combat air pollution:
- It is committed to reducing the air pollution level in 122 most polluted cities.
- In 2014, the Air Quality Index (AQI) was launched which currently tracks the levels of pollution on eight parameters.
- **Parameters:** Ground-level ozone, Particulate Matter (PM) 10, PM 2.5, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, ammonia and lead.
- **Most harmful pollutants**: Ground-level ozone and airborne particles
- A brochure on Integrated Measures to Combat Air Pollution under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) was also launched in the webinar.

Suggestions for Improvement
- States must work with city-specific plans, as every city has a different source of pollution.
- Most effective way to reduce air pollution in cities is to identify the hotspots and then disburse funds.
- Use of electric vehicles must be encouraged and the public transport should be modernised.
- Augmenting waste management Infrastructure is essential.
- Car-pooling and use of public transport must be promoted.

Do you know?
- India has migrated to BS-VI standards, quality petrol and diesel, which is an important initiative to fight against pollution.
- **Ministry responsible for deciding the fuel standards:** Environment Ministry.
- **Fuel standards implemented by:** The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)

Review of National Forest Policy, 1988 advocated

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Forestry; Environment

In news

- Recently the Director General of Forests has advocated for the amendment of National Forest Policy, 1988.
- It is based on a research paper published in 2016 in the Natural Resources Forum, a United Nations Sustainable Development Journal.
- The research paper called for sustainable forest management based on certification and a policy characterised by restoration, conservation and production equally.

Key takeaways from the research paper
- There is a lack of reliable data relating to growing stock, consumption and production of timber.
- The potential of timber production from Trees Outside Forests (TOFs) i.e. grown outside government Recorded Forest Areas (RFAs) must be explored and tapped.
- Since the domestic timber production has declined and imports have increased manifolds. There is a need to review Export-Import Policy.
- The paper emphasized on revising the Indian Forest Policy to boost domestic production.

Important value additions
- India's forests are currently governed by the National Forest Policy, 1988.
- The Policy has environmental balance and livelihood at its centre.
- Some features and Goals: (1) Maintenance of environmental stability through preservation and restoration of ecological balance; (2) Conservation of Natural Heritage (existing); (3) Checking Soil Erosion and Denudation in catchment areas of rivers, lakes, and reservoirs; (4) Checking extension of sand dunes in desert areas of Rajasthan and along coastal tracts
- A draft National Forest Policy was released in 2019.
- The basic thrust of the draft is conservation, protection and management of forests along with safeguarding the interest of tribals and forest-dependent people.

Significance of Dead Coral Reef

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment; Biodiversity
In news
- According to a recent study by researchers from University of Queensland (UQ), Australia, more life can be supported by dead coral remains than live corals.

Key takeaways
- The researchers designed three-dimensional-printed coral stacks called RUbble Biodiversity Samplers (RUBS) to survey cryptic organisms.
- The researchers found the missing link in the coral reef food webs.
- This data fills important knowledge gaps, such as how small cryptic animals support coral reefs from the bottom of the food chain, all the way up to bigger predators

Important value additions
Coral Reefs
- They are large underwater structures composed of the skeletons of colonial marine invertebrates called coral.
- Corals extract calcium carbonate from seawater to create a hard, durable exoskeleton that protects their soft, sac-like bodies.

- These exoskeleton remains of millions of corals pile up with time to form coral reefs.
- The corals have a symbiotic relationship with algae called the zooxanthellae.
- These algae live inside the coral polyp's body and provide the coral with food. The polyps, in turn, provide a home and carbon dioxide for the algae.
- These algae are responsible for the variety of colours of corals.

Do you know?
- Coral reefs cover less than 1% of the ocean floor but they are among the most productive and diverse ecosystems on Earth.
- They are referred to as "the rainforests of the sea" for their biodiversity,
- When corals become stressed due to any changes, including pollution or global warming, they can expel algae and get bleached, meaning the 'death' of the coral reef.
- Dead coral reefs support cryptic organisms like hidden sea creatures, including fishes, snails, tiny crabs and worms, who hide under its rubble to save themselves from predation.

Image source: Click here

Ease Banking Reforms Index

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Banking; Economy
In news
- Union Minister of Finance recently inaugurated Doorstep Banking Services by Public Sector Banks (PSBs).
- Best performing banks on EASE Banking Reforms Index were also facilitated.

Key takeaways

- Doorstep Banking Services are part of EASE Reforms.
- It is envisaged to provide convenience of banking services to the customers at their doorstep through the universal touch points of Call Centre, Web Portal or Mobile App.
- Customers can also track their service request through these channels.
- The services shall be rendered by the Doorstep Banking Agents deployed by the selected Service Providers at 100 centres across the country.
- The services can be availed by customers of Public Sector Banks at nominal charges.

Important value additions

EASE 2.0 Banking Reforms Index

- It is a common reform agenda for PSBs.
- **Aim:**Institutionalizing clean and smart banking.
- **Launched in:** January 2018.
- PSBs have shown a healthy trajectory in their performance over four quarters since the launch of EASE 2.0 Reforms Agenda.
- **Top Performing Banks:** (1) Bank of Baroda, (2) State Bank of India, (3) Oriental Bank of Commerce
- **Top Improvers:**(1) Bank of Maharashtra, (2) Central Bank of India, (3) Corporation Bank.

Top 3 banks in each theme

Top 3 banks for EASE 2.0 Index	Theme 1: Responsible Banking	Theme 4: Udyami Mitra for MSMEs
• Bank of Baroda • State Bank of India • Oriental Bank of Commerce	• Bank of Baroda • State Bank of India • Punjab National Bank	• Oriental Bank of Commerce • State Bank of India • Union Bank of India
Top 3 banks in improvement from March baseline	Theme 2: Customer Responsiveness	Theme 5: Deepening FI & Digitalisation
• Bank of Maharashtra • Central Bank of India • Corporation Bank	• State Bank of India • Oriental Bank of Commerce • Bank of Baroda	• Bank of Baroda • Canara Bank • Punjab National Bank
	Theme 3: Credit Off-take	Theme 6: Governance and HR
	• Oriental Bank of Commerce • Union Bank of India • State Bank of India	• State Bank of India • Bank of Baroda • Punjab National Bank

Climate Smart Cities Assessment Framework (CSCAF) 2.0 launched

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Policies and interventions &GS-III – Climate change
In news

- Recently, Climate Smart Cities Assessment Framework (CSCAF) 2.0 and 'Streets for People Challenge' were launched.
- **Ministry:** Ministry for Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA).

Important value additions

Climate Smart Cities Assessment Framework (CSCAF) 2.0

- **Objective:**(1) To provide a clear roadmap for cities towards combating Climate Change while planning and implementing their actions, including investments; (2) To inculcate a climate-sensitive approach to urban planning and development in India.
- The framework has 28 indicators across five categories namely; (i) Energy and Green Buildings, (ii) Urban Planning, Green Cover & Biodiversity, (iii) Mobility and Air Quality, (iv) Water Management and (v) Waste Management.

- **Implemented by:** The Climate Centre for Cities under National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) and MoHUA

Streets for People Challenge

- It is the response to the need for making the cities more walkable and pedestrian friendly.
- It builds on the advisory issued by the MoHUA.
- It will support cities across the country to develop a unified vision of streets for people in consultation with stakeholders and citizens.
- Fit India Mission, under Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports and the India program of the Institute for Transport Development and Policy (ITDP) have partnered with the Smart Cities Mission to support the challenge.

Living Planet Report 2020

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment; Climate change
In news

- The WWF's Living Planet Report 2020 was recently released.

Key takeaways from the Report

- There has been a reduction of 68 % in the global wildlife population between 1970 and 2016.
- 75 % of the Earth's ice-free land surface has already been significantly altered.
- Most of the oceans are polluted.
- More than 85% of the area of wetlands has been lost during this period.
- **The most important cause of biodiversity loss:** Land-use change - conversion of pristine habitats into agricultural systems and oceans have been overfished.
- **The highest biodiversity loss due to land use change**:(1) Europe and Central Asia at 57.9 %; (2) North America at 52.5 %; (3) Latin America and Caribbean at 51.2 %;(4) Africa at 45.9 %; (5) Asia at 43 %.
- **The largest wildlife population loss**: Latin America at an alarming 94 %.
- **One of the most threatened biodiversity:**Freshwater biodiversity (declining faster than that in oceans or forests).

Do you know?

- Global mapping has recently revealed the extent to which humans have altered millions of kilometres of rivers.

India, a "mega diverse country" with over 45,000 species of plants in only 2.4 % of the world's land area, has already lost six plant species to extinction, according to the IUCN Red List.

Delhi Master Plan 2041

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Policies and Interventions& GS-III – Pollution; Climate Change
In news

- Recently, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) has decided to hold public consultations for the preparation of the Master Plan for Delhi 2041.
- It is a vision document for Delhi's development.

Key takeawaysof 2041 Master Plan:
- **Focus:** Sustainability, inclusivity and equity, blue-green infrastructure, cycling infrastructure, walking circuits for pedestrians, removal of all sources of pollution and unauthorised colonies
- **Objective:** To be proactive and forward-looking
- **Features:** Spaces for yoga, active sports, open air exhibitions, museums and information centres, and other low impact public uses.
- It will fulfil various provisions of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) like: (1) SDG 6 - Clean water and sanitation; (2) SDG 11- Sustainable cities and communities; (3) SDG 14- Life below water; (4) SDG 15- Life on land.

Loss of forest and tree cover: Conserving through Cash for Conservation System

Context:

The unprecedented breadths of the wildfires over three western states of the US, combined with their intensity, scale, speed and duration, have greatly complicated the ability to bring them under control. The 500,000-acre fire is the largest ever recorded blaze in California.

Impact of wildfires:

While natural fires have regenerative properties, large-scale anthropogenic fires have a devastating environmental impact.

- Wildfires can have long-term effects on the quality of rivers and lakes, and on storm water runoff channels. As ash-dry soil with organic matter that hasn't rotted becomes hydrophobic and prevents the absorption of water.
- Wildfires emit carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases that will continue to warm the planet well into the future. They damage forests that would otherwise remove CO2 from the air.
- Biodiversity gets impacted hugley.

Grim situation around the world:

- In 2019, the world lost a football field of rainforest every six seconds.
- 11.9 million hectares of tree cover was lost in 2019. This is about 1.8 gigatonnes of released carbon dioxide, or the annual emission equivalent of 400 million cars (the world's total number of cars is estimated at 1 billion).
- Brazil, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Indonesia have lost the most tropical primary forest cover in recent years.
- The massive wildfires during the latest Australian summer resulted in the worst tree loss ever recorded in Australia, along with the loss of hundreds of millions of animals.

India's situation:

India has about 31 million hectares, or 11% of its area under forest cover. Over the past 20 years, India has lost 328,000 hectares of humid primary forest.

Deforestation and destruction of wetlands are among the leading causes of annual floods in heavily urbanized areas in Kerala and the cities of Mumbai and Chennai.

Silver lining:
- Some countries like Colombia and Costa Rica have been able to slow forest loss.
- While on the one hand contributing to forest loss, China, the US, Ethiopia, and India have also planted billions of trees over the last decade.
- **The Billion Tree Campaign** inspired by Kenyan Nobel Laureate WangariMaathai has morphed into a Trillion Tree Campaign.

Environmentalists estimate that planting a trillion trees can cancel out the deleterious effects of a decade of anthropogenic emissions.

"Cash for conservation" or Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES):
- Populations living on the periphery of forests often see an advantage in cultivating the forest land or using it for pasture, resulting in high rates of deforestation.
- One solution to the alarming loss of forest cover is to compensate marginalized populations on the periphery of forests and incentivize them not to flatten forests.
- PES was pioneered in Costa Rica, and has been successfully used in Mexico.
- The world's longest running PES programme is the US Conservation Reserve Program, which pays out about $1.8 billion a year to the farmers to refrain from cultivating environmentally sensitive land.
- The contract requires these farmers to plant resource-conserving covers to manage soil-erosion, improve water quality, and enhance biodiversity.
- China's Grain-for-Green scheme hands out nearly $4 billion a year to conserve sloping plots (greater than 25 degrees) that are prone to soil erosion by giving out grain and cash. One of the programme's goals is to reduce the annual silt deposits in the Yangtze and Huang He rivers.

Word of caution:
PES systems are complicated to design and implement because they have to be very specific to micro-climatic conditions as well as to the practices of local populations.

Conclusion:
Even as the world tries to give up fossil fuels, reduce material consumption, work more from home and turn vegetarian, afforestation and PES programmes can add significant strength to the fight against climate change.

India should set up an ambitious goal of first retaining and then increasing its forest cover.

Connecting the dots:
- Payment for ecosystem services (PES) can be an effective way to check deforestation. Comment.
- What is a wildfire? What are its impacts?

Waste Management in India

"Legacy waste":

Years of neglect, lack of foresight and complete absence of urban planning has left India with mountains of waste-landfills, waste-choked drains, water bodies and rivers. This is called "legacy waste", a cumulative consequence of decades of neglect and lack of foresight.

India faces a challenge of treating and **getting rid of the legacy waste**, with simultaneous and **continuous accumulation of fresh everyday waste**.

How staggering is the issue?

- India generates the most waste globally, about 275 million tonnes of waste per year.
- With current waste treatment rates of about 20-25%, the majority of waste remains untreated, in a heap, on landfills, and an equal amount in drains and river bodies.
- Drains and water bodies, emptying out into Indian rivers, also carry with them an unimaginable amount of waste. The Ganga is among the top 10 polluted rivers in the world, together accounting for 90% of the total ocean plastic pollution.
- Central, state, city and municipal governments, over decades, have not been able to prevent the situation, nor deal with its scale.
- Out of a total 92 large WTE(Waste-to-Energy) plants only a small fraction is operational. The plants that are operational, run at suboptimal capacity.

Suggested solutions:

India needs affordable, decentralised, customised solutions:

- Municipalities need to have access to affordable technology.
- Local situations needs local solutions: Today most of the technology/equipment needed for waste management is imported, expensive and often not suited in our varied local situations.Amphibian equipment to clean water bodies is imported and can work well for large water bodies. Indigenisation of design and manufacturing of such equipment for smaller drains and water bodies is essential.
- *Atmanirbhar Bharat*(self-reliant India) needs to kick in immediately.

Ease of procurement of technology and equipment:

Evolving a less cumbersome process for the procurement of technology and equipment is imperative. State governments are hit by a double whammy due to lack of technology and a rigid procurement system.

Policy change:

Policy which provides a direction to accelerate the removal of waste exponentially is needed.

- One way, used internationally, is to **unlock the land value under landfills**. Allowing agencies, companies or industry that clear waste, to own the land can fund the clean-up.
- **Development of skilled and trained professional personnel** to operate and maintain the waste management chain, right from collection, operation and maintenance of waste-handling plants.
- Moving to a **zero-waste society**.
- Central, and integral to success, is design. Design in the collection, of centralised and decentralised waste treatment plants, and of the equipment used. **Design of waste management should be the bedrock** of a well-planned smart city, town or village.

Conclusion:
Science and technology must be the fulcrum to provide solutions to the waste challenges faced by the country, a challenge which is both urgent and important, and can be ignored at our own peril.

Connecting the dots:
- A well-designed waste-management strategy, cognisant of Indian constraints, should be the hallmark of Swachh Bharat, Swasth Bharat and Unnat Bharat. Comment.
- India faces a challenge of treating and getting rid of the legacy waste, with simultaneous and continuous accumulation of fresh everyday waste. In this light a multi-pronged strategy is required for waste management.

Net Present Value of Forests

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Forests
In news
- The Ministry of Mines has requested the Forest Advisory Committee to exempt digging exploratory boreholes from Net Present Value (NPV).

Important value additions
Net Present Value
- It is a mandatory one-time payment that a user has to make for diverting forestland for non-forest use, under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980.
- This is calculated on the basis of the services and ecological value of the forests.
- It depends on the location and nature of the forest and the type of industrial enterprise that will replace a particular parcel of forest.
- These payments go to the Compensatory Afforestation Fund (CAF) and are used for afforestation and reforestation.
- **Decided by**: The Forest Advisory Committee.
- The Committee is constituted by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) and decides on whether forests can be diverted for projects and the NPV to be charged.
- It is a statutory body constituted by the Forest (Conservation) Act 1980.

Exemptions
- Some projects have been provided exemption from paying NPV like construction of Schools, Hospitals, village tanks, laying down of optical fibre etc.
- Projects like underground mining and wind energy plants have been given a 50% exemption from NPV.

Do you know?
- In the N. GodavarmanThirumulpad v. Union of India case, 2008, the Supreme Court mandated the payment of NPV.
- The Kanchan Gupta Committee developed the concept of NPV after this case.
- **Exploratory Boreholes**: It is drilled for the purpose of identifying the characteristics, location, quantity and quality of a resource (coal, metal or petroleum). It is a part of prospecting a site for future use for mining and extraction activities.

Low Ozone Over Brahmaputra River Valley observed

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Climate Change

In news
- Recently, scientists at the Aryabhatta Research Institute of Observational Sciences (ARIES), Nainital, have evaluated the near surface ozone in the Brahmaputra River Valley (BRV).
- They assessed seasonal characteristics of ozone to identify the emission source of ozone and its precursors, especially methane (CH4) and non-methane hydrocarbons (NMHCs).

Key takeaways
- Scientists have found relatively low concentration of ozone over BRV (Guwahati - Assam) compared to the other urban locations in India.
- The pattern of ozone concentrations in the BRV indicated that it was strongly influenced by local oxides of nitrogen (NOx) sources with an adjacent national highway being the likely major source.
- High ozone winter concentrations were observed.
- This could be due to local biomass burning providing reactive volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that contributed to ozone formation.
- In the pre-monsoon season, an impact of solar radiation (SR) on the photochemical formation of O3 was observed.
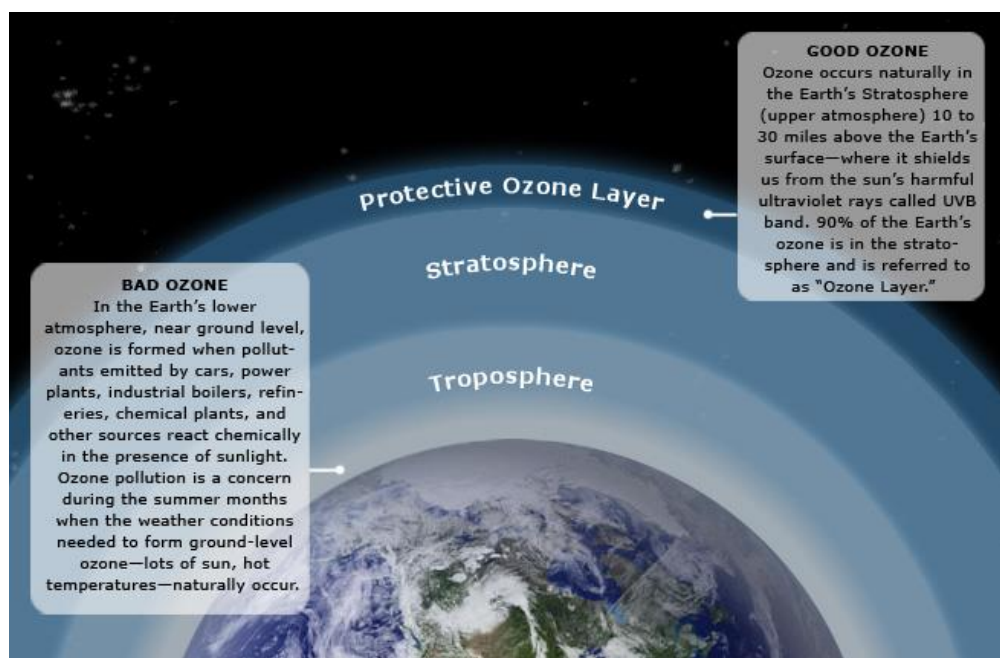
India's track on climate change: Giving up investments on coal?

Context:

The UN Secretary General AntónioGuterres has called on India to make no new investment in coal after 2020, and to reduce emissions by 45% by 2030.

India's track record:
- India is one of the few countries which is currently on track to fulfilling their Paris Agreement commitments.
- Despite the accelerated economic growth of recent decades India's annual emissions, at 0.5 tonnes per capita, are well below the global average of 1.3 tonnes.

In absolute terms it is below that of China, the United States and the European Union (EU), the three leading emitters in absolute term

- In terms of cumulative emissions, India's contribution by 2017 was only 4% for a population of 1.3 billion, whereas the European Union, with a population of only 448 million, was responsible for 20%.

Where do developed countries stand?

- The UNFCCC itself has reported that between 1990 and 2017, the developed nations (excluding Russia and east Europe) have reduced their annual emissions by only 1.3%.
- The global North continues its dependence on oil and natural gas, both equally fossil fuels, with no timeline for their phase-out.
- Large sections of First World environmentalist opinion have been unable to summon up the domestic political support required for climate action.
- They have turned to pressure the developing countries to bear the brunt of climate mitigation.

Issues:

- Any discussion on climate action should have reference to the core principles of climate convention(The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC))- global and international equity and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities
- Unlike the developed nations, India cannot substitute coal substantially by oil and gas. A huge part of this growth needs to come from solar for which sustainable technology is not yet developed.
- Renewables, in the current scenario, at best can meet residential consumption and some part of the demand from the service sector.
- **Lack of technology:** Whether providing 70% to 80% of all generation capacity is possible through renewables depends critically on technology development, including improvements in:
  a) The efficiency of conversion of energy from its source into electricity.
  b) Management of the corresponding electricity grids.
  c) Improvement in storage technologies.

Technology development in climate change mitigation technologies has registered a significant fall since 2009-10 to 2017, across all subsectors and across all developed countries.

- Lacking production capacity in renewable energy technologies and their large-scale operation, deployment on this scale will expose India to increasing and severe dependence on external sources and supply chains.
- Renewables alongside coal will generate, directly and indirectly, far more employment than renewables alone.

Conclusion:

The UN's Generals's call seems to be a call to de-industrialise the country and abandon the population to a permanent low-development trap.

Connecting the dots:

- India must reiterate its long-standing commitment to an equitable response to the challenge of global warming. Comment.

Global Initiative to Reduce Land Degradation And Coral Reef Program

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – International Relations &GS-III – Climate change
In news

- The Environment Ministerial Meeting (EMM) of the <u>G20 countries</u> took place through video conferencing.
- **Under the Presidency:** Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
- The launch of Global Initiative to reduce Land Degradation and Coral Reef program were applauded.
- Two documents on climate change related to managing emissions and climate change adaptations were also launched.

Important value additions
The Global Initiative on Reducing Land Degradation

- It aims to strengthen the implementation of existing frameworks to prevent, halt, and reverse land degradation within G20 member states and globally.

The Global Coral Reef R&D Accelerator Platform

- It is an innovative action-oriented initiative.
- **Aim:** (1) To create a global research and development program; (2) To advance research, innovation and capacity building; (3) To enhance coral reefs conservation.

India's own eco-label BEAMS launched

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment; Climate change; Pollution
In news

- India's own eco-label Beach Environment & Aesthetics Management Services (BEAMS)was recently launched.
- **Ministry**: Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).
- The flag #IAMSAVINGMYBEACH was e-hoisted simultaneously at the eight beaches recently recognized as blue flag beaches.

Key takeaways

- **Objective:** (1) To reduce pollution in coastal waters; (2) To promote sustainable development of beach facilities; (3) To protect & conserve coastal ecosystems & natural resources.
- BEAMS (Beach Environment & Aesthetics Management Services) isa highly acclaimed program under MoEFCC's ICZM (Integrated Coastal Zone Management) project.
- The program will ensure sustainable development of coastal regions.
- This program promotes beach recreation in absolute harmony with nature.

Indian Beaches for Blue Flag certification recommended

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment; Climate change; Pollution
In news

- For the first time eight beaches of India are recommended for the coveted International eco-label, the Blue flag certification.
- **Ministry**: Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).

Key takeaways

- The recommendations are done by an independent National Jury composed of eminent environmentalists & scientists.
- The eight beaches are: (1) Shivrajpur (Gujarat); (2)Ghoghla(Daman & Diu);(3) Kasarkod and (4) Padubidri(Karnataka); (5)Kappad(Kerala);(6) Rushikonda(Andhra Pradesh); (7) Golden beach (Odisha); (8)Radhanagar(Andaman &Nicobar).

Important value additions

Blue Flag certification

- The 'Blue Flag' is a certification that can be obtained by a beach, marina, or sustainable boating tourism operator.
- It serves as an eco-label.
- The certification is known as an indication of high environmental and quality standards.
- Blue Flag beaches are considered the cleanest beaches of the world.
- The certification is awarded by the Denmark-based non-profit Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) with 33 stringent criteria under four major heads for the beaches: (i) Environmental Education and Information (ii) Bathing Water Quality (iii) Environment Management and Conservation and (iv) Safety and Services.

The Blue Flag Programme started in France in 1985 and in areas outside Europe since 2001

Komodo Dragon could become extinct

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Biodiversity; Conservation; Climate change

In news

- A recent study conducted by Australian universities has found out that the Komodo dragon could become extinct in the next few decades due to climate change.

Important value additions

Komodo dragon

- Scientific Name: Varanus komodoensis.
- They are the largest and heaviest lizards on Earth.
- They have long, flat heads with rounded snouts, scaly skin, bowed legs, and huge, muscular tails.
- They can eat almost anything, including invertebrates, birds, and mammals.
- They have venom glands loaded with toxins which secrete anticoagulants.
- **Habitat:** Komodo National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is situated in the Island of Komodo (eastern Indonesia) and is the only habitat for this lizard species.
- **Threats**: (1) Anthropogenic factors; (2) Less prey; (3) Climate change
- **Conservation**: (1) IUCN Status: Vulnerable; (2) CITES: Appendix I

Do you know?

- In February 2019, the Australian government officially declared the first known extinction of a mammal (Bramble Cay melomys) as a result of human-induced climate change.

World Risk Index 2020 released

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Climate Change

In news

- According to the **World Risk Index (WRI) 2020,** India is 'poorly prepared' to deal with **'climate reality',** due to which it is vulnerable to extreme natural disasters.
- Among continents, Oceania is at the highest risk, followed by Africa and the Americas.

Important value additions

World Risk Index

- It is part of the World Risk Report 2020 released by the United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS), BundnisEntwicklungHilft and the University of Stuttgart in Germany.
- It is calculated on a country-by-country basis, through the multiplication of exposure and vulnerability.

- It describes the disaster risk for various countries and regions.
- It is released annually since 2011.
- It indicates which countries are in the greatest need to strengthen measures for coping with and adapting to extreme natural events.

Hundreds of long-finned pilot whales die

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Conservation

In news

- Over 450 long-finned pilot whales have died in Australia's largest recorded mass-stranding event.
- The whales were beached at a remote beach in Tasmania's west coast.
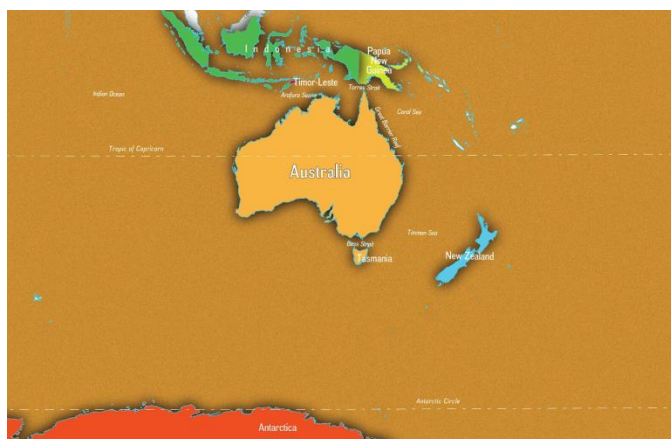
Important value additions

Beaching

- It refers to the phenomenon of dolphins and whales stranding themselves on beaches.
- There are around 2,000 strandings each year worldwide, with most resulting in the death of the animal.
- Whales strand themselves on beaches either singularly or in groups.
- While individual strandings are mostly attributed to injury or sickness, it is not clear why exactly whales beach themselves in groups.

Long-finned pilot whales

- Scientific Name: Globicephalamelas
- These are one of two species of pilot whale, along with short-finned pilot whales.
- These prefer deep temperate to subpolar oceanic waters.
- They have been known to occur in coastal waters in some areas.

- They have been documented near the Antarctic sea ice and associated with the colder Benguela and Humboldt Currents, which may extend their normal range.
- Protection Status: (1) CITES: Appendix II; (2) IUCN: Least Concern

Environmentalism: A Green Supply Chain

Context: The United Nations Millennium Development Goals and the World Bank Group's global practices have recognised environment sustainability as an essential issue of global importance.

Environmental sustainability is understood as
- Buying greener products
- Avoiding hazardous materials
- Energy optimisation
- Waste reduction.

Present Challenges of achieving Environment Sustainability
- **Fear of losing Profits**: Some firms are still reluctant to engage in environmentally beneficial activities as they are afraid to compromise on the economic benefits
- **Adoption by Force**: Some firms have positioned environmental practices at the forefront due to legislation and government commitments but not on voluntary basis.
- **Short term green practices**: Manufacturing sector, get so serious about the low-hanging fruits of waste reduction and energy efficiency improvements that they fail to recognise the need for restructuring their learning imperatives and see the big picture of environmentalism

Way Ahead - Green supply chain
- These include green procurement, green manufacturing, green distribution, and reverse logistics.
- With practices starting from acquisition of eco-friendly raw material to disposal/ reuse/ recycle of used products,employees, suppliers, distributors, retailers and customers will be able to integrate environmental concerns in the daily operations of a firm
- This ensures that environmental sustainability is from the source (willingness) and not through force (regulations).

Benefits of Green Supply chain
- **Enables Restructuring of Firms & ecosystem:** Green supply chain practices enable organisational learning in environmental sustainability. This further promotes environmentalism across all players in manufacturing supply chains.
- **Helps firms Better Strategize to future needs:** The resultant learning system smoothens the knowledge flow in the organisation and help firms to strategise for better performance, bearing in mind the environmental aspects.
- **Leads to Higher Economic performance in long run**: Research shows that green Supply Chain not only lead to a long-lasting natural drive towards environmental performance, but also to higher economic performance
- **Society will be prioritised over Profits**: Understanding environmental links will enable managers and experts to shape their organisational values, work practices, and performances for the greater good of society.

Conclusion

Policymakers should support this thinking (Green Supply Chain) by not merely imposing environmental practices as regulatory norms but by emphasising on the creation of green supply chain-based learning systems in manufacturing.

Electric buses under FAME scheme sanctioned

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Policies &GS-III – Climate change; Pollution

In news

- In a big push towards electric mobility, the Government has sanctioned 670 Electric buses in various states.
- **States:** Maharashtra, Goa, Gujarat and Chandigarh and 241 Charging Stations in Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Gujarat and Port Blair under Phase-II of FAME India Scheme.

Important value additions

The FAME(Faster Adoption and Manufacture of (Hybrid and) Electric Vehicles)

- **Launched by:** The Ministry of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises in 2015
- **Objective:** To incentivize the production and promotion of eco-friendly vehicles including electric vehicles and hybrid vehicles
- **Two phases of the scheme**: **Phase I**: started in 2015 and was completed on March 31st, 2019; (2) **Phase II**: started from April 1st, 2019, will be completed by March 31st, 2022.

FAME IIKey Features

- It proposes to give a push to electric vehicles (EVs) in public transport.
- It seeks to encourage adoption of EVs by way of market creation and demand aggregation.
- It envisages the holistic growth of EV industry, including providing for charging infrastructure, research and development of EV technologies and push towards greater indigenization.
- The outlay of ₹10,000 crore has been made for three years till 2022 for FAME 2 scheme.
- There is also provision for setting up of charging stations for electric vehicles in India.
- The plug-in hybrid vehicles and those with a sizeable lithium-ion battery and electric motor will also be included in the scheme.
- FAME 2 will offer incentives to manufacturers, who invest in developing electric vehicles and its components.

Eligibility to get incentive: Only buses priced up to ₹2 crore, strong and plug-in hybrids under₹15 lakh, three-wheelers under ₹5 lakh and two-wheelers under ₹1.5 lakh.

The benefits of a carbon tax

Context: China, the largest carbon dioxide emitter, announced that it would balance out its carbon emissions with measures to offset them before 2060. The spotlight is now on the U.S. and India, countries that rank second and third in emissions.

Do You Know?

- India ranks fifth in the Global Climate Risk Index 2020.
- Between 1998 and 2017, disaster-hit countries reported $2.9 trillion in direct economic losses, with 77% resulting from climate change, according to a United Nations report.

What are India's commitments to tackle Climate Change?

- India has committed to 40% of electricity capacity being from non-fossil fuels by 2030
- India has also committed lowering the ratio of emissions to GDP by one-third from 2005 levels
- It has agreed to enhance its forest cover which will absorb 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO_2, the main gas responsible for global warming) by 2030.

A Stronger Action is required – Pricing Carbon

It is in India's interest to take stronger action before 2030, leading to no net carbon increase by 2050. A smart approach is pricing carbon which can be done in following ways:

1. Emission Trading

- One way to price carbon is through emission trading, i.e., setting a maximum amount of allowable effluents from industries, and permitting those with low emissions to sell their extra space.
- It is a market-based approach to controlling pollution by providing economic incentives for reducing the emissions of pollutants.
- This is in contrast to command-and-control environmental regulations imposed by governments

2. Carbon Tax

- Another way is to put a carbon tax on economic activities — for example, on the use of fossil fuels like coal, as done in Canada and Sweden.
- A carbon tax is a fee on the carbon content of fossil fuels
- It is a powerful monetary disincentive that motivates transition to clean energy across the economy, simply by making it more economically rewarding to move to non-carbon fuels and energy efficiency.
- **Example**: Canada imposed a carbon tax at $20 per tonne of CO2 emissions in 2019, eventually rising to $50 per tonne. This is estimated to reduce greenhouse gas pollution by between 80 and 90 million tonnes by 2022.
- **The fiscal gains from pricing carbon can be sizeable**. A carbon tax at $35 per tonne of CO2 emissions in India is estimated to be capable of generating some 2% of GDP through 2030.

3. Carbon Tariff on Imports

- Big economies like India should also use their global monopsony, or the power of a large buyer in international trade, to impose a carbon tariff as envisaged by the EU
- Focusing on trade is vital because reducing the domestic carbon content of production alone would not avert the harm if imports remain carbon-intensive

Conclusion

By reducing carbon emission through carbon pricing there are immense health benefits. A significant part of more than 3 % percent of India's GDP currently spent on pollution-induced diseases will inevitably come down

Connecting the dots

- Paris Climate Deal
- [Draft EIA notification](#) and its impact on environmental standards

Plastic Parks Scheme launched

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Interventions related to Climate change and Pollution
In news

- The Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilizers has approved setting up of 10 Plastic Parks in the country.
- **The Parks are being set up in the states of:** Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand and Chhattisgarh.
- A Plastic Park is an industrial zone devoted to plastic enterprises and its allied industries.
- **Implemented by**: A Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) shall complete the setting up of the Plastic Park in a period of three years from the date of final approval.

Key takeaways

- Plastic Parks shall enable the plastic sector to move up the value chain and contribute to the economy more effectively.
- **Major Objectives**: (1) Increase the competitiveness, polymer absorption capacity and value addition in the domestic downstream plastic processing industry through adaptation of modern measurers; (2) Achieve environmentally sustainable growth through innovative methods of waste management, recycling, etc.
- The Central Government provides grant funding up to 50% of the project cost, subject to a ceiling of Rs. 40 crore per project.
- The remaining project cost is funded by the State Government, beneficiary industries and by loan from financial institutions.

Leuser Ecosystem

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Biodiversity
In news

- Recently, Leuser Ecosystem was in the news.
- An investigation by the global watchdog Rainforest Action Network (RAN) has shown that various food, cosmetics and finance companies have links with companies which are responsible for the destruction of the Leuser Ecosystem.
- It is a forest area on the island of Sumatra, Indonesia.

Important value additions

Leuser Ecosystem

- It is among the most ancient and life-rich ecosystems ever documented by science.
- It is a world-class hotspot of biodiversity.
- It is widely acknowledged to be among the most important areas of intact rainforest left in all of Southeast Asia.
- It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- The ecosystem stretches across the province of Aceh and North Sumatra, Indonesia.
- Its diverse landscape includes lowland and montane rainforests and carbon-rich peatlands.

Do you know?

- It supports viable populations of rare species like Sumatran tigers, orangutans, rhinos, elephants, clouded leopards and sun bears.
- It plays an important role regulating the global climate by storing massive amounts of carbon in its peatlands and standing forests.

- **Threats**: (1) Industrial development for palm oil, pulp and paper plantations and mining; (2) The fires from this widespread destruction have caused major haze pollution

Margadarshika for Gram Panchayats and PaaniSamitis under JalJeevan Mission unveiled

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III –Water Resources
In news
- Indian Prime Minister released the new logo for the JalJeevan Mission.
- 'Margadarshika for Gram Panchayats and PaaniSamitis under JalJeevan Mission' (Guidelines for the Village Panchayats and Water Committees) was also unveiled.

Key takeaways
- Referring to the Margadarshika, it was highlighted that they are equally important for the Gram Panchayats, people living in rural areas and for the Government machinery.
- The Mardarshika Guidelines will guide the members of the Water Committee and Gram Panchayats in taking the right decisions.
- A special 100-day campaign is being launched on 2nd Oct this year under JalJeevan Mission to ensure drinking water connection to every school and Anganwadi in the country.

Do you know?
- The JalJeevan Mission aims at providing every rural household in the country with piped-water connection.
- The new logo of the Mission shall continue to inspire the need to save every drop of water.
- JalJeevan Mission adopts a bottom to top approach, where the users and PaaniSamitis (Water Committees) in the villages envision the whole project from its implementation to maintenance and operation.
- The mission has also ensured that at least 50% of the members of the water committee would be women.

6 Mega development projects inaugurated under NamamiGange Mission

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Pollution; Climate change; Water Resources
In news
- Indian Prime Minister inaugurated 6 mega development projects in Uttarakhand under the NamamiGange Mission.

Key takeaways

- The Ganga Avalokan Museum, the first of its kind on the River Ganga at Haridwar was also inaugurated.
- "Rowing Down the Ganges" book was also released which explains in detail how the River Ganges stands as a glowing symbol of India's Culture, Faith and Heritage.
- These six mega projects of Sewage Treatment Plants (STP) are constructed at Haridwar, Rishikesh, Muni kiReti, Chorpani, and Badrinath.
- The Government would provide upfront around 40% of the project cost to the developer to start the work and the remaining 60% would be borne by the private party.

ANIMALS/NATIONAL PARKS IN NEWS

Project Dolphin announced

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment; Biodiversity
In news

- The IndianPrime Minister had announced the government's plan to launch a Project Dolphin in his recent Independence Day Speech.
- **Aim:** To save both river and marine dolphins.
- **Implemented by**: Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- Project Dolphin will be on the lines of Project Tiger.

Important value additions
Gangetic Dolphin

- Scientific Name: Platanistagangetica
- These are generally blind.
- They catch their prey byemitting an ultrasonic sound which reaches the prey.
- These are also called Susu.
- It is found mainly in the Indian subcontinent, particularly in Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems and in the Ganga's tributaries.
- **Threats:** Construction ofdams,Pollution, excessive silting and sand mining.
- It has been recognized by the Indian Government as its National Aquatic Animal
- It is the official animal of the Guwahati, Assam.
- **IUCN Status**: Endangered

Do you know?

- They are included in Appendix I (most endangered) of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).
- They are also included in Appendix II of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS).
- The National Mission for Clean Ganga celebrates 5th October as National Ganga River Dolphin Day.

Welfare of Animals in India

Context:

Over the past year, there have been reports of animals being subjected to sexual abuse, acid attacks, being thrown off rooftops, and being burnt alive.

Flaws in legal framework: The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PCA) Act, 1960

- The law punishes the most serious forms of animal violence with a paltry fine of Rs. 50.
- Section 11 lists a series of offences, which vary from abandoning an animal to kicking it, mutilating it or killing it, and prescribes the same punishment for all these offences. Severe offences are treated on a par with less severe ones.
- At present, a majority of the offences under the Act are non-cognisable, which means the police cannot investigate the offence or arrest the accused without the permission of a Magistrate. This facilitates police inaction.
- The PCA Act creates a plethora of exceptions which significantly dilute the protections available to animals. Section 11(3) provides exceptions for animal husbandry procedures such as dehorning, castration, nose-roping, and branding.
  The law does not provide any guidelines for these procedures. This allows individuals to resort to cruel methods.
- Ambiguity in definition: The law was enacted to "prevent the infliction of unnecessary pain or suffering on animals". However, this phrase is not defined anywhere in the Act. This is crucial because what constitutes "unnecessary" is entirely a matter of subjective assessment.

Way forward:
- An amendment is required to grade the offences according to their severity, and specify punishments accordingly. Further, the more severe offences must be made cognisable and non-bailable.
- Proper regulations of animal husbandry procedures: A petition from PETA's (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) suggests mandating the use of anesthetics prior to castration, replacing nose-roping with face halters and branding with radio frequency identification. Aas opposed to dehorning cattle, it recommended that farmers breed hornless cattle.

Conclusion:
The Constitution requires all citizens to "have compassion for living creatures". We must seek to protect the most vulnerable among us. Our animal welfare laws need an overhaul.

Connecting the dots:
- For a country that claims adherence to ahimsa, India's treatment of its animals betrays a moral failure.

Nandankanan Zoological Park: Odisha

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Zoological Parks
In news
- Recently, Nandankanan Zoological Park was in news due to death of two sloth bears.

Important value additions
Nandankanan Zoological Park
- It is situated near Bhubaneswar, Odisha.
- It was inaugurated in 1960.
- It is the first zoo in India to become a member of the World Association of Zoos & Aquariums (WAZA).

- It is recognized as a leading zoo for the breeding of the Indian pangolin and white tiger.
- Leopards, mouse deer, lions, ratel and vultures are also bred here.
- It was the world's first captive crocodile breeding centre, where gharials were bred in captivity in 1980.
- The State Botanical Garden of Nandankanan is one of the pioneering plant conservation and nature education centres of Odisha.

Sloth Bear

- **Scientific Name**: Melursusursinus
- Also called honey bear, Hindi bhalu.
- **Habitat**: Tropical or subtropical regions of India and Sri Lanka.
- **Protection Status**: (1) Vulnerable in the IUCN Red List; (2) Appendix I in CITES; (3) Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- **Threats**: Habitat loss, poaching for body parts, captured for use in performances and hunted because of their aggressive behavior and destruction of crops.

Do you know?

- WAZA is the global alliance of regional associations, national federations, zoos and aquariums, dedicated to the care and conservation of animals and their habitats around the world.

African Elephant dying due to Cyanobacteria

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Environment; Biodiversity
In news

- Recently, neuro-toxins in water produced by cyanobacteria killed more than 300 African elephants in the Okavango delta region, Botswana, South Africa.

Importantvalue additions
Cyanobacteria
They are blue-green algae.

- They are found naturally in soils and all types of water.
- These organisms use sunlight to make their own food.

- In warm, nutrient-rich (high in phosphorus and nitrogen) environments, cyanobacteria can multiply quickly.
- Toxic blue-green algae are occurring more frequently as climate change drives up global temperatures.

The African elephant
- It is the largest animal walking the Earth.
- Their herds wander through 37 countries in Africa.
- **IUCN Status:** Vulnerable
- **African elephants in Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe:** CITES Appendix II

Image source: Click here

Botswana
- It is a landlocked country of southern Africa.
- The semi-arid Kalahari Desert covers about 70% of Botswana's surface.
- It is home to mostly different types of acacia trees; animals like lion, cheetah, leopard, hyena, antelopes, meerkats, as well as many birds species and reptiles.
- It is also home to the tribes like- San people (Bushmen), Tswana, Kgalakgadi, and Herero people.
- **Okavango Delta**: It is one of the world's largest inland deltas.

Do you know?
- Neuro-toxins are substances that damage, destroy, or impair the functioning of neural tissue.
- An algal bloom is a rapid increase in the population of algae or cyanobacteria in an aquatic system.

INFRASTRUCTURE/ENERGY

Green Term Ahead Market (GTAM) launched

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure; Energy Resources

In News:

- Pan-India Green Term Ahead Market (GTAM) in electricity was recently launched.
- **Launched by:** The Union Minister of State (IC) Power and New & Renewable Energy
- **Objective:** Greening the Indian short term power Market.

Key takeaways

- The market is the first Exclusive product for the renewable energy sector in the world.
- Transactions through GTAM will be bilateral in nature.
- Clear identification of corresponding buyers and sellers shall be available.
- There will not be any difficulty in accounting for Renewable Purchase Obligations (RPO).
- GTAM contracts will be segregated into Solar RPO & Non-Solar RPO.
- Further, within the two segments GTAM contracts will have Green Intraday, Day Ahead Contingency, Daily and Weekly Contracts.
- Price discovery will take place on a continuous basis.
- Looking at the market conditions, open auction can be introduced for daily & weekly contracts.

Coal India Ltd. (CIL) to invest in 500 coal-related projects

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure: Energy

In News:

- Coal India Ltd (CIL) will invest over 1.22 lakh crore rupees on development of nearly 500 projects.
- Projects will be related to coal evacuation, infrastructure, project development, exploration and clean coal technologies in India.

Key takeaways

- The investment aims at making India self-reliant in terms of coal and at achieving the production target of 1 billion tonnes by 2023-2024.
- The investment will be in two phases for 49 First Mile Connectivity projects.
- First Mile Connectivity is the transportation of coal from pitheads to dispatch points.
- Computer-aided loading technology of coal is being developed to replace the existing methodology of transportation via road.
- CIL has also identified 15 Greenfield projects which will be operated under the Mine Developer and Operator (MDO) model.
- It also announced measures for relaxations and exemptions for greater participation of its stakeholders.
- The experience criteria is reduced from 65% to 50% for mining tenders.
- Work experience criteria are relaxed by 50%.

World's largest solar tree developed

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Renewable sources of Energy

In news

- Indian Council of Scientific and Industrial Research - Central Mechanical Engineering Research Institute (CSIR-CMERI) has developed the World's Largest Solar Tree.
- It is installed at CSIR-CMERI Residential Colony, Durgapur, West Bengal.

Key takeaways

- The installed capacity of the Solar Tree is above 11.5 kilowatts peak (kWp).
- It has the annual capacity to generate 12,000-14,000 units of Clean and Green Power.
- There are a total of 35 Solar PV Panels in each tree with a capacity of 330 wp each.
- The inclination of the arms holding the Solar PV Panels are flexible and can be adjusted as per requirement.
- This feature is not available in Roof-Mounted Solar facilities.
- Each Solar Tree will cost Rs 7.5 lakhs.
- The interested MSMEs can align their Business Model with the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evem Utthan Mahabhiyan (PM KUSUM) Scheme for farmers, for developing a Renewable Energy based Energy Grid.

Important value additions

PM-KUSUM Scheme

- Ministry- Ministry of New & Renewable Energy (MNRE).
- The scheme aims to add solar and other renewable capacity of 25,750 MW by 2022.
- It provides for installation of solar pumps, grid connected renewable power plants and solarization of existing grid-connected agricultural pumps.
- The Scheme is being implemented through State Government Agencies.
- The PM KUSUM scheme has three components.
- Component-A- 10,000 megawatts (MW) of decentralised ground mounted grid-connected renewable power plants.
- Component-B- installation of 17.50 lakh standalone solar powered agriculture pumps and
- Component-C- solarisation of 10 lakh grid-connected solar powered agriculture pumps.

Do you know?

- The Component-A and Component-C will be implemented on pilot mode for 1000 MW capacity and one lakh grid connected agriculture pumps respectively and thereafter, will be scale-up on success of pilot run.
- Component-B will be implemented in full-fledged manner.

Coal Gasification and Liquefaction webinar held

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Energy resources

In news

- The Union Coal Ministry organised a webinar on Coal Gasification and Liquefaction recently.

Key takeaways

- India aims for 100 million tonnes (MT) coal gasification by 2030 with investments worth over Rs. 4 lakh crores, said Pralhad Joshi, Union Minister of Coal and Mines.

- For encouraging use of clean sources of fuel, the government has provided for a concession of 20% on revenue share of coal used for gasification.
- This will boost production of synthetic natural gas, energy fuel, and urea for fertilisers and production of other chemicals.

Do you know?

- For development of Surface Coal Gasification in India, a Steering Committee has been constituted under the chairmanship of Dr. V.K. Saraswat, Member, NITI Aayog comprising members from the Ministry of Coal.
- CIL has also planned to set up at least 3 gasification plants (besides Dankuni) on BOO basis (Build-Own-Operate) through global tendering and has signed an MOU with GAIL for marketing synthetic natural gas.

Important value additions

Coal gasification

- It is the process of producing syngas—a mixture consisting primarily of carbon monoxide, hydrogen, carbon dioxide, natural gas, and water vapour —from coal and water, air and/or oxygen.

Coal liquefaction

- It is a process of converting coal into liquid hydrocarbons: liquid fuels and petrochemicals.

Foundation Day of AREAS

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Energy resources; Renewable sources of Energy

In news

- On the 6th Foundation Day (27th August 2020) of the Association of Renewable Energy Agencies of States (AREAS), the government has launched a website and telephone directory for AREAS.

Important value additions

AREAS

- **Agenda Behind AREAS**: State Nodal Agencies (SNAs) for Renewable Energy (RE) interact and learn from each other's experiences and also share their best practices and knowledge regarding technologies and schemes/programmes.
- **Members**: The Union Minister for New & Renewable Energy (NRE) is the Patron of the Association and Secretary, MNRE is the ex-officio President of the Association. All SNAs are members of the Association.
- **Formation**: It got registered under Society Registration Act, 1860 on 27th August 2014.

UN Special Rapporteurs on EIA 2020

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Global Groupings &GS-III- Environment

In news

- Recently, a group of Special Rapporteurs to the United Nations (UN) has expressed concerns over the draft Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) notification, 2020.

Analysis of EIA draft, 2020 Part I
Analysis of EIA Draft, 2020 Part II

Key takeaways

- The group has highlighted that the proposed notification appeared to have clauses that obstructed people's rights to a safe, clean and healthy environment.
- There are clauses which exempt several large industries and projects from the public consultation.
- It does not require publication of information or holding of public consultation for projects labelled by the Central government as 'involving strategic considerations'.
- It allows for post-facto approval for projects. It means that the clearances for projects can be awarded even if they have started construction or have been running phase without securing environmental clearances.
- The group has sought the government's response on how the provisions of the notification are consonant with India's obligations under international law.

Indian Government's Response
- The Environment Ministry has held that nothing in the proposed EIA, 2020 violates the UN Declaration of Human Rights and that the rapporteurs' concerns are misplaced.
- It is still a draft and was issued for public consultation.
- The imperfections in the existing EIA would be amended in the new notification.

Do you know?
- Special Rapporteurs are independent experts working on behalf of the UN. They work on a country or a thematic mandate specified by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC).

Petroleum projects in Bihar inaugurated

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure - Energy
In news
- The Indian Prime Minister recently inaugurated three key projects related to the Petroleum sector in Bihar.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas
- **Commissioned by:**IndianOil and HPCL

Key takeaways
- The projects include the Durgapur-Banka section (about 200 km) of the Paradip-Haldia-Durgapur Pipeline Augmentation Project and two LPG Bottling Plants in Banka and Champaran.
- The line from Paradip - Haldia will now be further extended to Patna, Muzaffarpur and the pipeline coming from Kandla which has reached Gorakhpur will also be connected to it.
- These LPG plants will meet the LPG requirements of Godda, Deoghar, Dumka, Sahibganj, Pakur districts and some areas of Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand.

Important bridges and road improvement projects inaugurated in Gadchiroli

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure - Roadways
In news
- Three important bridges and two road improvement projects wereinauguratedin Gadchiroli, Maharashtra.
- Foundation stones for four other major bridge projects across the rivers Wainganga, Bandiya, Perikota and Perimili were also laid down.
- **Ministry:** Ministry for Road Transport & Highways

Important value additions

Wainganga Bridge Project
- [Wainganga river](), which divides Gadchiroli&Chandrapur Districts is one of the important rivers in the State of Maharashtra.
- To eliminate hardships of the people, Union Minister proposed construction of an ambitious project to construct bridge on Wainganga River, along National Highway 353 B, at a total cost of Rs. 99 Crore, to be completed by NHAI and PWD.

Standards for Safety Evaluation 0f Hydrogen Fuel Cell Vehicles

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Energy Resources

In news
- The Standards for Safety Evaluation of Hydrogen Fuel Cells vehicles were recently notified.
- **Ministry**: The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.

Key takeaways
- The motor vehicles of Category M and Category N, running on compressed gaseous hydrogen fuel cell, shall be in accordance with AIS 157:2020, as amended from time to time, till the corresponding Bureau of Indian Standard Act, 2016, specification is notified.
- Also, the hydrogen fuel specification for fuel cell vehicles will be in accordance with ISO 14687.
- They were notified through an amendment to Central Motor Vehicles Rules 1989.
- These standards are also at par with the available international standards.
- This would facilitate the promotion of Hydrogen Fuel Cell based vehicles in India.
- [Hydrogen Fuel Cell based vehicles]() are energy efficient and environment friendly.

States advised to stamp International Convention of Road Traffic

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Infrastructure

In news
- The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has advised the States and Union Territory administrations to stamp International Convention of Road Traffic of 19th September 1949 on the first page of International Driving Permit, IDP issued by them.
- Many countries ask for the validation of IDP in accordance with the International Convention of Road Traffic of 19th September 1949.

Important value additions

- The Convention on Road Traffic is commonly known as the Geneva Convention on Road Traffic.
- It is an international treaty promoting the development and safety of international road traffic by establishing certain uniform rules among the contracting parties.
- The convention addresses minimum mechanical and safety equipment needed to be on board.
- It defines an identification mark to identify the origin of the vehicle.
- The Convention was prepared and opened for signature by the United Nations Conference on Road and Motor Transport held at Geneva from 23 August to 19 September 1949. It came into force on 26 March 1952.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Early Galaxy Detected by AstroSat

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-III – Science and technology; Achievements of Indians in Science and technology

In News:

- One of the earliest galaxies called AUDFs01 has been discovered using AstroSat.
- **Discovered by:** A team of Scientists from the Inter University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA), Pune.
- The team comprises scientists from India, Switzerland, France, USA, Japan and Netherlands.

Key takeaways

- The galaxy is located in the Hubble Extreme Deep field, 9.3 billion light-years away from Earth.
- The galaxy was discovered using UltraViolet Imaging Telescope (UVIT) on Astrosat.
- AstroSat detected Extreme Ultraviolet light from the galaxy.

Important value additions

AstroSat

- It is a multi-wavelength astronomy mission on an IRS-class (Indian Remote Sensing-Class) satellite in a 650-km, near-equatorial orbit.
- **Launched by:** Indian launch vehicle PSLV by ISRO.
- It is the first dedicated Indian astronomy mission.
- **Aim**: To study celestial sources in X-ray, optical and UV spectral bands simultaneously with its five unique X-ray and ultraviolet telescopes working in tandem.
- AstroSat mission enables the simultaneous multi-wavelength observations of various astronomical objects with a single satellite.

Quantum State Interferography found

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-III – Science and technology; Achievements of Indians in Science and technology

In News:

- Indian Scientists have found a new way of inferring the state of a system (both 2-D qubits and higher-dimensional qubits) from an interference pattern.
- It has been termed as 'Quantum State Interferography' (QSI).
- New ways are being experimented with to manipulate quantum states so that they can be harnessed for computing, communication, and metrology.
- QSI can help make manipulations simpler so that several crucial operations in quantum technologies become less cumbersome.
- The setup requires only two interferometers from which many interferograms can be obtained to reconstruct the state.

Treating data as commons

Context: The Gopalakrishnan Committee set up by the government on developing a governance framework for non-personal data recently put out its draft report for public consultation

Data as Infrastructure

- Industrial age infrastructure — roads, electricity, etc. — were often publicly owned. Even if there was some private role, these were run as closely regulated public utilities.
- The idea was to ensure widespread availability of such infrastructural elements to all, and avoid wasteful duplications.
- Society's data have a similar nature for a digital economy.
- There are two key infrastructural components of a digital economy: data and cloud computing (analysis of data).

Why regulation of data infrastructure is needed?
- Infrastructures are to be equitably provided for all businesses. Data have similar characteristics
- Very few corporations have vertically integrated all the digital components involved in delivery of any digital service thus leading to creation of monopolies
- Dominant digital corporations are building exclusive control over any sector's data as their key business advantage.
- What is needed, however, is **to treat data as infrastructure, or 'commons',** so that data are widely available for all businesses.
- **Impact of data infrastructure regulation:** The digital businesses then shift their key business advantage from exclusive access to data to employing available data for devising digital services for consumers' benefit.

How does Gopalkrishnan Committee view data?
- The Gopalakrishnan committee takes such an infrastructural view of data.
- Data collected from various communities are considered to be 'owned' by the relevant community.
- **Community ownership** means that the data should be shared back with all those who need it in society, whether to develop domestic digital businesses or for producing important digital public goods.
- Only the data collected from non-privately owned sources, from society or community sources, have to be shared when requested for. Data from privately owned sources remain private.
- **Significance:** Community ownership will help create a robust domestic data/AI industry, thus reducing the dependence on U.S. and Chinese companies.

What institutional mechanisms does the committee recommend?
- **Community Trustees:** Since a community requires a legally recognisable body to articulate its data ownership claim, the committee introduces the concept of community trustees that could be various bodies representative of the community.
- **Data collectors** are considered as data custodians that will use and secure data as per the best interests of the community concerned.
- **Data trusts** are data infrastructures that will enable data sharing, sector-wise, or across sectors, and which can be run by various kinds of third-party bodies.
- **A Non-Personal Data Authority** is envisaged to enable and regulate all the envisaged data-sharing activities.
- **A new legislation** is also recommended by committee because ensuring and enforcing data sharing will require sufficient legal backing.

Conclusion

- India is the first country to come up with a comprehensive framework in this area.
- Starting early in this important digital policy and governance area may just provide a formidable first mover advantage for India to acquire its rightful place in the digital world.

Connecting the dots

- K.S. Puttaswamy Case & Right to Privacy
- Justice BN Srikrishna committee report on data protection law

Star Formation in Dwarf Galaxies

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Space

In news

- Recently, astronomers from the Aryabhatta Research Institute of Observational Sciences (ARIES) have found out the reasons behind intense star formation in some dwarf galaxies.

Key takeaways

- Hydrogen in these dwarf galaxies is found to be irregular and sometimes not moving in well-defined orbits (non-symmetric hydrogen distribution).
- Some Hydrogen around these galaxies is also detected in forms of isolated clouds, plumes, and tails
- Scientists used the Devasthal Fast Optical Telescope (DFOT) near Nainital (Uttarakhand) and the Giant Metrewave Radio Telescope (GMRT) in Maharashtra.

Do you know?

- Dwarf galaxies are the most abundant type of galaxy in the universe but are difficult to detect due to their low luminosity, low mass and small size.

Controlling Dengue Using Wolbachia Bacteria

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II - Health & GS-III- Biotechnology

In news

- Researchers from the World Mosquito Program have used mosquitoes infected with Wolbachia bacteria to successfully control dengue in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

Important value additions

Wolbachia

- Wolbachia are natural bacteria present in up to 60% of insect species, including some mosquitoes.
- It is not usually found in the Aedes aegypti mosquito.
- It is safe for humans, animals and the environment.
- The Aedes aegypti mosquito spreads Dengue and other diseases such as chikungunya, Zika and yellow fever
- However, it cannot spread the disease when it is artificially infected with Wolbachia.

Do you know?

- Dengue is a mosquito-borne tropical disease caused by the dengue virus (Genus Flavivirus)
- The dengue vaccine CYD-TDV or Dengvaxia was approved by the US Food & Drug Administration in 2019.
- It is the first dengue vaccine to get the regulatory nod in the US.
- Dengvaxia is basically a live, attenuated dengue virus which has to be administered in people of ages 9 to 16 who have laboratory-confirmed previous dengue infection and who live in endemic areas.

NIDHI-EIR program launched

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Entrepreneurship; Innovation

In news

- A brochure featuring Entrepreneurs in Residence (EIR) was recently launched.
- **Launched under:** National Initiative for Developing and Harnessing Innovations (NIDHI) programme.
- **Concerned department:** Department of Science & Technology (DST) Secretary.
- The brochure details what the EIRs are working on and some highlights about them.
- It is also meant to be a directory of all EIRs.

Important value additions

- NIDHI supports aspiring entrepreneurs for pursuing a promising technology business idea over a period up to 18 months with a subsistence grant up to Rs 30000 per month with a maximum cap for total support of Rs 3.6 lakh to each EIR over a maximum of 18 months.
- The NIDHI-EIR programme provides tremendous opportunities for innovative entrepreneurs to expand their networks and get critical feedback on their ventures in order to promote their entrepreneurial career goals and aspirations.

Spot Robot developed

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Science and Technology

In news

- Recently, researchers from Boston Dynamics, of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT - USA) have developed a robot, called 'Spot'.
- They have planned to use it for patients with Covid-19 symptoms.

Key takeaways
- The robot is controlled by a handheld device.
- It can walk on four legs, climbs stairs and can traverse rough terrain with ease.
- It is small enough to be used indoors.
- It can measure skin temperature, breathing rate, pulse rate, and blood oxygen saturation in healthy patients, from 2 metres away.
- It has four cameras — one infrared, three monochrome.

Do you know?
- The infrared camera measures skin temperature on the face

- When haemoglobin binds to oxygen and flows through blood vessels, it results in slight changes in colour.
- These changes are measured with the help of the three monochrome cameras, which filter lights of three different wavelengths.
- The robot can be deployed in areas where suspected cases of Covid-19 assemble.
- The robot can also carry a tablet that allows doctors to ask patients about their symptoms without being in the same room.

Image source: [Click here](#)

Covid-19 Detection Using Mass Spectrometer developed

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Science and Technology
In news

- Researchers from the Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (IGIB) and the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) have developed a technique that uses mass spectrometry to detect novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2).

Important value additions
Mass Spectrometry (MS)
- It is an analytical technique used for determining the elemental composition of samples, quantifying the mass of particles and molecules, and explaining their chemical structure.
- MS is based on ionization and fragmentation of sample molecules in the gaseous phase.
- The new technique based on mass spectrometry relies on detecting the presence of two peptides which are unique to SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Do you know?
- The new method can directly detect the virus without amplifying the RNA for detection.
- With the new technique, scientists have been able to detect novel coronavirus with 95% sensitivity and 100% specificity with respect to RT-PCR.
- This is much better than the alternative rapid antigen kits.
- Detection of the virus takes less than three minutes;
- The method also allows for effective pooling of samples.

- Different Types of Test for Detecting Covid-19: (1) RT-PCR Tests; (2) Rapid Antigen Detection Tests; (3) RTnPCR Tests; (4) Feluda Tests; (5) ELISA Antibody Tests; (6) SalivaDirect Test

Significance and capability of scramjet vehicle tested

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Defence; Achievements of Indians in Sci& Tech
 In news

- The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) recently successfully flight tested the Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle (HSTDV).
- It is an unmanned scramjet vehicle with a capability to travel at six times the speed of sound.

Key takeaways

- The parameters of the test were monitored by multiple tracking radars, electro-optical systems and telemetry stations and a ship was also deployed in the Bay of Bengal to monitor the performance during the cruise phase of hypersonic vehicle.
- The indegenous development of the technology will also boost the development of the systems built with hypersonic vehicles at its core, including both offensive and defensive hypersonic cruise missile systems and also in the space sector.
- To achieve the level of technology with countries like the US, Russia and China, many more rounds of tests will have to be done .

Do you know?

- It is a giant leap in indigenous defence technologies and a significant milestone towards a Sashakt Bharat and Atmanirbhar Bharat.
- Capabilities for highly complex technology will serve as the building block for NextGen Hypersonic vehicles in partnership with industry.
- The test was conducted from Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Launch Complex at Wheeler Island, off the coast of Odisha.
- The Agni missile was used for the launch.

Important value additions

The hypersonic vehicle and its scramjet engine

- The scramjets are a variant of a category of jet engines called the air breathing engines.
- Hypersonic speeds are those which are five times or more than the speed of sound. The unit tested by the DRDO can achieve upto six times the speed of sound or Mach 6.
- **Disadvantages:** Very high cost and high thrust-to-weight ratio.
- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and DRDO have worked on the development of the technology earlier as well in 2016 and 2019, respectively.
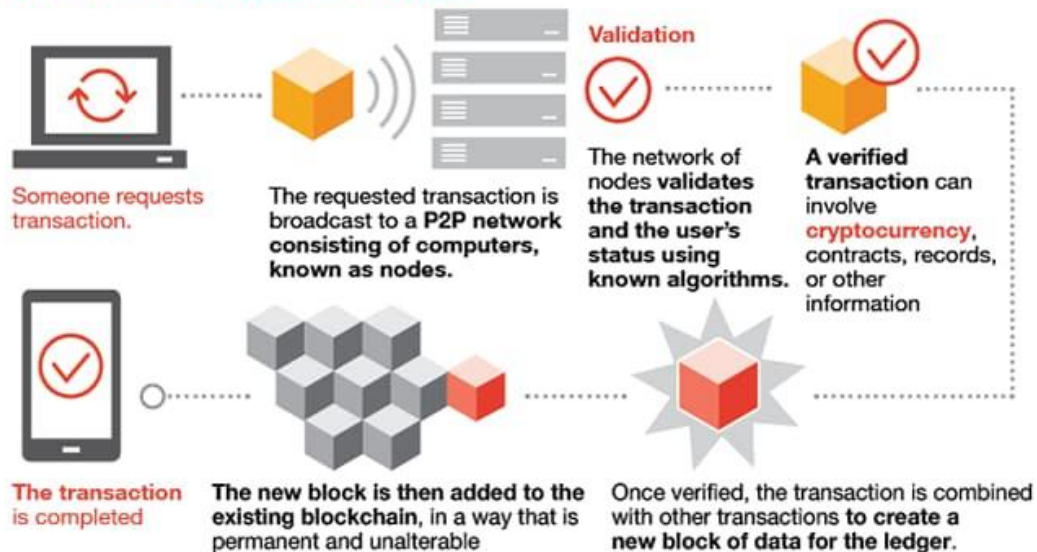
Blockchain Technology and Voting

Context: The Election Commission in August 2020, held an online conference in collaboration with the Tamil Nadu e-Governance Agency ("TNeGA") and IIT Madras, through which they explored the possibility of using blockchain technology for the purpose of enabling **remote elections.**

What is Blockchain Technology?

- A blockchain is a distributed ledger of information which is replicated across various nodes on a "peer-to-peer" network (P2P Network)
- The purpose of technology is of ensuring integrity and verifiability of data stored on the ledger.
- Blockchain ledgers have traditionally been used as supporting structures for cryptocurrencies, such as Bitcoin and Ethereum,however, their use in non-cryptocurrency applications too has seen a steady rise like enabling remote voting and elections.

How blockchain works

Someone requests transaction.

The requested transaction is broadcast to a P2P network consisting of computers, known as nodes.

Validation

The network of nodes **validates the transaction** and the user's status using known algorithms.

A verified transaction can involve **cryptocurrency,** contracts, records, or other information

The transaction is completed

The new block is then added to the existing blockchain, in a way that is permanent and unalterable

Once verified, the transaction is combined with other transactions **to create a new block of data for the ledger.**

Picture: Shows the Schematic representation of working of Blockchain Technology

What are the benefits of remote voting?

- **Solved the problem of ballot portability:** Remote voting would appear to benefit internal migrants and seasonal workers, who account for roughly 51 million of the populace (Census 2011).
- **Useful for People in Remote Places**: The envisioned solution might also be useful for some remotely-stationed members of the Indian armed forces (although that exhaustive infrastructure of Elections has helped address this)
- **Helps Increase Voter Participation**: Remote voting solutions may facilitate the participation in elections by specific groups of citizens, including expats, military voters, voters resident in health and care institutions, and prisoners.
- **Speed and Secure:** The blockchain-based voting system not only provides real-time results, but also ensures that the counting is foolproof, and with blockchain, nobody can tamper the results.

What are the Challenges associated with Blockchain Remote Voting?

- **Requirement of physical presence and biometric authentication**: The electors would still have to physically reach a designated venue in order to cast their vote, whereby systems would use

"white-listed IP devices on dedicated internet lines", and the system would make use of the biometric attributes of electors
- **Adds Vulnerability to failure:** Digitisation and interconnectivity introduce additional points of failure external to the processes which exist in the present day
- **Technology not yet fully secure:** Blockchain solutions rely heavily on the proper implementation of cryptographic protocols. If any shortcomings exist in an implementation, it might be misused
- **Prone to targeted Denial-of-Service attacks** -where an attacker would be in a position to block traffic from the system, effectively preventing, or at the very least delaying the registration of votes
- **Privacy Issues**: With such intrusive technology being used in elections, which when interconnected can go against the Puttaswamy judgement [on the right to privacy]

Conclusion
- It is important to note that further digitisation, in itself, does not make processes more robust.
- Any solution to electoral problems must be software independent and fault tolerable, where failure or tampering of one mechanism — or several — would not affect the integrity or transparency of the overall process.

Wireless fibre: Need of the hour

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Technology; IT
In news

- To bridge digital divide, such technologies such as wireless fibre need to be tapped into.
- Wireless fibre uses a combination of fixed wireless, high speed microwave and fibre optic technology to deliver broadband directly to homes or businesses.
- A small satellite is installed on a poll or your roof and a cable is connected to a router where you need internet connection
- It bypasses miles of common underground fibre, copper, and cable infrastructure that often fail due to construction, flooding, or manhole accidents.

Key takeaways
- Most residential broadband today runs over cables that are laid in the ground or strung on telephone poles, that then branch off and tunnel directly into our houses.
- Laying these cables is costly,
- That is why many Internet providers expand slowly if they're worried the returns won't justify the expansion.
- Cell (mobile) towers are expensive, too, but they create a one-to-many connection that serves thousands of mobile devices wirelessly.
- The speeds aren't quite fast on mobile data but for basic Web browsing and video, it's good enough.

Advantages of wireless fibre
- Wireless fibre provides a fixed location such as a home or business with all the capacity of a mobile connection but without the need to plug a cable directly into the building.
- It is a much cheaper way for Internet providers to extend their networks.

- Wireless is also the most cost-effective as there is no need to alter surrounding infrastructure.
- It allows multiple devices to connect from anywhere you need them to.
- Wireless networks can potentially accommodate more users as they are not limited by a specific number of connection ports.

SwabhimanAnchal set to enjoy uninterrupted cellular service for the first time

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Policies and interventions &GS-III- Technology; Telecommunication
In news

- Thousands of villagers in Odisha'sMalkangiri district are set to enjoy uninterrupted cellular service for the first time in their lives.

Important value additions
- Due to threats from left wing extremists, mobile towers could not be installed until now in SwabhimanAnchal (formerly known as Cut-off area).
- SwabhimanAnchal comprises 151 villages.
- The area is surrounded by water on three sides and by inhospitable terrain on another.
- It also became less remote after the construction of Gurupriya Bridge, which connected the zone with the rest of the State in 2018.

Do you know?
- Odisha accounts for the highest number of villages that do not have mobile phone service in India.

Intermediate-Mass Black Hole

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Space
In news

- Analyses of signals from gravitational waves detected in 2019 at the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO), the USA and the detector Virgo at Italy have indicated a black hole with unusual mass.

Key takeaways
- These waves were a result of a collision between two black holes billions of years ago.
- The signal has been named GW190521.
- It likely represented the instant that the two black holes merged.
- It lasted less than one-tenth of a second.
- It was calculated to have come from roughly 17 billion light-years away.

Do you know?
- Out of the two, the larger black hole was of 85 solar masses and the smaller black hole was of 66 solar masses
- In the merger leading to the GW190521 signal, the larger black hole was well within the unexpected range, known as the pair-instability mass gap.
- The researchers suggest that the larger 85-solar-mass black hole was not the product of a collapsing star but was itself the result of a previous merger.

Important value additions

About LIGO

- It is a large scale physics experiment observatory established in 2002 to detect gravitational waves.
- The present telescopes could detect objects which emit electromagnetic radiations like X-ray, gamma rays etc. However, merger of black holes and many other cataclysmic events do not emit electromagnetic waves rather gravitational waves.
- Thus, LIGO was established to unfold the many unknown phenomenon in universe through the gravitational waves detection.
- Indian participation in the LIGO Scientific Collaboration, was done under the umbrella Initiative –IndIGO, which is a consortium of Indian gravitational-wave physicists.

Draft Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture: NITI Aayog

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- IT; Cybersecurity

In news

- Recently, the NITI Aayog has released draft Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture (DEPA).
- **Aim**: To promote greater user control on data sharing.
- **Implemented by**: RBI, SEBI, IRDAI, PFRDA and the Ministry of Finance

Key takeaways

- DEPA will be empowering individuals with control over their personal data, by operationalising a regulatory, institutional, and technology design for secure data sharing.
- It is designed as an evolvable and agile framework for good data governance.
- It empowers people to seamlessly and securely access their data and share it with third party institutions.
- The consent given under DEPA will be free, informed, specific, clear, and revocable.

Do you know?

- Using DEPA, individuals and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) can use their digital footprints to access not just affordable loans, but also insurance, savings, and better financial management products.
- The framework is expected to become functional for the financial sector starting fall 2020.
- It will help in greater financial inclusion and economic growth.
- Opening up an API-based data sharing framework would bring significant innovation by new fintech entities.
- This architecture replaces costly and cumbersome data access and sharing practices that disempower individuals.

The discovery of phosphine gas in the atmosphere of Venus

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Space

In news

- Recently, phosphine gas in the atmosphere of Venus was discovered by an international team of astronomers.
- The discovery throws light about the possibility of the presence of life forms on Venus.

Key takeaways
- A team of scientists have reported traces of phosphine in a concentration of approximately 20 parts per billion, thousands to millions of times more than what could otherwise be expected.
- The discovery is more significantthan the discovery of water on the Moon or Mars.
- The finding can further ignite interest in space missions to Venus.
- Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is also planning a mission to Venus, tentatively called Shukrayaan, in the near future.
- The plan is still on the drawing board.

Do you know?
- There are several things that make life unsustainable on Venus.
- The temperature of Venus is too high.
- Its atmosphere is highly acidic.
- However, Scientists also suggest that this phosphine could be remnants from a time when Venus was a much more hospitable place.
- Apart from being produced in industrial processes, phosphine, a colourless but smelly gas, is known to be made only by some species of bacteria that survive in the absence of oxygen.

Bradykinin Storm phenomenon amongst Covid-19 patients

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Health; Pandemic& GS-III – Science & Technology
In news
- A recent analysis of samples of patients with the Covid-19 infection has shown a phenomenon called a 'bradykinin storm'.
- Doctors treating Covid-19 patients often cannot identify the severity with which the SARS-CoV-2 virus seems to affect some people.
- 'Bradykinin storm' might explain the working of the virus in the body.
- However, the cytokine storm is able to explain certain causes for the rapid deterioration in some patients with Covid-19.

Important value additions
The bradykinin hypothesis
- SARS-CoV-2 uses a human enzyme called ACE2 to enter into the cells of its host.
- ACE2 lowers blood pressure in the human body and works against another enzyme known as ACE (which has the opposite effect).
- The virus causes the levels of ACE to fall in the lungs, and consequently pushes up the levels of ACE2.
- This happens as a chain reaction and increases the levels of the molecule bradykinin in the cells, causing a bradykininstorm.
- The storm causes the blood vessels to expand and become leaky, leading to swelling of the surrounding tissue.
- The levels of hyaluronic acid also increase.
- The leakage of fluid into the lungs and the excess of hyaluronic acid result in a Jello-like substance.
- It prevents oxygen uptake in the severely affected Covid-19 patients.
- Thus, it sometimes makes even the most sophisticated intensive carefutile.
- Knowing the mechanism, doctors can target the bradykinin pathway to evolve more therapeutic interventions to offset the severe effects of Covid-19.

Do you know?
- Bradykinin is a compound that is related to pain sensation and lowering blood pressure in the human body.
- Hyaluronic acid is a sugar molecule that occurs naturally in the skin, and it helps to bind water to collagen (a protein). It can absorb more than 1,000 times its own weight in water to form a hydrogel.

Number of Giant Radio Galaxies

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Space
In news
- Indian Researchers working on giant radio galaxies (GRG) at Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA) Pune, India and Leiden University, Netherlands, have found nearly 400 new GRGs.

Important value additions
Giant Radio Galaxies (GRG)
- GRGs are large single structures in the universe.
- When some of the radio galaxies grow to enormous sizes, bigger than 33 lakh light years across, they are called giant radio galaxies (GRGs).
- GRGs were discovered in 1974 and until 2016, only about 300 GRGs were known.
- The latest findings indicate that they are over 800.
- It is not clearly understood how some objects grow to such large scales and what is the fuel of their respective black holes.
- The study of GRGs gives important clues to unveiling how massive black holes accrete mass and the efficiency with which they produce the magnificent jets.

Indian Brain Templates developed at NIMHANS

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Achievements of Indians in Science and Technology;
In news
- A team of neuroscientists from the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) has developed Indian Brain Templates (IBT) and a brain atlas.

Key takeaways
- Neuroscientists studied over 500 brain scans of Indian patients to develop five sets of Indian Brain Templates (IBT) and a brain atlas.
- IBT provides a scale that will measure an Indian Brain.
- Brain Atlas has been developed for five age groups covering late childhood to late adulthood (six to 60 years).
- These new population and age-specific Indian brain templates will allow more reliable tracking of brain development and ageing.
- They will provide more precise reference maps for areas of interest in individual patients with neurological disorders like strokes, brain tumours, and dementia.
- These will also help pool information more usefully in group studies of the human brain and psychological functions.
- These will aid in understanding of psychiatric illnesses like Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), autism, substance dependence, schizophrenia, and mood disorders.

Do you know?

- **Brain Template**is a gross representation from various brain images to understand brain functionality in diseased conditions.

The Montreal Neurological Index (MNI) template that India currently uses is based on Caucasian brains, which are different from Asian brains.

Web 3.0

Context:

Recent issues of concerns regarding social media:

- During the ongoing covid-19 pandemic, social media has emerged as a force for good, with effective communication and lockdown entertainment, but also for evil, being used effectively by people to protest against vaccines and masks.
- A documentary called The Social Dilemma, exposes the ways in which technology giants have manipulated human psychology to influence how we behave. It explains how chiefs of tech companies severely curtail the screen time of their own children, while apparently trying to addict every other adult and child on the Close planet.
- In the last US elections Cambridge Analytica, a social analytics firm had manipulated Facebook accounts to impact the 2016 US presidential election and the Brexit vote.

Web 1.0:

In this stage the internet was created as a distributed set of computers communicating with one another, and sharing the load of managing the network. It worked very

Well but had one big problem—there was no way to make money off it. For instance, a Web 1.0 startup called Google had heavy traffic, but could not encash it.

Web 2.0:

In 2001, Google developed AdWords, a pay-per-click, auction-based search advertising model, backed by search and monetization algorithms. Google's revenues rocketed to $2.7 billion from $87 million in three years when it went public, and now in 2020, it sits on a trillion-dollar valuation.

The internet got monetized with stage Web 2.0.

Challenges:

- Our intentions, personas and desires are being tracked at laser precision and the data is being sold to willing advertisers.
- Search and social media advertising has crossed $200 billion. And all this money comes from us users who have become the product.
- The current business model has led to a "winner-takes-all" industry structure, creating natural monopolies and centralizing the once-decentralized internet.

Emergence of Web 3.0 revolution:

An alternative to current issues is unlikely to be driven by technology or regulation. It will take new business models. The good news is that these are coming along with the emergence of Web 3.0, a revolution that promises to return the internet to users.

Construct and philosophy:

- To allow users explicit control of their data, an initiative aided by Europe-like data protection regulation.
- To grant creators of content—artists, musicians, photographers, me and you—a portion of revenues, instead of platforms taking it all (or most).
- The technologies that Web 3.0 leverages are newer ones, like blockchains, which are inherently decentralized. They have technology guard-rails against the accumulation of power and data in the hands of a few.
- Digital currencies enabled by these technologies offer a business model of users paying for services and contents, as an alternative to advertiser-pays.

Conclusion:

The path to success for the new kinds of democratic networks will be difficult. But a revolution has begun.

Connecting the dots:

- In the ongoing era of Web 2.0 the users have become a 'product'. Comment.

Solar Cycle 25 predictions announced

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Space

In news

- Scientists from NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) announced their predictions about the new solar cycle, called Solar Cycle 25.
- The Scientists believe that the cycle has begun.

Important value additions

Solar cycle

- Sun's surface is a very active space.
- Electrically charged gases on its surface generate areas of powerful magnetic forces, which are called magnetic fields.
- These gases are constantly moving.
- Thus, these magnetic fields can get stretched, twisted and tangled creating motion on the surface known as solar activity.
- Solar activity varied with the stages of the solar cycle, which lasts on average for a period of 11 years.
- Solar cycles have implications for life and technology on Earth as well as astronauts in space.

Sunspots

- Scientists track a solar cycle by using sunspots.
- These are the dark blotches on the Sun that are associated with solar activity.
- Sunspots are associated with the origins for giant explosions such as solar flares that can spew light, energy and solar material into space.
- A Sunspot is an area on the Sun that appears dark on the surface and is relatively cooler than the surrounding parts.
- These spotsare the visible markers of the Sun's magnetic field.
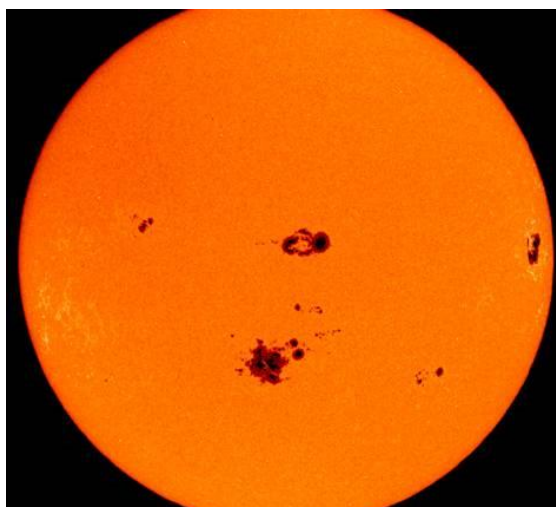- Some spots are as large as 50,000 km in diameter.

Image source: Click here

Vaibhav Summit

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Science and Technology
In news

- VaishwikBharatiyaVaigyanik (VAIBHAV) Summit will be inaugurated on 2nd October 2020 - the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

Key takeaways

- It will be followed by online month-long deliberation sessions among researchers.
- It is a global summit of Overseas and Resident Indian scientists and academicians.
- **Key areas of discussion**: Quantum technologies, artificial intelligence and machine learning, communications technologies, computational and data sciences and aerospace technologies, etc.
- **Objectives**: (1) To bring out the comprehensive roadmap to leverage the expertise and knowledge of global Indian researchers for solving emerging challenges; (2) To reflect in-depth on the collaboration and cooperation instruments with academia and scientists in India; (3) To create an ecosystem of Knowledge and Innovation in the country through global outreach.
- **Organisers**: Various Science & Technology (S&T) and Academic organisations.

Science & Technology Indicators, 2019-20

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – IPR; Science & Technology
In news

- According to the latest Science & Technology Indicators (STI) report for 2019-20, India performs very dismally in the field science & technology innovation.
- **Released by:** Department of Science and Technology (DST).
- In these 13 years, just 24% of patent claims came from Indians.

Reasons for Dismal Performance

- Poor investment in research and development (R&D)
- The poor state of higher education.
- Lack of employable personnel, who lack skills and the aptitude in a variety of fields.
- Lack of conducive environment for start-ups.

New 'sonification' project unveiled by NASA

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Space

In news

- The NASA's Chandra X-Ray Center (CXC) has unveiled a new 'sonification' project that transforms data from astronomical images into audio.

Important value additions

Data Sonification

- It refers to the use of sound values to represent real data.
- It is the auditory version of data visualisation.
- In NASA's Chandra (sonification) project, for instance, data is represented using a number of musical notes.
- The birth of a star, a cloud of dust or even a black hole can be 'heard' as a high- or low-pitched sound.

Chandra X-ray Project

- The Chandra X-ray Observatory was launched by Space Shuttle Columbia in 1999.
- It is part of NASA's fleet of "Great Observatories".
- **X-ray universe**: It refers to the universe as observed with telescopes designed to detect X-rays.
- X-rays are produced in the cosmos when matter is heated to millions of degrees.
- Such temperatures occur where high magnetic fields, or extreme gravity, or explosive forces exist in space.
- The telescope is named after the Nobel Prize-winning Indian astrophysicist Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar.

India based Neutrino Observatory

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Achievements of Indians in Sci& Technology

In news

- An India based Neutrino Observatory (INO) is going to be set up in Bodi West Hills, in Theni district, Tamil Nadu.
- **Funded by**: Dept. of Atomic Energy (DAE) and the Dept. of Science and Technology (DST).

Key takeaways

- **Objective**: To observe neutrinos and antineutrinos produced in the atmosphere of the Earth.
- **Features**: The project includes: (1) Underground laboratory and associated surface facilities at Bodi West Hills; (2) Construction of a magnetized Iron Calorimeter (ICAL) detector for studying neutrinos.
- **Advantages**: (1) This observation will tell us more about the properties of neutrino particles; (2) This will also help in developing a model of physics beyond the so-called Standard Model of Particle Physics; (3) It would also have a great impact on diverse fields such as nuclear and particle physics, astrophysics and cosmology, medical imaging etc.

Do you know?

- INO Project is a multi-institutional effort aimed at building a world-class underground laboratory with a rock cover of approx. 1200 m for non-accelerator based high energy and nuclear physics research in India.
- National Neutrino Collaboration group (NNCG) includes more than 50 scientists from about 15 Institutes and Universities in India.
- It is tasked with detailing various aspects related to INO activity and to come up with a proposal for an underground neutrino laboratory.

Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Center

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Space; Achievements of Indians in Sci& Technology
In news

- Recently, the Government of India has created the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Center (IN-SPACe).
- It is an independent nodal agency under the Department of Space.

Key takeaways

- IN-SPACe is to be established as a single-window nodal agency, with its own cadre, which will permit and oversee the activities of private companies.
- **Functions**: (1) Encourage, promote and handhold the private sector for their participation in the Space Sector; (2) Draw up an integrated launch manifest considering the requirements for ISRO, New Space India Limited (NSIL) and private companies; (3) Work out a suitable mechanism to offer sharing of technology, expertise and facilities; (4) Permit establishment of facilities, within ISRO premises, based on safety norms and feasibility assessment.
- The decision of IN-SPACe shall be final and binding on all stakeholders including ISRO and private players will not be required to seek separate permission from ISRO.

Tata CRISPR Test

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-II – Health &GS-III – Achievements of Indians in Sci& Technology
In news

- India's first CRISPR Covid-19 test, developed by the Tata Group and CSIR-IGIB, has been approved for use in India.

Key takeaways

- The Tata CRISPR (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats) test is powered by CSIR-IGIB (Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology) FELUDA.
- This test uses an indigenously developed, cutting-edge CRISPR technology for detection of the genomic sequence of SARS-CoV-2 virus.
- CRISPR is a genome editing technology for diagnosing diseases.
- It is the world's first diagnostic test to deploy a specially adapted Cas9 protein to successfully detect the virus causing Covid-19.
- It achieves accuracy levels of traditional RT-PCR tests, with quicker turnaround time, less expensive equipment, and better ease of use.

Virgin Hyperloop to do feasibility study

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Achievements of Indians in Sci& Technology

In news

- India's IT hub, Bengaluru may soon get its own hyperloop network as a future mode of mobility.
- Recently, a Memorandum of Understanding(MoU) was signed between Virgin Hyperloop and Bangalore International Airport Limited (BIAL) to conduct a feasibility study for a proposed Hyperloop corridor from Bengaluru Airport.

Key takeaways

- The pre-feasibility study, which focuses on technical, economic and route feasibility, is expected to be completed in 2 phases of six months each.
- With speeds of up to 1,080 kmph, hyperloop could transport thousands of passengers per hour from Bengaluru Airport to the city center in under 10 minutes, according to the preliminary analysis.
- This will help the people of Bengaluru to save a lot of the time that goes to travel in one of India's most congested cities.
- Passengers travelling to the Bengaluru airport could streamline their multimodal trip with seamless check in and security – for both their hyperloop as well as air travel at centrally-located hyperloop portals which will help in reducing the overall travel time.
- In addition to the road network, the airport will also be connected with the sub-urban railway soon and will have Metro connectivity in four years.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF)

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Disaster Management

In news

- Recently, the limit of using the State Disaster Response Fund for COVID-19 specific infrastructure has been increased from 35% to 50%.
- The decision will help States have more finances at their disposal to fight the virus.

Important value additions

The State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF)

- It was constituted under Section 48 (1) (a) of the Disaster Management Act, 2005.
- It is the primary fund available with State Governments for responses to notified disasters.
- The Central Government contributes 75% of SDRF allocation for general category States/UTs and 90% for special category States/UTs (NE States, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir).

DEFENCE/INTERNAL SECURITY/SECURITY

INS Viraat

Part of: GS-Prelims and GS-III – Security
In News:

- INS Viraat will be scrapped at a ship breaking yard at Alang in Gujarat soon.
- INS Viraat holds the Guinness World Record for being the longest serving warship of the world.
- It is a Centaur class aircraft carrier.
- It played a major role in Operation Jupiter in 1989 during the Sri Lankan Peacekeeping operation.
- It also saw action during Operation Parakram in 2001-2002, post the terrorist attack on Parliament.
- The indigenous Advance Light Helicopters 'Dhruv' and the Russian twin rotor Kamov-31 have also operated from the ship.
- It was decommissioned in March 2017.

Special Frontier Force: Vikas Battalion

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Defence and Security
In news

- The Special Frontier Force (SFF) unit, referred to as Vikas Battalion, was recently in the news.
- It had been said to be instrumental in preventing Chinese occupation on the LAC in Ladakh.

Important value additions
Special Frontier Force (SFF)

- SFF was established on 14th November 1962 in the immediate aftermath of the 1962 Sino-India war.
- It falls under the purview of the Cabinet Secretariat.
- It is headed by an Inspector General who is an Army officer of the rank of Major General.
- They are highly trained special forces personnel who can undertake a variety of tasks.
- Women soldiers, too, form a part of SFF units.
- The SFF units are not part of the Army
- However, they function under operational control of the Army

Do you know?
Major Operations of SFF:

- Operation Eagle (1971 war with Pakistan)
- Operation Bluestar (clearing Amritsar's Golden Temple in 1984)
- Operation Meghdoot (securing the Siachen glacier in 1984)
- Operation Vijay (war with Pakistan at Kargil in 1999)

Rethinking the defence doctrine

Context: Over four months ago, the Chinese army entered territory that India has long considered its own, and never left.

Consequences of Chinese adventurism along India's border

- **Short Term Loss:** In effect, the multiple incursions have changed the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and India has lost territory, at least for the time being
- **Reflects India's failure of the warning-intelligence system:** Either Indian intelligence services did not collect sufficient data of Chinese intentions and early moves, or they did not interpret it correctly. Wherever the fault lay, the system apparently failed.

In the light of China's incursion, what is the criticism of Army's prevailing doctrine?

- **Conventional Mindset**: The Army's prevailing doctrine is designed to deter and defend against major conventional invasions. This determines how the Army is organised, what equipment it operates, and where it is deployed.
- **Past References:** In this mindset, the Army expected that any Chinese bid to capture Indian territory would come as a major conventional invasion, as it did in 1962. The Indian response would accordingly involve large formations, with planning and command decisions made at the Corps headquarters or higher.
- **Miscalculation by Security Leadership:** China has no interest in launching a major conventional invasion, but this is not just a typical probe either – which Security leadership could not understand at initial stages.
- **Changed Chinese Tactics:** But the Chinese army's initial forays in April and May 2020 did not look like a guns-blazing invasion. It crossed the LAC in several places nearly simultaneously, and in larger numbers than usual.
- **India faced with tough choices**: China's quick land grab looks increasingly permanent, like an attempt to change the status-quo at the border without triggering war. This fait accompli leaves India with two awful choices: either start a war by launching its own reprisal attack, or do nothing and accept a new situation.

What should be the way forward w.r.t Army's Doctrinal thinking?

- **Fundamental Shift:** Addressing this type of security threat requires a fundamental shift in the Army's doctrinal thinking, from strategies revolving around punishing the adversary, to strategies that prevent its adventurism in the first place
- **A new doctrinal thinking should involve**
    - Greater investment in persistent wide-area surveillance to detect and track adversary moves,
    - Devolved command authority to respond to enemy aggression,
    - Rehearsed procedures for an immediate local response without higher commanders' approval.
- **Speed is of essence:** In countering China's 'grey zone' tactics of quick land grabs, speed is of the essence. The military must be able to detect adversary action and react quickly, even pre-emptively, to stop attempted aggression from becoming a fait accompli.
- **Recent Success:** The late-August incident at Chushul demonstrates how this new strategy can and should work. Indian special forces troops took position on previously unoccupied heights south of Pangong Tso. In so doing they have complicated future Chinese moves to consolidate their position, and Chinese attempts to seize more ground have been foiled.

Conclusion

- The challenge for India is to learn the right lessons and be alert to similar tactics in other regions, like the Indian Ocean. It must not rely on doctrines forged in wars half a century ago.

Connecting the dots

- India's Nuclear Doctrine and No First Use Policy

Flying V Aircraft

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- Defence

In news

- The first real test flight of the scaled model of the 'Flying V' aircraft was successfully conducted.

Key takeaways

- Flying V is a futuristic and fuel-efficient long-distance aircraft that could one day carry passengers in its wings.
- The Flying-V design integrates the passenger cabin, the cargo hold and the fuel tanks in the wings.
- Computer calculations have predicted that the aircraft's improved aerodynamic shape and reduced weight will reduce fuel consumption by 20% compared to today's advanced aircrafts.

Do you know?

- The original plan for the Flying-V aircraft design came from TU Berlin student Justus Benad.
- The 'Flying V' project was first presented at the 100th anniversary of the Dutch airlines KLM, which has also been a partner in the project since its beginning in 2019.
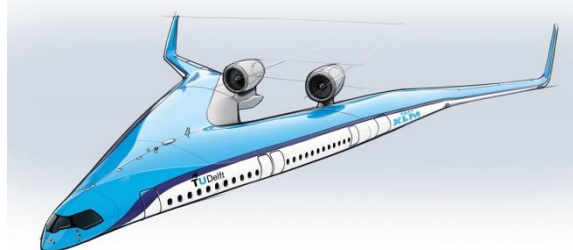- Various business partners including Airbus (an aerospace company), are now involved in the project.

Image source: Click here

Administration of Assam Rifles

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Various Security Forces and Agencies and their Mandate.

In news

- Recently, the Delhi High Court has directed the Centre to take a decision on the issue of bringing Assam Rifles out of the dual control of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and the Ministry of Defence (MoD).
- The administrative control of the Assam Rifles is with the MHA.
- Its operational control rests with the MoD.
- This duality of control leads to problems of coordination.

Key takeaways of the High Court's Direction
- The issue has been pending for nearly three years.
- The Centre should resolve it within 12 weeks with cooperation from all the stakeholders.
- The matter involves servicemen/ex-servicemen and others whose interests are paramount as proclaimed from various platforms of the Government

Important value additions
Assam Rifles
- Assam Rifles is a Central Paramilitary Force under the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF).
- It came into being in 1835, as a militia called the 'Cachar Levy'.
- **Initial Objective:** To primarily protect British Tea estates and their settlements against tribal raids.
- In November 2019, MHA proposed to merge it with the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP).
- ITBP is a specialized mountain force, raised in October 1962.
- It is deployed on border guarding duties from Karakoram Pass in Ladakh to Jachep La in Arunachal Pradesh covering 3,488 km of Indo-China Border.

Laser Guided ATGM successfully test fired

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Defence
In news

- Laser Guided Anti-Tank Guided Missile (ATGM) was successfully test fired from MBT Arjun Tank at KK Ranges, Ahmednagar recently.
- **Developed by**: Armament Research & Development Establishment (ARDE), Pune in association with High Energy Materials Research Laboratory (HEMRL) Pune, and Instruments Research & Development Establishment (IRDE) Dehradun

Important value additions

- Lasers guided ATGMs lock and track the targets with the help of laser designation to ensure precision hit accuracy.
- The missile employs a tandem HEAT warhead to defeat Explosive Reactive Armour (ERA) protected armoured vehicles.
- It has been developed with multiple-platform launch capability.
- It is currently undergoing technical evaluation trials from gun of MBT Arjun.

Successful flight-tests of Abhyas High-speed Expendable Aerial Target conducted

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Defence
In news

- Recently, successful flight-tests of the indigenously-designed Abhyas High-speed Expendable Aerial Target (HEAT) in Balasore (Odisha) were conducted.
- **Conducted by**: Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)
- **Designed and developed by:** Aeronautical Development Establishment (ADE) of DRDO

Key takeaways

- Two demonstrator vehicles of Abhyas cleared all the evaluation parameters like 5 km flying altitude, vehicle speed of 0.5 mach (half the speed of sound), endurance of 30 minutes etc.

Important value additions

Abhyas High-speed Expendable Aerial Target (HEAT)

- It is a drone (UAV) that will be used as a target for various missile systems.
- It is powered by a small gas turbine engine.
- **Navigation by:** Micro-electromechanical (MEMS) systems based Inertial Navigation System (INS).
- It is lightweight and reliable, consumes less power and is cost-effective.
- It is programmed for fully autonomous flight.

Do you know?

- MEMS is a process technology used to create tiny integrated devices or systems that combine mechanical and electrical components.

Defence Acquisition Procedure – 2020 released

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III – Defence; Security

In news

- Union Defence Minister unveiled the Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) – 2020 recently.
- DAP 2020 will be applicable with effect from 01 October 2020.
- The first Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP) was promulgated in 2002 and has since been revised periodically.

Key takeaways

- **The New Category of Buy (Global – Manufacture in India)** incorporates 'manufacture of either the entire/part of the equipment or Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) facility for the equipment, through its subsidiary in India.
- **The categories of Buy(Indian-IDDM), Make I, Make II, Production Agency in Design & Development, OFB/DPSU and SP model** will be exclusively reserved for Indian Vendors meeting the criteria of Ownership and Control by resident Indian Citizens with FDI not more than 49%.
- A simple and practical verification process has been instituted and Indigenous Content (IC) will now be calculated on 'Base Contract Price'.
- Provision for exploring options for operating base applications like Fire Control System, Radars, Encryption, Communications etc. on indigenous software in Buy (Indian- IDDM) & Buy (Indian) cases has been included.
- A separate dedicated chapter has been incorporated in the DAP 2020 for acquisition of systems Designed and Developed by DRDO/DPSUs/OFB.
- The Offset guidelines have been revised, wherein preference will be given to manufacture of complete defence products over components and various multipliers have been added to give incentivisation in discharge of Offsets.

MISCELLANEOUS

In News	Description
1. Kavkaz 2020	• India has announced its withdrawal from multilateral Military Exercise Kavkaz 2020. • It is to be held in Astrakhan region in southern Russia from 15th to 26th September. • Both China and Pakistan are going to be a part of the multinational exercise. • China's participation in the exercise was also a reason for India to pull out of the multilateral tri-services military exercise. • India is locked in a military conflict with the Chinese in eastern Ladakh and on high alert all along the 4,000 kilometre Line of Actual Control (LAC).
1. RORO train	• Karnataka CM flagged off the first 'Roll On Roll Off' (RORO) train from Bengaluru to Solapur (Maharashtra). • It consists of an open flat wagon on which trucks with goods are loaded. • It will be operated by the South Western Railway (SWR). • Time taken: 17 hours • Distance: About 682 kms. • As many as 42 trucks with goods can be carried at time in this train. • It shall reduce accidents on the road, improves safety, saves fuel, and foreign exchange. • It ensures faster transport of essential goods, perishables, food items and smaller cargo. • The cost of transport is lesser than transport by road.
2. Chhavni COVID: Yodha Sanrakshan Yojana	• 'Chhavni COVID: Yodha Sanrakshan Yojana' was recently launched. • Launched by: The Ministry of Defence • It is a group life insurance scheme to be implemented through Life Insurance Corporation (LIC). • It will cover more than 10,000 employees in all 62 Cantonment Boards in event of any unfortunate fatal calamity with an insurance cover of Rs 5 lakhs each. • It will benefit permanent and contractual employees including doctors, paramedics and sanitation staff.
3. Hurricane Laura	• Hurricane Laura recently made landfall in southwestern Louisiana (South Central United States) • Depending on where they occur, hurricanes are given many names in different regions of the world • Typhoons: China Sea and Pacific Ocean. • Hurricanes: In the West Indian islands in the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean. • Tornados: In the Guinea lands of West Africa and southern USA. • Willy-willies: In north-western Australia Tropical Cyclones: In the Indian Ocean Region
4. Multi-State	• Recently, Haryana Police has identified a phishing racket which

Phishing Scam	accessed over 300 nationalized and private bank accounts across many states.
	• Frauds were done with Phishing and use of e-SIMs as the main conduit.
	• Phishing is a cybercrime in which a target or targets are contacted by email, telephone, or text message.
	• E-SIM can not be removed as opposed to physical SIM cards, which can be removed.
	• The e-SIMs enable users to change service providers through a simple process.
	• Multiple networks and numbers can be stored on a single e-SIM too, so one can have more than one number.
5. Crete Island	• Crete Island was recently in news with regard to the Turkey-Greece stand off.
	• Turkey has renewed calls for dialogue with rival Greece that would lead to the fair sharing of resources in the eastern Mediterranean,which is the major point of contention.
	• Both countries' forces have been conducting military exercises in the seas between Cyprus and the Greek island of Crete.
	• Crete is the largest and most populous of the Greek islands and the fifth largest island in the Mediterranean Sea.
	• It bounds the southern border of the Aegean sea.
6. MEDBOT	• Indian Railways has developed a remote-controlled medical trolley named 'MEDBOT' to help deliver food and medicines to COVID-19 patients.
	• It is providing service in the Central Hospital of the Diesel Rail Engine Factory of Indian Railways.
7. Indra 2020	• It is a bilateral naval exercise India and Russia.
	• It is to be held in the Andaman Sea close to the Strait of Malacca instead of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
	• It will be the first bilateral naval exercise since all such engagements were suspended due to Covid-19 pandemic.
	• The Strait of Malacca connects Indian Ocean to the South China Sea.
	• It is also a prominent trade route between East Asia and West Asia-Europe.
	Map 1: Geographic Location of Malacca Strait Source: Malacca Strait cooperation. (2012). Retrieved Jan 11, 2015, from http://www.marsecreview.com/2012/07/malacca-strait-cooperation/ Image source: Click here
8. PoshanMaah	• Under Poshan Abhiyaan, the month of September is observed as PoshanMaah i.e. Nutrition month every year, since 2018.

	• 'Agricultural Fund of India' is being created to have complete information about the crops that are grown in each district and their related nutritional value.
	• It includes a month-long activities focussed on antenatal care, optimal breastfeeding, anaemia, girls education, right age of marriage, etc.
	• The activities focus on Social and Behavioural Change Communication (SBCC) and are based on Jan Andolan Guidelines.
	• A food and nutrition quiz as well as meme competition will be organized on the My Gov portal.
	• A unique kind of Nutrition Park has been created at Statue of Unity (Gujarat), where one can witness nutrition related education along with fun and frolic.
9. Shetrunji and Bhadar Dams of Gujarat	• Due to heavy rains, Shetrunji and Bhadar dams have overflowed simultaneously.
	• These are two largest reservoirs in the Saurashtra region (Gujarat).
	• The two dams are across Shetrunji and Bhadar rivers.
	• These rivers flow in opposite directions.
	• These two dams have different catchment areas.
	• SardarSarovar Dam, also called Narmada Dam, is the largest reservoir in Gujarat
10. BIPOC	• The term BIPOC became popular on the internet during the Black Lives Matter movement.
	• It stands for "Black, Indigenous and People of Color."
	• The BIPOC movement urges to acknowledge the diversity in skin color, race, and hair.
	• It advocates for inclusivity and representation across all areas of life, from politics to skin care.
	• It is been seen as a substitute to degrading and offensive terms like negro, african-american and minority
11. Rakshak	• In the fight against the spread of Covid 19 pandemic, the Railways has designed a health assistant Robot Rakshak which can remotely communicate between doctor and patient.
	• It is able to measure health parameters such as temperature, pulse, oxygen percentage.
	• It can also provide medicines, food to the patients and make a two-way video communication between the doctor and the patient.
	• It can move in all directions at all levels with a range of remote operations up to 150 meters.
	• With a full charge battery, the Rakshak robot can work continuously for 6 hours and can carry up to 10 kg of weight in its tray. It is based on Wi-Fi and therefore does not require any mobile data. It also operates with an Android mobile application.
12. Jammu and Kashmir Official Languages Bill	• Recently, the Union Cabinet has approved the Jammu and Kashmir Official Languages Bill 2020 to be introduced in the monsoon session of Parliament.

2020	• The Bill will include Kashmiri, Dogri and Hindi as official languages in the newly-created Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. • Only English and Urdu were official languages in the former State, • Part XVII of the Indian Constitution deals with the official languages in Articles 343 to 351.
13. Question Hour and Zero Hour	• Recently, the Central government has decided to suspend the Question Hour and curtail Zero Hour for Monsoon Session. • This has been done in view of the Covid-19 pandemic.
14. Question Hour	• The first hour of every parliamentary sitting is slotted for the Question Hour. • During this one hour, Members of Parliament (MPs) ask questions to ministers and hold them accountable for the functioning of their ministries. • The questions can also be asked to the private members. • Kinds of Questions: There are three types of questions asked. • Starred question (distinguished by an asterisk) - This requires an oral answer and hence supplementary questions can follow. • Unstarred question - This requires a written answer and hence, supplementary questions cannot follow. • Short notice question - One that is asked by giving a notice of less than ten days. It is answered orally.
15. Zero Hour	• Zero Hour is an Indian parliamentary innovation. • It is not mentioned in the parliamentary rules book. • Under this, MPs can raise matters without any prior notice. • The zero hour starts immediately after the question hour and lasts until the agenda for the day (i.e. regular business of the House) is taken up.
16. Patrika Gate	• Indian Prime Minister shall inaugurate the Patrika Gate in Jaipur on the 8th September 2020. • Patrika Gate derives its name from newspaper and media company- Rajasthan Patrika. • The facade is inspired by the traditional architecture and features Jharokhas, Pols, Pavilions, and Chhatris. • The idea of building this gate is linked with the old city gates of Jaipur walled city. When Maharajah Sawai Jai Singh II founded Jaipur in 1727 AD, he secured the perimeter with a wall and eight gates.
17. Chushul	• The Chushul sub-sector has come into focus in the standoff between the Indian and PLA troops of China following the movement that took place recently. • The Chushul sub-sector lies south of PangongTso in eastern Ladakh. • It comprises high, broken mountains and • It also comprises Thatung, Black Top, Helmet Top, Gurung Hill, and

	Magger Hill
	• Passes such as Rezang La and Reqin La, the Spanggur Gap, and the Chushul valley are also present. • The Chushul Valley has a vital airstrip that played an important role even during the 1962 War with China. • Chushul is one among the five Border Personnel Meeting points between the Indian Army and the Chinese army. • It is here that representatives of the two armies meet for regular interactions. • It is the gateway to Leh. • If China enters Chushul, it can launch its operations for Leh.
18. Indira Gandhi Peace Prize 2019	• Sir David Attenborough has been conferred with Indira Gandhi Peace Prize for 2019 at a virtual ceremony. • The Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development is an annual prestigious award named after former prime minister Indira Gandhi. • It is conferred every year by Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust since 1986. • It consists of a citation and a monetary award of Rs. 25 lakh. • The award recognizes creative efforts by individuals/organizations • Sir David is an English broadcaster and natural historian. • He is best known for writing and presenting the BBC Natural History Unit.
19. The Yanomami tribe	• The tribe has launched a global campaign to expel 20,000 gold miners from their land amid the coronavirus pandemic. • The Yanomami live in the rainforests and mountains of northern Brazil and southern Venezuela. • According to Survival International, it is the largest relatively isolated tribe in South America. • They live in large, circular houses called yanos or shabonos, some of which can hold up to 400 people. • The Yanomami consider all people to be equal, and do not have a chief. Instead, all decisions are based on consensus after long discussions and debates. • They are speakers of a Xiriamá language.
20. Hurricane Nana	• Atlantic Hurricane Nana has made a landfall on the coast of Belize.

	• The country Belize is located on the northeast coast of Central America. • Few days back, Hurricane Laura made landfall in south-western Louisiana (South Central United States).
21. Real Mango: Illegal Software	• In a nationwide investigation, Railway Protection Force (RPF) has disrupted the operation of illegal software called "Real Mango" - used for cornering confirmed Railway reservation. • Real Mango software is illegal software developed for booking Tatkal tickets. • It bypasses captcha. • It synchronises bank OTP with help of a mobile app and feeds it to the requisite form automatically. • The software auto-fills the passenger details and payment details in the forms. • The software logs in to the IRCTC website through multiple IRCTC Ids. • Following these steps multiple tickets can be booked. And it leads to swift online tickets booking by agents whereas common people may not get the tickets booked on their own. This creates the possibility of ticket hoarding and black marketing of tickets. • Significance: The information supplied by RPF will help the Centre for Railway Information Systems (CRIS) to strengthen security features in the Passenger Reservation System (PRS).
22. Typhoon Maysak and Typhoon Haishen	• Recently, Korean Peninsula and Japan were hit by two typhoons named Maysak and Haishen. • The Maysak typhoon takes its name from a Cambodian word for a type of tree. • While, Haishen means Sea God in Chinese. Background of Naming • In Japan, the first typhoon to occur after January 1st of the year is called typhoon number 1. • In the USA, hurricanes are referred to by English names. • The intergovernmental organisation called the Typhoon Committee which has 14 members including Japan, USA and China uses Asian names for typhoons that are contributed by the member countries. • Haishen was a name recommended by China, while Maysak is a Combodian name.
23. ShikshakParv	• ShikshakParv is being celebrated from 8th-25th September 2020 to felicitate the teachers and to take New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 forward. • Under the initiative, the Ministry of Education is organizing a series of webinars on NEP and its implementation. • Teachers' Day is celebrated on 5th September every year throughout India in memory of Dr.SarvapalliRadhakrishnan'sbirth anniversary.
24. Revised Guidelines for Parole and Furlough: MHA	• Recently, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has revised the Model Prison Manual, 2016 guidelines related to parole and furlough. • Both parole and furlough are considered as reformative processes. • These provisions were introduced with a view to humanising the

	prison system.
	• Parole and furlough are covered under the Prisons Act of 1894.
25. Parole	• It is a system of releasing a prisoner with suspension of the sentence.
	• The release is conditional, usually subject to behaviour, and requires periodic reporting to the authorities for a set period of time.
	• Parole is not a right.
	• It is given to a prisoner for a specific reason, such as a death in the family or a wedding of a blood relative.
	• It may be denied to a prisoner even when he makes out a sufficient case, if the competent authority is satisfied that releasing the convict would not be in the interest of society.
26. Furlough	• It is similar to parole, but with some significant differences.
	• It is given in cases of long-term imprisonment.
	• The period of furlough granted to a prisoner is treated as remission of his sentence.
	• Unlike parole, furlough is seen as a matter of right for a prisoner, to be granted periodically irrespective of any reason.
	• It is provided to enable the prisoner to retain family and social ties, and to counter the ill-effects of prolonged time spent in prison.
27. K.N. Dikshit Committee constituted	• An expert committee has been set up for conducting holistic study of origin and evolution of Indian culture
	• Ministry: Ministry of Culture.
	• The committee is chaired by K.N. Dikshit (Chairman of Indian Archaeological Society, New Delhi and former Joint Director General, Archaeological Survey of India).
28. Kosi Rail Mahasetu	• The historic Kosi Rail Mahasetu (Mega Bridge) was recently inaugurated.
	• The Kosi Rail Mahasetu is 1.9 KM long.
	• It cuts an otherwise 300-km long journey between Samastipur and Jaynagar on Indo-Nepal border to just 22 km.
	• It strengthens Bihar's rail network and West Bengal and Eastern India's rail connectivity.
	• Indian Prime Minister also inaugurated 12 rail projects related to passenger facilities.
	• These include a new railway bridge on the Kiul River, two new railway lines, 5 Electrification projects, one Electric Locomotive Shed and 3rd Line Project between Barh-Bakhtiyarpur.
	• This bridge is of strategic importance along the India-Nepal border.
29. Kosi River	• The Kosi is a trans-boundary river which flows through Tibet, Nepal and India.
	• It drains the northern slopes of the Himalayas in Tibet and the southern slopes in Nepal.
	• From a major confluence of tributaries north of the Chatra Gorge onwards, the Kosi River is also known as Saptakoshi for its seven upper tributaries.
	• The Saptakoshi crosses into northern Bihar, India where it branches

	into distributaries before joining the Ganges near Kursela in Katihar district.
30. International Day of Peace	• Each year the International Day of Peace is observed around the world on 21st September. • Theme for 2020: Shaping Peace Together • The United Nations (UN) General Assembly has declared this as a day devoted to strengthening the ideals of peace, through observing 24 hours of non-violence and cease-fire.
31. PASSEX	• The Indian and the Australian navies are undertaking Passage Exercise or PASSEX exercises on September 23-24 in the Indian Ocean. • From the Indian side, Indian Naval Ships Sahyadri and Karmuk will be present and Australia will be represented by HMAS Hobart. • PASSEXs are regularly conducted by the Indian Navy with units of friendly foreign navies. • Australia is the third country, since June, with which India has conducted conduct the exercises. • The first was with US Navy's USS Nimitz and the second was the Russian Navy.
32. Women Officers as Observers	• In a first, two women officers have been selected to join as 'Observers' (Airborne Tacticians) in the Indian Navy's helicopter stream. • Sub Lieutenant (SLt) KumudiniTyagi and SLtRiti Singh would be the first set of women airborne tacticians in India who would operate from the deck of warships. • Earlier, entry of women was restricted to the fixed wing aircraft that took off and landed ashore.
33. YaminHazarika Award	• Historian-author RanaSafvi has been conferred YaminHazarika award. • It is an award instituted in memory of YaminHazarika. • She was the first woman from the Northeast to join the central police service. • RanaSafvi, who has published several books on culture, history, and monuments of India, was chosen for her "contribution to the syncretic culture of India". • The award is given every year by a collective of women professionals since 2015
34. G4 Foreign Ministers Meeting	• Recently, Foreign Ministers from the Group of 4 (G4), consisting of India, Brazil, Japan and Germany, participated in a virtual meeting. • G4 is a group of countries that are seeking permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).
35. JIMEX 2020	• The 4th edition of India - Japan Maritime bilateral exercise JIMEX, will be held in North Arabian Sea from 26 to 28 September 2020. • It is conducted biennially between the Indian Navy and Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) • JIMEX series of exercises commenced in January 2012 with special

	focus on maritime security cooperation.
36. Centre For Disability Sports	• Centre for Disability Sports was recently inaugurated at Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh. • Organized by:DEPwD, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. • At present no training facilities are available in the country for sports person with disabilities. • It will provide facilities of international standards to sportspersons with disabilities to compete at international level. • The Centre will be registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860. • Governing Body under the Chairpersonship of Secretary, DEPwD has been constituted.
37. Destination North East-2020	• Union Home Minister inaugurated the "Destination North East -2020". • The Union Home Minister is also the Chairman of the North-East Council. • Ministry: Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region. • Objective: To take the North East Region to other parts of the country. • Aim: To introduce various cultures of the country to each other along with the tourist destinations of the North East. • Theme: The Emerging Delightful Destinations which speaks of the tourism destinations emerging stronger and more attractive when the Sector picks up momentu
38. Jnanpith Award	• The 55th Jnanpith award was handed over to poet AkkithamAchuthanNamboothiri. • Akkitham became the sixth writer to bring Jnanpith to Malayalam literature. • Jnanpith Award is given by BharatiyaJnanpith, a literary and research organization based in Delhi. • It is given annually to an author for their "outstanding contribution towards literature". • It is bestowed only on Indian writers writing in Indian languages included in the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution of India and English
39. Scrub Typhus	• Recently, Scrub Typhus (Bush Typhus) was in the news. • It is a bacterial disease which has caused 5 deaths and 600 infections in Nagaland's Noklak district bordering Myanmar. • Caused by: Orientiatsutsugamushi (Bacteria)

	• Spread through bites of Larval Mites of family trombiculid, also called Chiggers. • Symptoms: Fever, headache, body aches, and sometimes rash. • Occurrence: Rural areas of Southeast Asia, Indonesia, China, Japan, India, and northern Australia. • Treatment: Antibiotics. No vaccine available.
40. I-ATS (Automatic Train Supervision) indigenously-built	• The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) launched 'i-ATS' (Automatic Train Supervision). • It is an indigenously-built communication-based train control signalling technology for the metro. • It will significantly reduce the dependence of Indian metros on foreign vendors dealing with such technologies. • It can work with train control and signalling systems of various suppliers.
41. Brucellosis	• An outbreak of brucellosis disease was recently reported from China. • More than 3,000 people have been infected with the disease since 2019. • It is a bacterial disease that mainly infects cattle, swine, goats, sheep and dogs. • Humans can get infected if they come in direct contact with infected animals or by eating or drinking contaminated animal products or by inhaling airborne agents. • Most cases of the disease are caused by ingesting unpasteurised milk or cheese from infected goats or sheep. • Symptoms: Fever, sweats, malaise, anorexia, headache and muscle pain. • Human to human transmission of the virus is rare.
42. Samvedna	• SAMVEDNA (Sensitizing Action on Mental Health Vulnerability through Emotional Development and Necessary Acceptance), a Toll Free Tele counselling service for children was recently launched. • Launched by: National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) • It will provide psychological first-aid and emotional support to children who are in quarantine or at COVID care centres and children who have COVID positive family members or children who have lost their parents due to COVID-19. • It will cater to children all over India in various regional languages also.

(TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE)

Model questions: (Answers are provided at the end)

Q.1 Recently India's GDP fell by 23.9% in the first quarter of 2020. Consider the following statements:

1. All the sectors have shown negative growth except agriculture.
2. Once a country faces three consecutive quarters of negative real growth it is declared recession.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.2 Recently RenatiChola Era inscription has been unearthed in which of the following state of India?

a) Karnataka
b) Kerala
c) Tamil Nadu
d) Andhra Pradesh

Q.3 Consider the following statements regarding RenatiChola:

1. They ruled over Renadu region.
2. They were forced to the suzerainty of the Eastern Pallavas.
3. They used Telugu language in their inscriptions between 6th and 8th centuries.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 and 2 only
b) 2 only
c) 1 and 3 only
d) None of the above

Q.4 Consider the following statements regarding INS Viraat:

1. It holds the Guinness World Record for being the longest serving worship of the world.
2. It played a major role in Operation to Jupiter during Bangladesh peacekeeping operation.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.5 India recently announced its withdrawal from multilateral military exercise Kavkaz 2020. In which of the following country is it going to be held?

a) Russia
b) Japan
c) China
d) USA

Q.6 Recently, one of the earliest galaxies called AUDFs01 has been discovered using AstroSat. Consider the following statements regarding AstroSat:

1. It is an astronomical mission launched by ISRO.
2. It aims to study celestial sources in X-ray, optical and UV spectral band simultaneously.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.7 Consider the following statements:

1. India-Pacific oceans initiative was launched by Indian Prime Minister at G20 summit.

2. Maritime security and Maritime ecology are some of the focuses of the initiative.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.8 Which of the following are principles recently released by the United Nations for people with disabilities?

1. People with disabilities have the right to appropriate procedural accommodations.
2. Facilities and services must be universally accessible for them without any discrimination.
3. They have the right to report complaints and initiate legal proceedings concerning human rights violations.
4. They have the right to free legal assistance.

Select the correct code:

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

Q.9 Consider the following statements regarding Quantum State Interferography:

1. It is the way of inferring the state of a system in both 2-D qubits and higher dimensional qubits.
2. It can help make manipulation simpler which can be harnessed for computing, communication and Metrology.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.10 Consider the following statements regarding dwarf galaxies:

1. They are least abundant in the universe.
2. They are difficult to detect due to their low mass.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.11 National Clean Air Programme was launched by which of the following?

a) National Green Tribunal
b) Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate change
c) United Nations Environment Programme
d) World Health Organization

Q.12 Consider the following statements regarding Wolbachia bacteria?

1. It is usually found in Aedes aegypti mosquito.
2. It harms the environment including humans.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.13 Recently world's largest solar tree was developed in which of the following country?

a) India
b) Japan
c) USA
d) China

Q.14 Which of the following is the concerned Ministry for Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evem Utthan Mahabhiyan (PM KUSUM) Scheme?

a) Ministry of New & Renewable Energy
b) Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate change

c) Ministry of Power
d) Ministry of Rural Development

Q.15 Which of the following are not the members of ASEAN?
1. Cambodia
2. Indonesia
3. Laos
4. India
5. South Korea

Select the correct code:
a) 1 and 3 only
b) 2,3 and 5 only
c) 4 and 5 only
d) 1, 2 and 4 only

Q.16 Consider the following statements regarding river Gomati or Gumti:
1. It is a tributary of the Ganges.
2. It flows through Tripura and Bangladesh.
3. Trial run of inland waterway was recently done through this river for the first time.

Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 and 2 only
b) 2 and 3 only
c) 1 and 3 only
d) 1, 2 and 3 only

Q.17 Indra 2020 is to be held between which of the following countries?
a) India and Japan
b) India and USA
c) India and Russia
d) India and Thailand

Q.18 Strait of Malacca is a strait between which of the following countries?
a) Malaysia and Thailand
b) India and Sri Lanka
c) Malaysia and Indonesia
d) Indonesia and Philippines

Q.19 Consider the following statements regarding recently held 17th ASEAN-India Economic Ministers Consultations:
1. It was co-chaired by India and Laos.
2. The AITIGA is a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) among ASEAN countries and India.

Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.20 Which of the following country has proposed the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI) as a trilateral approach to trade?
a) Japan
b) India
c) USA
d) Russia

Q.21 Which of the following species of milkweed butterflies is involved in migration?
a) Dark Blue Tiger
b) Blue Tiger
c) Common Crow
d) Double-branded

Q.22 Consider the following initiatives being taken up as parts of PoshanMaah, which is being observed in the month of September:
1. Agricultural Fund of India is being created to have complete information about the crops that are grown in each district and their related nutritional value.
2. A unique kind of Nutrition Park has been created at Statue of Unity where one can witness nutrition related education along with fun and frolic.

Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.23 Consider the following statements regarding Question hour:
1. It is an Indian parliamentary innovation.
2. It starts immediately after the Zero Hour.

Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.24 Consider the following statements regarding Zero Hour:
1. Under this, MPs can raise matters without any prior notice.
2. The first hour of every parliamentary sitting is slotted for the Zero Hour.

Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.25 UNSC Resolution 1267 Sanctions Committee is associated with combating which of the following?
a) Terrorism
b) Poverty
c) Hunger
d) Female foeticide

Q.26 Consider the following statements regarding Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle (HSTDV) which was recently tested:
1. It was successfully flight tested by ISRO.
2. It is an unmanned scramjet vehicle with a capability to travel at six times the speed of sound.

Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2

d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.27 Consider the following statements:
1. Contingency Fund (CF) is a specific provision meant for meeting unexpected and unforeseen contingencies of the RBI.
2. Unrealised gains or losses on valuation of foreign currency assets (FCA) and gold are accounted for in the Currency and Gold Revaluation Account (CGRA).

Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.28 Consider the following statements regarding International Solar Alliance (ISA):
1. Its headquarter is in Paris, France.
2. It aims to deploy over 1,000 GW of solar energy by 2030 in Member countries.

Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.29 Patrika Gate, recently seen in news, will be inaugurated in which of the following city of India?
a) Noida
b) Jaipur
c) Bengaluru
d) Mumbai

Q.30 Consider the following statements regarding the report on Literacy Rate released recently:
1. The male literacy rate is higher than the female literacy rate among all states.
2. Uttar Pradesh is the worst performer in the literacy rate in India.

Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.31 Consider the following statements:

1. Ground-level ozone and airborne particles are the most harmful pollutants.
2. Car-pooling and use of electric vehicles are some of the effective ways to reduce air pollution.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.32 Consider the following statements:

1. Environment Ministry is responsible for deciding the fuel standards in India.
2. These fuel standards implemented bythe Central Pollution Control Board.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.33 International Day to protect Education from attack was recently launched by which of the following?

a) United Nations
b) World Health Organization
c) AkshayaPatra Foundation
d) Amnesty International

Q.34 Recently, South India's 1st Kisan Rail was flagged off. Consider the following statements:

1. The inauguration was done by Union Minister of Railways.
2. The train would cover distance between Anantapur and Mumbai.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.35 Which of the following countries have Mediterranean sea as one of their borders?

1. Turkey

2. Russia
3. Greece

Choose the correct option:

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

Q.36 Consider the following statements regarding Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO):

1. Its headquarter is situated in Shanghai, China.
2. It was Founded in 2010.
3. India is one of its founders.

Which of the above is/are correct?

a) 1 and 3 only
b) 1 only
c) 2 and 3 only
d) None of the above

Q.37 Consider the following statements regardingGlobal Multidimensional Poverty Index:

1. It was first developed in 2010 by Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative and United Nations Development Programme.
2. It is released at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development of the United Nations in July, every year.

Which of the above is/are correct?

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

Q.38 Consider the following statements regardingPradhanMantriMatsyaSampadaYojana (PMMSY):

1. The PMMSY is an umbrella scheme with two- Central Sector Scheme (CS) and Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS).
2. Goal isto double the fish exports by 2024-25.

Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.39 Which of the following sectors were most impacted by nationwide lockdown due to COVID-19:
1. Consumer-oriented
2. Pharmaceuticals
3. Airline
4. Tourism
5. Real Estate

Select the correct code:
a) 1 and 3 only
b) 2, 3 and 4 only
c) 1, 3, 4 and 5 only
d) 2 and 5 only

Q.40 Consider the following statements regarding Coral reefs:
1. Coral Reefs are large underwater structures composed of the skeletons of colonial marine invertebrates called coral.
2. The corals have a symbiotic relationship with algae called the zooxanthellae.

Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.41 Consider the following statements regarding Gangetic Dolphin:
1. It has been recognized by the Indian Government as its National Aquatic Animal.
2. It is the official animal of the Guwahati, Assam.
3. Its IUCN Status isVulnerable
Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 and 3 only
b) 3 only
c) 2 and 3 only

d) 1 and 2 only

Q.42 Recently, 4th edition of Ease of Doing Business Rankings for the states was announced. Consider the following statements:
1. The results were based on the State Business Reform Action Plan (State BRAP).
2. It was released byThe Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT).
3. Andhra Pradesh is the top state in Ease of Doing Business.

Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 and 2 only
b) 1 only
c) 2 and 3 only
d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.43 Real Mango was in news recently. It is associated with which of the following?
a) A spy satellite launched by China
b) Illegal software used by agents to book tatkal tickets
c) A malware
d) New breed of Mango cultivated in Uttar Pradesh

Q.44 Consider the following regarding SAROD-Ports:
1. It was launched by the Union Ministry of Shipping.
2. It was established under Societies Registration Act, 1860.

Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.45 Recently, Kiran: Mental Health Rehabilitation Helpline was launched by which of the following Ministry?

a) Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment
b) Ministry of Education
c) Ministry of Home Affairs
d) Ministry of Finance

Q.46 Which of the following Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) deals with Clean water and sanitation?
a) SDG 6
b) SDG 11
c) SDG 14
d) SDG 8

Q.47 'Health in India' report was recently published. Consider the following statements regarding the same:
1. Manipur has shown the poorest performance under full immunisation.
2. Only 59.2% of the children below five years were fully immunised all over India.
Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.48 Bamboo Technology Parks were set up by which of the following Ministry?
a) Ministry of Agriculture
b) Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region
c) Ministry of Urban Affairs
d) Ministry of Information technology

Q.49 Consider the following statements:
1. National Bamboo Mission was launched by the Ministry of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME).
2. Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries (SFURTI) was launched by the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare.

Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2

d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.50 Phosphine gas was recently discovered on which of the following Planet?
a) Mars
b) Jupitar
c) Venus
d) Saturn

Q.51 Consider the following statements regarding Parole and Furlough:
1. Furlough is given to a prisoner for a specific reason, such as a death in the family.
2. Parole is provided to enable the prisoner to retain family and social ties.
Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.52 Consider the following statements regarding BRICS:
1. New Development Bank was established after signing the Agreement at Fortaleza, Brazil.
2. BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement provides short-term liquidity support to the members only.
Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.53 Bradykinin storm phenomenon is associated with which of the following disease?
a) Tuberculosis
b) AIDS
c) Malaria
d) COVID-19

Q.54 Sanskrit Grams are launched in which of the following state of India?
a) Himachal Pradesh
b) Uttar Pradesh
c) Uttarakhand

d) Rajasthan

Q.55 Consider the following statements regarding Commission on Status of Women:
1. It is a functional commission of the ECOSOC.
2. 45 member states of the United Nations serve as members of the Commission at any one time.
Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.56 Which of the following are major rivers of Maharashtra?
1. Koyna river
2. Wainganga river
3. Bhima river
4. Godavari
Choose the correct code:
a) 1 and 2 only
b) 1 and 4 only
c) 2 and 3 only
d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q.57 Consider the following statements regarding Index of Industrial Production (IIP):

1. It is compiled by the National Statistical Office (NSO)
2. It is published annually.
Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.58 Consider the following statements:
1. Core Sector Industries comprise 40.27% of the weight of items included in IIP.
2. Coal has the greatest weightage among the eight core Industries

Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only

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

Q.59 Consider the following statements:
1. Adjournment sine die suspends the work in a sitting for a specified time.
2. Adjournment means terminating a sitting of Parliament for an indefinite period.
Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.60 The Results of the 2nd edition of Ranking of States on Support to Startup Ecosystems were released recently.Consider the following statements:
1. It was released by Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade
2. Karnataka is the best performer among the states.
Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.61 Low Ozone was observed over which of the following River Valley?
a) Godavari
b) Narmada
c) Brahmaputra
d) Ganges

Q.62 Which of the following river is also known as Saptakoshi?
a) Ganga
b) Yamuna
c) Narmada
d) Kosi

Q.63 Consider the following statements regarding Singapore Convention on Mediation:

1. The settlement reached by parties shall be binding and enforceable.
2. Mediated settlement agreement across borders can be done by applying directly to the courts of countries that have signed and ratified the treaty.

Which of the above is/are correct?
   a) 1 only
   b) 2 only
   c) Both 1 and 2
   d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.64 Recently, Indo-Pacific Trilateral Dialogue was held between which of the following countries?
   a) India, Japan and Australia
   b) India, France and Australia
   c) India, Japan and France
   d) Japan, France and Australia

Q.65 DongriaKondh is a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group belonging to which of the following state of India?
   a) Odisha
   b) Jharkhand
   c) Chhattisgarh
   d) West Bengal

Q.66 Consider the following statements about Select Committee:
1. It is formed for examining Budget and policies of LokSabha.
2. Members are nominated from both the Houses.

Which of the above is/are correct?
   a) 1 only
   b) 2 only
   c) Both 1 and 2
   d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.67 The Global Initiative on Reducing Land Degradationwas recently launched by which of the following?
   a) G20 at its Environment Ministerial Meeting
   b) United Nations Environment Program
   c) Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change of India

   d) ASEAN

Q.68 Consider the following statements regarding Sunspots:
1. It is an area on the Sun that appears bright on the surface.
2. It is relatively hotter than the surrounding parts.

Which of the above is/are correct?
   a) 1 only
   b) 2 only
   c) Both 1 and 2
   d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.69 India's own eco-label Beach Environment & Aesthetics Management Services (BEAMS) was recently launched. Which of the following Ministry is associated with it?
   a) Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
   b) Ministry of Urban Affairs
   c) Ministry of Agriculture
   d) Ministry of Commerce and Industry

Q.70 Consider the following statements:
1. Goods will be considered originating from ASEAN, if the value addition in China is less than 50%.
2. It will always be treated as goods originating from China if China purchases the goods from ASEAN nations and exports to India.

Which of the above is/are correct?
   a) 1 only
   b) 2 only
   c) Both 1 and 2
   d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.71 The term 'nutraceutical' is used to describe which of the following?
   a) Medicines prepared from shoots of bamboo
   b) Vaccines which boosts immunity in children
   c) COVID-19 specific masks
   d) Medicinally functional foods.

Q.72 VAIBHAV Summit, to be inaugurated on 2nd October 2020, is associated with which of the following?
   a) Summit of next phase of Swachh Bharat Mission
   b) Summit of Start-ups Mission in Indian Central Universities
   c) Summit of Overseas and Resident Indian scientists and academicians
   d) Summit of Developing countries to combat terrorism

Q.73 Nandankanan Zoological Park is situated in which of the following state of India?
   a) Odisha
   b) West Bengal
   c) Kerala
   d) Maharashtra

Q.74 Bondas and Didiayis are Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups, recently seen in news. They belong to which of the following state of India?
   a) Odisha
   b) Jharkhand
   c) Rajasthan
   d) Himachal Pradesh

Q.75 Consider the following statements regarding Komodo Dragon:
   1. It is the largest Species of dragon fly known to man.
   2. Its IUCN status is threatened.

Which of the above is/are correct?
   a) 1 only
   b) 2 only
   c) Both 1 and 2
   d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.76 Which of the following is true regarding Bilateral Netting?
   a) It is a legally enforceable arrangement between a bank and a counterparty that covers all included individual contracts.
   b) It is a legally enforceable arrangement between two individuals that covers all included individual contracts.
   c) It is a legally enforceable arrangement between India and USA that covers all included individual contracts.
   d) It is a legally enforceable arrangement between Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry if Finance that covers all included individual contracts.

Q.77 Consider the following statements regarding The State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF):
   1. The Central Government contributes 50% of SDRF allocation for general category States/UTs and
   2. It also contributes 75% for special category States/UTs.

Which of the above is/are correct?
   a) 1 only
   b) 2 only
   c) Both 1 and 2
   d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.78 Consider the following statements regardingAbhyas High-speed Expendable Aerial Target (HEAT):
   1. It is a satellite that will be used as a target for various missile systems.
   2. It consumes less power.
   3. It is highly expensive.

Which of the above is/are correct?
   a) 1 and 2 only
   b) 2 only
   c) 1 and 3 only
   d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.79 India is home to the largest number of which of the following Rhinos?
   1. Black Rhino
   2. Sumatran rhino

3. Greater One-Horned

Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 and 2 only
b) 2 and 3 only
c) 3 only
d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.80 Special Report on Sustainable Recovery was recently released. Consider the following statements:

1. It was presented by Ministry of Finance.
2. It is a part of World Energy Outlook series.

Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.81 Consider the following statements regarding International Energy Agency:

1. It was established in the framework of the International Monetary Framework in 1974.
2. Its headquarter is in Washington.

Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.82 World Risk Index was recently released. Consider the following statements:

1. According to the report, India is well prepared to deal with **climate reality.**
2. It is part of the World Risk Report 2020 released by the United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS).

Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.83 Consider the following statements regarding International Convention of Road Traffic:

1. It defines an identification mark to identify the origin of the vehicle.
2. It promotes safety of international road traffic by establishing certain uniform rules among the contracting parties.

Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.84 Consider the following statements regarding GIFT city:

1. It is located in Gurgaon, Haryana.
2. It is India's first operational international financial services centre.

Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.85 Which of the following were recently announced as Domestic Systemically Important Insurers (D-SIIs) for 2020-21:

1. Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC)
2. General Insurance Corporation of India (GIC)
3. The New India Assurance Company

Select the correct code:
a) 1 only
b) 1 and 2 only
c) 2 and 3 only
d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.86 Which of the following Ministry is associated with FAME Scheme?
a) Ministry of Roadways
b) Ministry of Civil Aviation
c) Ministry of Electronics and IT
d) Ministry of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises

Q.87 Consider the following statements regarding Epidemic Diseases (Amendment) Bill, 2020 which was passed recently:
1. The legislation makes harm, injury, hurt or danger to the life of health care service personnel as a cognizable and bailable offence.
2. It has provisions of imprisonment from 3 months to 1 year

Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.88 The Indian Institutes of Information Technology Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2020 seeks to establish IIITs under PPP mode in which of the following cities?
1. Surat
2. Bhopal
3. Bhagalpur
4. Agartala
5. Lucknow

Select the correct code:
a) 1, 2, 3 and 5 only
b) 1 and 5 only
c) 1,2,3 and 4 only
d) 3, 4 and 5 only

Q.89 In which of the following state will the Raksha Shakti University be established?
a) Assam
b) Maharashtra
c) Uttar Pradesh
d) Gujarat

Q.90 Consider the following statements regarding Health in India report recently released:
1. The least percentage of people suffering from any ailment belongs to Hindu community.
2. Women are more susceptible to suffering from ailments than men in both rural and urban India.

Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only

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

Q.91 Recently, "Kaushal Se KalBadlenge" Program was in the news. It is related to which of the following scheme?
a) DeenDayalUpadhyayaGrameenKaushalyaYojana
b) Atal Innovation Mission
c) SarvaShikshaAbhiyan
d) Ujjwala Scheme

Q.92 Nagorno-Karabakh region was recently in news. It is associated with which of the following?
a) Iran Sanctions
b) Turley-Greece Conflict
c) Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict
d) Oil spill in Mediterranean Sea

Q.93 Sandalwood Spike Diseaseis an infectious disease which is caused by phytoplasma. Consider the following regarding Phytoplasmas:
1. Phytoplasmas are fungal parasites of plant tissues.
2. They are transmitted by insect vectors.

Which of the above is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.94 Plastic Parks scheme is launched by which of the following Ministry?
a) Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate change
b) Ministry of Urban Affairs
c) Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilizers
d) Ministry of Agriculture

Q.95 Recently, Leuser Ecosystem was in the news. It is a forest area on the island of which of the following country?
a) Sri Lanka
b) USA
c) Indonesia

d) Malaysia

d) Assam

Q.96 Medicanes are associated with which of the following?
  a) Growth stimulating antibiotic
  b) A probable oral vaccine for COVID-19
  c) Mediterranean Hurricanes
  d) Moderate Hurricanes over USA

Q.97 An India based Neutrino Observatory (INO) is going to be set up in which of the following state of India?
  a) Tamil Nadu
  b) Himachal Pradesh
  c) Rajasthan

Q.98 Recently, the Government of India has created the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Center (IN-SPACe).Consider the following regarding IN-SPACe:
  1. The decision of IN-SPACe shall be final and binding on all stakeholders.
  2. Private players will be required to seek separate permission from ISRO.

Which of the above is/are correct?
  a) 1 only
  b) 2 only
  c) Both 1 and 2
  d) Neither 1 nor 2

2020 SEPTEMBER MONTH CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQs SOLUTIONS

1	A	26	B	51	D	76	A
2	D	27	C	52	C	77	D
3	C	28	B	53	D	78	B
4	A	29	B	54	C	79	C
5	A	30	C	55	C	80	B
6	C	31	C	56	D	81	D
7	B	32	C	57	A	82	B
8	D	33	A	58	A	83	C
9	C	34	D	59	D	84	B
10	B	35	D	60	A	85	D
11	B	36	D	61	C	86	D
12	D	37	C	62	D	87	D
13	A	38	C	63	C	88	C
14	A	39	C	64	B	89	D
15	C	40	C	65	A	90	C
16	B	41	D	66	D	91	A
17	C	42	D	67	A	92	C
18	C	43	B	68	D	93	B
19	B	44	C	69	A	94	C
20	A	45	A	70	B	95	C
21	A	46	A	71	D	96	C
22	C	47	B	72	C	97	A
23	D	48	B	73	A	98	A
24	A	49	D	74	A		
25	A	50	C	75	D		