PIB COMPILATION

JANUARY - 2019

VETRII IAS STUDY CIRCLE

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- MoU between India and Kuwait on recruitment of Domestic Workers

1. POLITY
FREEDOM OF LITERATURE BILL 2018

Polity:

Why in News?

- In a private member Bill introduced in the Lok Sabha on Friday, Congress MP Shashi Tharoor has suggested far-reaching amendments to various statutes to make it difficult for governments to ban books and to provide safeguards for authors and scholars from arbitrary and exhausting legal battles.

Highlights of the Bill:

- The Freedom of Literature Bill, 2018, puts on the government the onus of explaining why a book needs to be banned and removes the government's right to ban books indefinitely.

- The Bill envisages reading down Section 295A of the Indian Penal Code that provides for imprisonment of up to three years for "deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings or any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs," as well as Section 298, which is similar to 295A as it criminalises speech critical of religious organisations or religious figures, and therefore a major deterrent to free expression. Mr. Tharoor cites the example of Wendy Doniger's The Hindus: An Alternative History, which was banned in India because of legal travails under 295A.

- The most important part of the Bill, however, are the amendment to the Customs Act that allows governments to suspend the shipping in of books over an indefinite period (as had happened with the ban on Salman Rushdie's Satanic Verses).

Private member's Bill:

- Private Member – Any MP who is not a Minister is referred to as a private member.

- Government Bills – Bills introduced by Ministers are referred to as government bills. They are backed by the government, and reflect its legislative agenda. Private member's bills purpose is to draw the government's attention to what individual MPs see as issues and gaps in the existing legal framework, which require legislative intervention.

- The admissibility of a private member's Bill is decided by the Rajya Sabha Chairman in the case if it is introduced in Rajya Sabha. In the case of Lok Sabha, it is the Speaker; the procedure is roughly the same for both Houses.

- The Member must give at least a month's notice before the Bill can be listed for introduction; the House secretariat examines it for compliance with constitutional provisions and rules on legislation before listing.

- Up to 1997, private members could introduce up to three Bills in a week. This led to a piling up of Bills that were introduced but never discussed; Chairman K R Narayanan, therefore, capped the number of private member's Bills to three per session.

- While government Bills can be introduced and discussed on any day, private member's Bills can be introduced and discussed only on Fridays.

- Fourteen private member's Bills — five of which were introduced in Rajya Sabha — have become law so far.

THE CONSTITUTION (SCHEDULED TRIBES) ORDER (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2018' FOR REVISION IN LIST OF SCHEDULED TRIBES OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Polity/Governance

Prelims & Mains Level: The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2018 and list of Scheduled Tribes

Why in news?

- The Union Cabinet (chaired by Prime Minister) has approved the introduction of The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2018 in the Parliament for certain amendments in the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 so as to modify the list of Scheduled Tribes (STs) of Arunachal Pradesh.

Changes made in list of Scheduled Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh are:

- Deletion of 'Abor' in serial No. 1, as it is the same as 'Adi' in Serial No. 16.

- Replace 'Tai Khamti' instead of 'Khampti' at serial No. 6.

- Inclusion of 'Mishmi-Kaman' (Miju Mishmi), Idu (Mishmi) and Taraon (Digaru Mishmi) in serial No. 8.

- Inclusion of Monpa, Memba, Sartang, Sajolong (Miji) in serial No. 9 in lieu of 'Momba'.

- Inclusion of 'Nocte', 'Tangsa', 'Tutsa', 'Wancho' in lieu of 'Any Naga Tribes' in serial No. 10 in list of Scheduled Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.

Scheduled Tribes:

- A tribe is a social division in a traditional society consisting of families linked by social, economic, religious, or blood ties, with a common culture and dialect. A tribe possesses certain qualities and characteristics that make it a unique cultural, social, and political entity.

- The nature of what constitutes an Indian tribe and the very nature of tribes have changed considerably over the course of centuries. Constitution of India has recognized tribal communities in India under 'Schedule 5' of the constitution. Hence the tribes recognized by the Constitution are known as ' Scheduled Tribes'.

- The Constitution ensures certain protection and benefits for communities deemed as having Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

- Social and political mobilisation has led to the increase of number of STs 225 in 1960 to 700 today.

- As the number of communities demanding ST status expands, it brings the criteria of the recognition and the legitimacy of the process under scrutiny. The Constitution only states that STs are specified by the President after consultation with the Governor. It does not define or specify a particular criterion.

Criterion for STs:

- According to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, the criterion includes
    - ✓ Indication of primitive traits
    - ✓ Distinctive culture
    - ✓ Geographical isolation
    - ✓ Shyness of connect with the community at large &
    - ✓ Backwardness

AMENDMENT TO THE TRADE UNIONS ACT, 1926 TO MAKE PROVISIONS REGARDING RECOGNITION OF TRADE UNIONS

GS 2: Polity | Mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections

Prelims level: Trade Unions Act, 1926

Why in news?

- The Union Cabinet has approved Amendment to the Trade Unions Act, 1926 to make provisions regarding Recognition of Trade Unions.

Amendments:

- The proposed Bill will ensure that the nomination of workers' representatives in tripartite bodies by the government will become more transparent.

- Trade Unions so recognized would be accountable in maintaining industrial harmony.

- Recognition of Trade Unions at Central/State level would reduce duplicacy of such exercise by different departments. Recognized Trade Unions may be assigned specific roles at Central or State level.

Benefits of the Amendments:

- The approval will facilitate:
  ✓ Recognition of Trade Unions at Central and State level;
  ✓ Ensure true representation of workers in the tripartite bodies;
  ✓ Check on the arbitrary nomination of workers' representatives by the Government
  ✓ Reduce litigations and industrial unrest

Indian Trade Unions Act, 1926:

- The legislation regulating the trade unions is the Indian Trade Unions Act, 1926.

- The Act deals with the registration of trade unions, their rights, their liabilities and responsibilities as well as ensures that their funds are utilized properly.

- It gives legal and corporate status to the registered trade unions.

- It also seeks to protect them from civil or criminal prosecution so that they could carry on their legitimate activities for the benefit of the working class.

- The Act is applicable not only to the union of workers but also to the association of employers and extends to whole of India.

- Also, certain Acts, namely, the Societies Registration Act, 1860; the Co-operative Societies Act, 1912; and the Companies Act, 1956 shall not apply to any registered trade union, and that the registration of any such trade union under any such Act shall be void.

Trade Unions in India:

- The credit for the first association of Indian workers is generally given to the Bombay Mill-Hands Association founded by N.M. Lokhande in 1890.

- This was in the period just after the passing of the 'First' Factories Act in 1881 by the British Government of the time.

- The following years saw the formation of several labour associations and unions.

- The first clearly registered trade-union is considered to be the Madras Labour Union founded by B.P. Wadia in 1918.

NEW DELHI INTERNATIONAL ARBITRATION CENTRE BILL

GS 2: Polity | Dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions.

Prelims level: New Delhi International Arbitration Centre Bill

Why in News?

- The Lok Sabha has passed the New Delhi International Arbitration Centre Bill 2018.

- The Bill aims for creating an independent and autonomous regime for institutionalized arbitration and their better management so as to make it a hub for institutional arbitration.

- It will replace the International Centre for Alternative Dispute Resolution set-up in the year 1995, which is a society registered under the Societies Registration Act.

- It is based on the opinion of the High Powered Committee appointed by the Centre that the International Centre for Alternative Dispute Resolution has failed to address the growing needs of the institutional arbitration.

Composition:

- The proposed New Delhi International Arbitration Centre will be a statutory body.

- It will consist of:
  - ✓ Chairperson,
  - ✓ Two eminent persons having substantial knowledge in international and domestic arbitration,
  - ✓ One representative of a recognized body of commerce,

✓ Secretary to the Ministry of Law & Justice and

✓ Finance Advisor and a Chief Executive Officer.

Eligibility Criteria for Members:

- The Chairperson should have been a judge of the Supreme Court or High Court, or an eminent person having special knowledge and experience in the conduct or administration of arbitration.

- He will be appointed by the Central Government in consultation with the Chief Justice of India.

- The two eminent persons and the representative of commerce body are to be appointed by the Central Government.

Objectives:

- To bring targeted reforms to develop itself as a flagship institution for conducting international and domestic arbitration;

- To promote research and study, providing teaching and training, and organising conferences and seminars in arbitration, conciliation, mediation and other alternative dispute resolution matters; to provide facilities and administrative assistance for conciliation, mediation and arbitral proceedings; to maintain panels of accredited arbitrators, conciliators and mediators both at national and international level or specialists such as surveyors and investigators; to collaborate with other national and international institutions and organisations for ensuring credibility of the Centre as a specialised institution in arbitration and conciliation; to set-up facilities in India and abroad to promote the activities of the Centre; to lay down parameters for different modes of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms being adopted by the Centre

CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT BILL, 2016

GS 2: Polity

Why in news?

- The Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) on the contentious Citizenship Amendment Bill, 2016 recommended that the Assam government should help settle migrants "especially in places which are not densely populated, thus, causing lesser impact on the demographic changes and providing succour to the indigenous Assamese people".

- There has been a strong resistance to the Bill in the BJP-ruled Assam as it would pave the way for giving citizenship, mostly to illegal Hindu migrants from Bangladesh, in Assam who came after March 1971, in violation of the Assam Accord of 1985.

- The Union Cabinet cleared the redrafted Citizenship Amendment Bill on Monday, and it is likely to be tabled in Parliament on Tuesday. The Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) expressed its concern before the committee.

The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016:

- The Bill, introduced in the Lok Sabha on July 15, 2016, seeks to amend the Citizenship Act, 1955 to provide citizenship to illegal migrants, from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, who are of Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian extraction.

- However, the Act doesn't have a provision for Muslim sects like Shias and Ahmediyas who also face persecution in Pakistan.

- The Bill also seeks to reduce the requirement of 11 years of continuous stay in the country to six years to obtain citizenship by naturalisation.

- According to the Citizenship Act, 1955, an illegal immigrant is one who enters India without a valid passport or with forged documents. Or, a person who stays beyond the visa permit.

REPORT ON SECTION 126 OF THE RP ACT, 1951, SUBMITTED

Prelims level & Mains Level: Section 126 of Representation of the People Act, 1951

Why in News?

- A Committee constituted to review and suggest modifications and changes in the provisions of the Section 126 and other sections of the RP Act 1951, provisions of Model Code of Conduct and any other ECI instruction has submitted its report.

- The recommendations made by the Committee, when implemented will help in minimizing the possible interference of activities which aim at indirectly influencing voters during the valuable silence period of 48 hours provided to them.

Section 126 of RP Act, 1951:

- Section 126 of the RP Act prohibits displaying any election matter by means, inter alia, of television or similar apparatus, during the period of 48 hours before the hour fixed for conclusion of poll in a constituency.

- "Election matter" has been defined in that Section as any matter intended or calculated to influence or affect the result of an election. Violation of the provisions of Section 126 is punishable with imprisonment upto a period of two years, or with fine or both.

- It prohibits conduct of Exit poll and dissemination of their results during the period mentioned therein, in the hour fixed for commencement of polls in the first phase and half hour after the time fixed for close of poll for the last phase in all the States.

Section 126 and other related Sections of the RP Act, 1951:

- Prohibitory period of 48 hours before the completion of the poll

- Impact of new media platforms and social media during the prohibitory period of 48 hours before the close of poll campaign.

- Provisions of Model Code of Conduct (MCC) to the related issue

Background:

- The task of maintaining campaign silence during last 48 hours before the conclusion of polling is becoming increasingly onerous in the light of the increasing influence of digital media. So, apart from the regulation by law and ECI instructions, the resolve, proactive support and sustained effort by all stake holders is necessary to contain the evil impact.

VOTER AWARENESS FORUMS FOR PROMOTING AWARENESS ON ELECTORAL PROCESS

GS 2: Polity | Salient features of the Representation of People's Act

Prelims level: VAF

Why in News?

- Voter Awareness Forums will be set up in Ministries, Government Departments, Non-Government Departments and other Institutions to promote electoral awareness.

Highlights:

- Voter Awareness Forums are informal Forums for generating awareness around electoral process through activities like discussions, quizzes, competitions and other engaging activities.

- VAF is part of the Electoral Literacy Club programme of ECI.

- Launched on the 8thNational Voters Day, 25th January 2018, the ELC programme envisages setting up of Electoral Literacy Club in every educational institution.

- The ECI also aims to set up Chunav Pathshala at every booth to cover those outside the formal education system.
- The ELCs and Chunav Pathshala activities are conducted by the Convener using a resource Guide where step by step instructions are given for conducting each activity.
- Separate Resource books have been developed for Class IX, X, XI and XII.
- A calendar of activities in a year has also be indicated. Total of 6-8 activities, with specific learning outcome, running into approximately 4 hours in all, have been identified for each class.

9th NATIONAL VOTERS' DAY

GS 2: Polity

Why in news?

- The country will celebrate the 9th National Voters' Day (NVD) on 25th January 2019 at more than six lakh locations covering around ten lakh Polling Stations across the country.

National Voters Day:

- The National Voters' Day (NVD) is celebrated all over the country on January 25 every year since 2011 to mark the Foundation day of Election Commission of India, which was established on 25th January 1950.
- The main purpose of the NVD celebration is to encourage, facilitate and maximize the enrollment, especially for the new voters.
- Theme: 'No Voter to be Left Behind' has been selected as the theme for the NVD.
- New Voters shall be felicitated and handed over their EPIC (Elector Photo Identity Card) in the NVD function. And also My Vote Matters, a Quarterly Magazine will be launched on the occasion.
- Dedicated to the voters of the country, the Day is utilized to spread awareness among voters for promoting informed participation in the electoral process.

2. GOVERNANCE

CIC GETS FOUR INFORMATION COMMISSIONERS

GS 2: Governance | Important aspects of governance, transparency & accountability

Why in news?

- The government has appointed four new Information Commissioners in the Central Information Commission.

Central Information Commission:

- The Central Information Commission has been constituted with effect from 12-10-2005 under the Right to Information Act, 2005. The jurisdiction of the Commission extends over all Central Public Authorities.

Powers and Functions:

- The Commission has certain powers and functions mentioned in sections 18, 19, 20 and 25 of the RTI Act, 2005. Adjudication in second appeal for giving information

- Direction for record keeping. Suo motu disclosures receiving and enquiring into a complaint on inability to file RTI, etc. Imposition of penalties and Monitoring and Reporting including preparation of an Annual Report

- The decisions of the Commission are final and binding.

Composition:

- The Commission includes 1 Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) and not more than 10 Information Commissioners (IC) who are appointed by the President of India.

- CIC and members are appointed by the President of India on the recommendation of a committee consisting of—Prime Minister as Chairperson, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, a Union Cabinet Minister to be nominated by the Prime Minister.

ISRO LAUNCHES SAMWAD WITH STUDENTS ON NEW YEAR DAY

GS 2: Governance | Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Why in News?

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) launched a new platform called 'Samwad with Students' on January 1, 2018 in Bengaluru, as part of its enhanced outreach programme.

- Through the initiative, ISRO aims to constantly engage youngsters across India in activities concerning space science to capture their scientific temperament. The new conversation mission aims to inspire students cutting across schools and colleges.

Significance:

- The ISRO Chairman used the platform to explain to the students the importance of the Indian space programme and its benefits to the society at large.

- He wanted them to take up science and mathematics with absolute seriousness which would enable them to take up challenging careers.

Highlights:

- He explained that space missions are very complex in nature and totally different from terrestrial systems, as they have to work in extreme environments more often.

- Upon asked how the students could contribute to ISRO's missions, Dr. Sivan told the students that when they complete their studies with a focus on fundamentals of science, then they could get back to ISRO and help solve problems.

- On the sidelines, the students and teachers also interacted with ISRO scientists and engineers.

CABINET APPROVES HIGH LEVEL COMMITTEE TO IMPLEMENT CLAUSE 6 OF ASSAM ACCORD

GS 2: Governance

Why in news?

- The Union Cabinet approved the setting up of a High Level Committee for implementation of Clause 6 of the Assam Accord and measures envisaged in the Memorandum of Settlement, 2003 and other issues related to Bodo community.

Highlights:

- Clause 6 of the Assam Accord envisaged that appropriate constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.

- The Committee shall examine the effectiveness of actions since 1985 to implement Clause 6 of the Assam Accord. The Committee will hold discussions with all stakeholders and

assess the required quantum of reservation of seats in Assam Legislative Assembly and local bodies for Assamese people.

- The Committee will also assess the requirement of measures to be taken to protect Assamese and other indigenous languages of Assam, quantum of reservation in employment under Government of Assam and other measures to protect, preserve and promote cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of Assamese people

- The Composition and Terms of Reference of the Committee will be issued separately by the Ministry of Home Affairs. It is expected that the setting up of the Committee will pave the way for the implementation of the Assam Accord in letter and spirit and will help fulfil longstanding expectations of the Assamese people.

- The Cabinet also approved the establishment of a Bodo Musuem-cum-language and cultural study center, modernization of existing All India Radio Station and Doordarshan Kendra at Kokrajhar and naming a Superfast Train passing through BTAD as ARONAI Express. Relevant Ministries will take the required actions to implement these decisions.

- The Bodos are an ethnic and linguistic community centered on the Udalguri and Kokrajhar of Assam. They are largest of the 18 ethnic sub-groups within the Bodo -Kachari group.

Assam Accord:

- The Assam Accord (1985) was a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) signed between representatives of the Government of India and the leaders of the Assam Movement in New Delhi on 15 August 1985.

- The accord brought an end to the Assam Agitation and paved the way for the leaders of the agitation to form a political party and form a government in the state of Assam soon after.

- Some of the key demands were – All those foreigners who had entered Assam between 1951 and 1961 were to be given full citizenship, including the right to vote.

- Those who had done so after 1971 were to be deported; the entrants between 1961 and 1971 were to be denied voting rights for ten years but would enjoy all other rights of citizenship. A parallel package for the economic development of Assam, including a second oil refinery, a paper mill and an institute of technology, was also worked out.

- The central government also promised to provide 'legislative and administrative safeguards to protect the cultural, social, and linguistic identity and heritage' of the Assamese people.

- Though the accord brought an end to the agitation, some of the key clauses are yet to be implemented, which has kept some of the issues festering.

Section 6A of Citizenship Act, 1955 and Assam Accord:

- The section 6A in the Citizenship Act, 1955 contains the provisions with respect to citizenship of persons covered by the Assam Accord (1985).

- This section was introduced through an amendment made in 1985, in the Citizenship Act, 1955.

- The section 6A of the act says that all those who came to Assam on or after 1 January, 1966, but before 25th March, 1971 from the specified territory (it includes all territories of Bangladesh at the time of commencement of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 1985), and since then are residents of Assam, must register themselves under section-18 for citizenship. Therefore, this act fixes March 25, 1971 as the cut-off date for granting citizenship to Bangladeshi migrants in Assam.

CENTRE TO INTRODUCE COMMERCIAL SPACE ACTIVITIES BILL

GS 2: Governance| Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation

Prelims & Mains level: Space Activities Bill 2017

Why in News?

- The Centre is likely to introduce a Bill to commercialise space activities in the budget session this year.

Space Activities Bill 2017:

- It is a proposed Bill to promote and regulate the space activities of India.

- The Bill aims to facilitate the overall growth of space activities in India with higher order participation of public, non-governmental and private sector stakeholders.

- The Bill encourages the participation of non-governmental/private sector agencies in space activities in India under the guidance and authorisation of the government through the Department of Space.

- As few start-ups in India have shown interest in space activities there is an urgent need for a legal environment for orderly performance and growth of space sector.
- It will help the Centre establish a regulatory mechanism through an appropriate body to authorize and license space activities.

Provisions of the Bill:

- The provisions of this Act shall apply to every citizen of India and to all sectors engaged in any space activity in India or outside India
- A non-transferable licence shall be provided by the Central Government to any person carrying out commercial space activity
- The Central Government will formulate the appropriate mechanism for licencing, eligibility criteria, and fees for licence.
- The government will maintain a register of all space objects (any object launched or intended to be launched around the earth) and develop more space activity plans for the country
- It will provide professional and technical support for commercial space activity and regulate the procedures for conduct and operation of space activity
- It will ensure safety requirements and supervise the conduct of every space activity of India and investigate any incident or accident in connection with the operation of a space activity. It will share details about the pricing of products created by space activity and technology with any person or any agency in a prescribed manner.
- If any person undertakes any commercial space activity without authorisation they shall be punished with imprisonment up to 3 years or fined more than ₹1 crore or both.

Issues with the Bill:

- The Bill does not address space-based activities separately.
- Instead, it tries to cover large swaths of the space value chain in one go.
- In fact, the very definition of "space activity" could throw up complications.
- The definition puts every space object under its ambit, meaning even hardware that carries GPS receivers could require a license.
- The Bill could also affect navigation services provided by companies such as Google Maps, Ola and Uber.

YEAR END REVIEW OF DEEN DAYAL ANTYODAYA YOJANA – NATIONAL RURAL LIVELIHOODS MISSION

GS 2: Governance | Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resource.

Why in news?

- Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana- National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) seeks to reach out to 8-9 crore rural poor households and organize one woman member from each household into affinity-based women SHGs and federations at village level and at higher levels.

Progress:

- During 2018-19: 588 additional blocks have been covered under "Intensive" implementation strategy of DAY-NRLM bringing the cumulative total to 5054 blocks.

- During the year 2018-19so far, over 73 lakh households have been mobilized into 6.75 lakh SHGs. The SHG-Bank Linkage programme has seen tremendous growth year on year under DAY-NRLM. During this financial year, about 17.57 lakh SHGs have accessed credit of Rs. 27911 crore up to October, 2018.

Non-Farm Livelihoods:

- Aajeevika Grameen Express Yojana (AGEY) is a programme to provide safe, affordable and community monitored transport services to rural areas. The vehicles are owned and operated by members of Self-Help Group (SHG) networks and operate in regions which are not served by regular transport services. 624 routes are currently served by AGEY across the country.

- Start-up Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP), the sub-scheme under DAY-NRLM develops an eco-system for supporting small businesses in rural areas. The eco-system has components for providing business support services, mentorship, seed capital, training & capacity building on business and technical aspects and marketing support.

Farm Livelihoods:

- This year, DAY-NRLM has taken up promotion of organic farming with women SHG members across the country. Under organic farming initiative, a total of 1646 number of organic village clusters have been identified by 28 States/UTs.

- Ensuring Food & Nutritional Security is one of the stated objectives of all farm livelihoods interventions and in order to make sure that this objective is met, agri-nutri gardens at Mahila Kisan household level are being promoted.

- As linking small and marginal producers with the market is a critical gap, value chain development through the promotion of producer collectives is a critical component of the implementation strategy under Farm Livelihoods. In the year 2018-19, three Mahila Milk Producer Companies (MMPCs) have been operationalized in Madhya Pradesh and Bihar.

SCIENCE COMMUNICATORS MEET

GS 2: Governance

Prelims Level: India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway & Significance

Why in news?

- As a part of the on-going Indian Science Congress, 2019, Science Communicators' Meet was inaugurated by the Union Minister for Law & Justice and Electronics & Information Technology, Shri Ravi Shankar Prasad at Lovely Professional University in Jalandhar.

India's achievements:

- India's ranking in global innovation index has jumped from 81st in 2015 to 60th in 2017 and 57th in 2018.

- India is now at the 6th position in scientific publications and 10th in patent filing.

- Digital payments have surged to 8 folds in the last five years to 2070 crores. There has been 2048% growth in Aadhar Enabled Payment System transactions while transactions in UPI grew 1500 times in the last 24 months.

Aim of the Science Communicators' Meet:

- The aim of the Science Communicators' Meet is to cultivate and build up a more closely knit science communication community in the country responsible for disseminating science information to all stakeholders. The specific objective of the meet is to bring different science communicators together to discuss the development and optimum utilization of existing & new media and arenas in order to strengthen the dialogue between the research community and the society. The Communicators' meet will provide opportunities for practitioners of science communication to discuss communication

strategies receive critical feedback and spread the scientific way of thinking among people and make science accessible to them.

Women Science Congress:

- Minister of Textiles & Industry Smt. Smriti Zubin Irani inaugurated the Women's Science Congress as a part of the on-going Indian Science Congress,2019 with the focal theme "Future India: Science and Technology. The Women's Science Congress has been organised to showcase the contribution of women in Science, Technology and the Society.

MENSTRUAL HYGIENE FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS SCHEME

GS 2: Governance | Issues relating to development & management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources

Why in news?

- To address the need of menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls residing primarily in rural areas, Government of India is supporting the Menstrual Hygiene Scheme.

Menstrual Hygiene Scheme:

- Under the scheme, funds are provided to States/UTs through National Health Mission for decentralized procurement of sanitary napkins packs.
- It would thus make its provision to rural adolescent girls at subsidized rates as per proposals received from the States and UTs in their Programme Implementation Plans.
- **Objectives:**
  - ✓ Increasing awareness among adolescent girls on Menstrual Hygiene
  - ✓ Improving access to and use of high quality sanitary napkins by adolescent girls in rural areas
  - ✓ Ensuring safe disposal of Sanitary Napkins in an environmentally friendly manner
  - ✓ Provision of funds to ASHAs to hold monthly meeting with adolescents to discuss issues related to menstrual hygiene.

Other initiatives:

- A range of IEC material has been developed around Menstrual hygiene Scheme, using a 360 degree approach to create awareness among adolescent girls about safe & hygienic menstrual health practices.

- It includes audio, video and reading materials for adolescent girls and job-aids for ASHAs and other field level functionaries for communicating with adolescent girls.

- ASHAs across the country are trained and play a significant role in promotion of use and distribution of the sanitary napkins.

- Department of Health Research, under the Ministry of Health, is involved in assessment of all newer, alternative, environment friendly menstrual hygiene products to look into their safety and acceptability features.

NEW NATIONAL POLICY FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS

GS 2: Governance | Mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Prelims level: National policy for domestic workers

Why in News?

- According to National Sample Survey (NSSO Statistics-2011-2012, 68th round) it is estimated 39 lakh people are employed as domestic workers by private households, of which 26 lakhs are female domestic workers.

- The Ministry of Labour & Employment is considering formulating a National Policy on Domestic Workers which is in the draft stage.

Draft policy for domestic workers:

- In a bid to give recognition to domestic workers besides making them eligible for minimum wages, social security and safe working conditions, labour ministry is drafting the national policy.

- As per the National Sample Survey, there are an estimated 39 lakhs people employed as domestic workers by private households, of which 26 lakhs are female domestic workers.

  ✓ Inclusion of Domestic Workers in the existing legislations

  ✓ Domestic workers will have the right to register as unorganized workers. Such registration will facilitate their access to rights & benefits.

  ✓ Right to form their own associations/unions

  ✓ Right to minimum wages, access to social security

  ✓ Right to enhance their skills

  ✓ Protection of Domestic Workers from abuse and exploitation

- ✓ Domestic Workers to have access to courts, tribunals for grievance redressal
- ✓ Establishment of a mechanism for regulation of private placement agencies.
- ✓ Establishment of a grievance redressal system for domestic worker

THE DNA TECHNOLOGY (USE AND APPLICATION) REGULATION BILL - 2019

GS 2: Governance | Issues relating to development & management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources

Why in News?

- The Bill has been formulated recognizing the need for regulation of the use and application of Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) technology, for establishing the identity of missing persons, victims, offenders, under trials and unknown deceased persons.
- The Bill will add value in empowering the criminal justice delivery system by enabling the application of DNA evidence, which is considered the gold standard in crime investigations.

Purpose of the bill:

- The purpose of this Bill is to expand the application of DNA-based forensic technologies to support and strengthen the justice delivery system of the country.
- The utility of DNA based technologies for solving crimes, and to identify missing persons, is well recognized across the world.
- By providing for the mandatory accreditation and regulation of DNA laboratories, the Bill seeks to ensure that with the proposed expanded use of this technology in this country, there is also the assurance that the DNA test results are reliable, and furthermore that the data remain protected from misuse or abuse in terms of the privacy rights of our citizens.

Components of the bill:

- Establishment of a DNA Regulatory Board;
- Accreditation of DNA laboratories undertaking DNA testing, analysing, etc.;
- Establishment of the National and Regional DNA Data Banks, as envisaged in the Bill, will assist in forensic investigations.

- This will aid in scientific up-gradation and streamlining of the DNA testing activities in the country with appropriate inputs from the DNA Regulatory Board which would be set up for the purpose.

Law in place in other countries:

	USA	UK	South Africa	Ireland	India (proposed Bill)
Purpose for collecting DNA	• Criminal investigations. • Identification of missing and deceased persons.	• Criminal investigations. • Identification of missing and deceased persons.	• Criminal investigations. • Identification of missing and deceased persons.	• Criminal investigations. • Identification of missing and deceased persons.	• Criminal investigations. • Identification of missing and unknown persons. • Civil matters.
Process of collecting DNA samples from suspects	• For federal offences, sample can be taken when charged with an offence. • Process varies across states.	• Cheek swab can be taken when charged with an offence. • Intimate samples require consent and authorisation.	• Cheek swab can be taken on arrest. • Intimate sample can be taken only by medical practitioner.	• Cheek swab can be taken on order of inspector. • Intimate samples require consent.	• Written consent required for collecting sample. • Magistrate may order collection of samples. • Consent not required for offences with penalty above seven years.
Removal/Retention of profiles	• Profiles of individuals whose convictions are overturned are to be removed. • Profiles of those arrested are removed if charges are dismissed. • Varies across states.	• Profiles of individuals not convicted can be retained up to three years.	• Profiles must be removed in case of acquittal. • Profiles cannot be retained beyond three years.	• Profiles are to be removed in three months in case of acquittal.	• Profiles of suspects or undertrials to be removed on court order or police report. • Profiles in crime scene or missing persons' index to be removed on written request.

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FIRST SWADESH DARSHAN PROJECT IN MEGHALAYA

GS 3: Governance| Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation

Why in news?

- The Chief Minister of Meghalaya, inaugurated the project "Development of North East Circuit: Umiam (Lake View) – U Lum Sohpetbneng- Mawdiangdiang – Orchid Lake Resort" implemented under Swadesh Darshan Scheme of Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

Darshan Project:

- The project "Development of North East Circuit: Umiam (Lake View) – U Lum Sohpetbneng- Mawdiangdiang – Orchid Lake Resort" was sanctioned by the Ministry of Tourism.

- Under this project the Ministry of tourism has developed facilities like Traditional Healing Centre, Tribal Rejuvenation Centre, Tourist Information Centre, Multipurpose Hall, Log Huts, Cafeteria, Sound and Light show, Souvenir Shops, Water Sports Zone, Zip Line, Canopy Walk, Trekking Routes, Cycling Track, Last Mile Connectivity, Caravan Parking, Public Toilets, and Solid Waste Management.

Swadesh Darshan Scheme:

- It is one of the flagship schemes of the Ministry of Tourism for development of thematic circuits in the country in a planned and prioritised manner.

- Under this scheme the Government is focussing on development of quality infrastructure in the country with objective of providing better experience and facilities to the visitors on one hand and on other hand fostering the economic growth.

RECOMBINANT ELISA KITS

GS 3: Governance| Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation

Why in News?

- Union Minister of Agriculture & Farmers released recombinant Enzyme-linked immune sorbent assay (ELISA) kits: one for Glanders and other for Equine Infectious Anaemia.

Both these diseases are notifiable diseases in India and require special diagnosis for control and eradication in the country.

ELISA KIT:

- National Research Centre on Equines (NRCE) has been able to develop a recombinant Hcp1 antigen ELISA as an alternate to complement-fixation test (CFT). The ELISA has been duly validated in India and the OIE (World Organisation for Animal Health) Reference Laboratory, Germany.

Glanders Disease:

- Glanders is a fatal infectious and notifiable disease of equines including horses, donkeys and mules. The disease is caused by a bacterium known as Burkholderia mallei and has zoonotic potential. The organism is also considered as potential bio-weapon and categorized under 'Tier 1 Select Agent'.

Equine Infectious Anaemia(EIA):

- Equine infectious anaemia (EIA) is a chronic, debilitating and persistent infectious disease of equines caused by a retrovirus. It is an OIE (Office International des Epizooties) notifiable disease. NRCE has also developed recombinant p26 protein-based ELISA as an alternative to Coggin's test. This technology will provide sustainable and homogeneous source of antigen and harmonized protocol to ensure regular surveillance of EIA.

WEBWONDERWOMEN' CAMPAIGN

GS 2: Governance | Issues relating to development & management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources

Why in News?

- The Union Ministry of Women and Child Development on January 9, 2018 launched an online campaign, 'Web - Wonder Women' also known as '#www'.
- The Campaign aims to discover and celebrate the exceptional achievements of women, who have been driving positive agenda of social change through the social media itself.

Highlights:

- Through the '#www: WebWonderWomen', the Ministry and the Campaign's Partners aim to recognise the strength of Indian women stalwarts from across the globe who have used the power of social media to run positive campaigns to steer a change in society.

- The Campaign will recognise and acknowledge the efforts of these meritorious Women.

- The Campaign invites Entries through nominations from across the world as per the laid out criteria. Nominations will be open till January 31, 2019.

- Indian-origin women, working or settled anywhere in the world, are eligible for nomination.

- The shortlisted entries will be open for public voting on Twitter and the finalists will be selected by a specialised panel of judges.

- Nominations have been invited in a large number of categories including Health, Media, Literature, Art, Sports, Environmental protection, and fashion among others.

NATIONAL YOUTH PARLIAMENT FESTIVAL 2019

GS 2: Governance | Important aspects of governance, transparency & accountability

Prelims level & Mains Level: Section 126 of Representation of the People Act, 1951

Why in News?

- Minister of State (I/C) for Youth Affairs and Sports launched the National Youth Parliament Festival 2019 at New Delhi, thereby beginning the celebration of the National Youth Day 2019.

- National Youth Parliament Festival 2019 is organised on the theme of "Be The Voice of New India" and "Find solutions and contribute to policy".

Highlights:

- Youth in the age bracket of 18-25 years are invited to participate in the District Youth Parliaments. This is done in order to hear the voice of youth in this age bracket who are allowed to vote but cannot contest in elections.

- The National Youth Parliament Festival will also encourage the youth to engage with public issues, understand the common man's point of view, form their opinion and express these in an articulate manner.

- Relevant and effective voices on the vision of New India would be captured and documented to make these available to policy makers and implementers to take it forward.

- The National Youth Parliament Festival 2019 will be conducted at three levels:

❖ District Youth Parliament (DYP) at the district level.

❖ State Youth Parliament (SYP) at the State Level.

❖ National Youth Parliament (NYP) at the National Level

❖ The best three speakers at the National Youth Parliament will be awarded Rs. 2 Lakhs, Rs. 1.50 Lakhs and Rs. 1 Lakh respectively by the Prime Minister.

PERFORMANCE GRADING INDEX (PGI)

GS 2: Governance | Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Why in News?

- The PGI is for the purpose of grading States and UTs on their performance across 70 indicators on school education.

Higlights:

- The Index will grade States and UTS thus allowing for more than one State/UT to occupy the same grade, and therefore all States and UTS to ultimately reach the highest level.

- The PGI has been conceptualised as a tool to encourage States and UTS to adopt certain practices like online recruitment and transfer of Teachers, electronic attendance of Students & Teachers etc., The PGI has seventy (70) indicators divided into two categories viz Outcomes and Governance processes. The first category is divided into four domains viz. Learning outcomes, Access outcomes, Infrastructure and Facilities and Equity outcomes; The second category is about Governance processes which covers attendance, teacher adequacy, administrative adequacy, training, accountability and transparency.

- The total weightage under PGI is thousand points. Each indicator has been given either twenty or ten points.

WOMANIYA ON GOVERNMENT E MARKETPLACE' INITIATIVE

GS 2: Governance | Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these scheme

Why in news?

- The Union Government on January 14, 2019 launched the 'Womaniya on Government e Marketplace (GeM)', an initiative to enable women entrepreneurs and Women Self-Help Groups (WSHGs) to sell handicrafts, handloom, accessories, and other products directly to Government departments and institutions.

- The Womaniya on GeM initiative aims to develop women entrepreneurship on the margins of society to achieve gender-inclusive economic growth.

Highlights:

- India has approximately 500 million Internet users and nearly 54 percent of them are more than 25 years of age with higher discretionary income and likely to transact more online. Women constitute 33 percent or 143 million Internet users and control 44 percent of household spending in India.

- Nearly 80 percent women-owned establishments in India are self-financed and more than 60 percent of 8 million units are owned and led by women entrepreneurs from socially-challenged sections.

- Since women tend to invest up to 90 percent of their earnings back in their families to provide better nutrition, health care and education to their children, their economic empowerment is essential for poverty alleviation which would be made possible through Womaniya initiative.

- Womaniya on GeM will spur hyper-local economic opportunities for women entrepreneurs and address goals and objectives under United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

- Products like handicrafts and handloom, accessories, jute and coir products, home decor and office furnishings are categorised for ease-in-procurement.

- The initiative aligns with Government's initiatives for MSMEs, especially to reserve 3 percent in government procurement from women entrepreneurs.

Government e Marketplace:

- Government e Marketplace is a 100 percent government owned company setup under the aegis of Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry for procurement of common use goods and services by Government ministries, departments and CPSEs.

- GeM was setup in 2016 and has 731,431 product categories, with 180,862 registered sellers and 32,114 government buyers.

- Since inception, GeM has processed 1,171,761 orders worth Rs 16,976 crores in gross merchandise value. The platform offers online, end to end solution for procurement of

commonly used goods and services for all central government departments and state governments, public sector units and affiliated bodies.

- It aims to enhance transparency, efficiency and speed in public procurement of goods and services and eliminate corruption.

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR DRUG DEMAND REDUCTION (2018-2023)

GS 2: Governance | Issues relating to development & management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources

Why in news?

- The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has drafted a five-year action plan for addressing the problem of drug and substance abuse in the country, dumping a long-pending draft policy on the matter.

National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (2018-2023):

- It aims to employ a multi-pronged strategy — involving education, de-addiction and rehabilitation of affected individuals and their families — to address the issue.

- The objective is to create awareness and educate people about the ill-effects of drugs abuse on the individual, family, workplace and the society at large in order to integrate them back into the society.

- The ministry has planned several measures for controlling sale of sedatives, painkillers and muscle relaxant drugs, and checking online sale of drugs by stringent monitoring by cyber cell, under the national action plan.

- It includes holding awareness generation programmes at schools, colleges, universities, workplaces and for police functionaries, paramilitary forces, law enforcement agencies, judicial officers and Bar council, among others. Plans are also afoot for awareness generation through social, print, digital and online media, and engagement of celebrities, besides strengthening the national toll-free helpline for drug prevention. It also calls for persuading principals, directors, vice chancellors of educational institutions to ensure that no drugs are sold within/nearby the campus. It also includes identification of vulnerable areas based on survey, skill development, vocational training and livelihood support of ex-drug addicts through National Backward Classes Finance and other Development Corporations and continuous research on drug use pattern.

Other Initiatives:

- The ministry, in collaboration with the National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre (NDDTC) under the AIIMS, is also conducting a national survey on the extent and pattern of substance abuse.

- A steering committee would be constituted under the chairmanship of the secretary, Social Justice Ministry, and with representatives from the Ministries of Health, HRD, WCD, MHA, Skill development and Entrepreneurship, among others.

- The committee will hold quarterly meetings to monitor effective implementation of the NAPDDR.

- As a part of the plan, module for re-treatment, ongoing treatment and post-treatment of addicts of different categories and age groups will be developed and database on substance use will be maintained.

PRADHAN MANTRI ROZGAR PROTSAHAN YOJANA

GS 2: Governance | Issues relating to development & management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources

Why in News?

- The Pradhan Mantri Rozgar Protsahan Yojana (PMRPY), the flagship scheme of the Union Government for employment generation, crossed the milestone of one crore beneficiaries on January 14, 2019.

Highlights:

- The scheme was announced on August 07, 2016 and is being implemented by the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment through the Employees' Provident Fund Organization (EPFO).

- Under the scheme, Government is paying full employers' contribution of 12 percent towards Employees' Provident Fund and Employees' Pension Scheme both for a period of 3 years.

- The new employees who are registered with the EPFO on or after April 1, 2016, with salary up to Rs. 15,000 per month are covered under the scheme.

- During 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19 (up to January 15, 2019), 33,031, 30,27,612, and 69,49,436 beneficiaries respectively, have been enrolled with EPFO under the PMRPY.

- The numbers of establishments who have been benefitted during the implementation of the scheme are 1.24 lakh.

Pradhan Mantri Rozgar Protsahan Yojana (PMRPY):

- The Scheme has been designed to incentivise employers for generation of new employment, where the Union Government pays the full employer's contribution towards EPF and EPS with effect from April 1, 2018. Earlier the benefit was applicable for employer's contribution towards EPS only.

- PMRPY has a dual benefit - on the one hand, the employer is incentivised for increasing the employee base in the establishment through payment of EPF contribution of 12 percent of wage, which otherwise would have been borne by the employer, and on the other hand, a large number of workers find jobs in such establishments.

- A direct benefit of the scheme is that these workers have access to social security benefit through Provident Fund, Pension and Death Linked Insurance.

- The terminal date for registration of beneficiaries through an establishment under the PMRPY is March 31, 2019. The entire system of availing of the scheme is online and AADHAR based with no human interface in the implementation of the scheme.

KRUSHAK ASSISTANCE FOR LIVELIHOOD AND INCOME AUGMENTATION (KALIA)

GS 2: Governance | Issues relating to development & management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resource

Why in News?

- Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation (KALIA) is a support scheme of Odisha whose primary targets are small farmers, cultivators and landless agricultural labourers.

- The scheme involves payments to encourage cultivation and associated activities.

Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation (KALIA):

- Odisha would spend Rs 10,180 crore over three years until 2020-21 in providing financial assistance to cultivators and landless agricultural labourers benefitting 92% of the cultivators in the state and including every category from big farmers to landless cultivators.

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- The government would provide Rs 10,000 per family as assistance for cultivation, Rs 5,000 each in the Kharif and Rabi seasons, for five cropping seasons between 2018-19 and 2021-22.

- The financial assistance under the scheme is not linked to the quantum of land owned.

- The scheme also targets landless households, specifically SC and ST families as they will be supported with a unit cost of Rs 12,500 for activities like goat rearing, mushroom cultivation, beekeeping, poultry farming and fishery.

- The Scheme also provides a life insurance cover of Rs 2 lakh and additional personal accident coverage of the same amount for 57 lakh households.

- The Scheme also proposes interest-free crop loans up to Rs 50,000.

- The scheme is proposed as an alternative to the demand of farm loan waiver.

- The scheme strives to target rural activities as a whole by supporting farming on a small scale, sharecropping, fishing and animal herding which doesn't get covered under loan waiver schemes.

PRAVASI BHARTIYA DIWAS -2019

GS 2: Governance

Why in news?

- The stage is all set for the beginning of 15th edition of Pravasi Bhartiya Divas at Varanasi.

- The theme for PBD 2019 is "Role of Indian Diaspora in building New India".

Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas:

- Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) is celebrated once in every two years to strengthen the engagement of the overseas Indian community with the Government of India and reconnect them with their roots. During the Convention, selected overseas Indians are also honored with the prestigious Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award.

Pravasi Bhartiya Samman Award:

- The Pravasi Bhartiya Samman Award PSBA is the highest honour conferred on overseas Indian. It will be conferred by the President of India to selected NRIs, PIOs, organisation or institution established and run by the NRIs who have made significant contribution to various fields both in India and abroad.

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF INDIAN CINEMA

GS 2: Governance | Government policies & interventions for development in various sectors & issues arising out of their design & implementation

Why in news?

- Hon'ble PM Modi has inaugurated the National Museum of Indian Cinema (NMIC) in Mumbai.

National Museum of Indian Cinema (NMIC):

- The state-of-the-art Museum aims to take its visitors through an absorbing journey of over a century of Indian cinema in a story telling mode with the help of visuals, graphics, artifacts, interactive exhibits and multimedia expositions.

- The creation of the Museum has been guided by the Museum Advisory Committee headed by Shri Shyam Benegal.

- The Museum is housed in two buildings – the New Museum Building and the 19th century historic palace Gulshan Mahal – in the Films Division campus in Mumbai.

New Museum Building has four Exhibition Halls which encapsulate:

- Gandhi & Cinema: It not only depicts the movies made on the life Mahatma Gandhi but also showcases the deep impact his life had on cinema.

- Children's Film Studio: it gives visitors, particularly children, an opportunity to explore the science, technology and art behind filmmaking.

- Technology, creativity & Indian cinema: it showcases the creative use of technology by Indian film makers over the years to produce cinematographic impact on the silver screen.

- Cinema across India: it showcases the charismatic kaleidoscopic presence of the vibrant cinematographic culture across India.

Gulshan Mahal:

- It is an ASI Grade-II Heritage Structure which has been restored as part of the NMIC project.

- The displays present here showcase the journey of over a hundred years of Indian cinema.

- It is divided into 9 sections viz. The Origin of Cinema, Cinema comes to India, Indian Silent Film, Advent of Sound, The Studio Era, The impact of World War II, Creative Resonance, New Wave and Beyond and Regional Cinema.

Significance of Indian Cinema:

- The Indian Cinema has a big role in enhancing India's soft power, its credibility and building the Brand India across the world.

- Through Cinema important social issues such as sanitation, women empowerment, sports etc are now reaching to people. Cinema plays an important role in nation Building and strengthens the feeling of Ek Bharat Shresth Bharat. The film Industry has a huge potential of contributing in the growth of Tourism in the country.

- Government is working to provide facility of 'Ease of Filming' by putting in place a Single Window Clearance system, for Film Shooting approvals in different parts of the country.

- It is also working on amending Cinematograph Act 1952 to check the problem of Film Piracy.

WORLD INTEGRATED MEDICINE FORUM 2019

GS 2: Governance | Issues relating to development & management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resource

Why in News?

- Union Ministry for AYUSH will inaugurate the 2nd World Integrated Medicine Forum 2019 on the 'Regulation of Homeopathic Medical Products; Advancing global collaboration'.

Highlights:

- The organizers of the forum are the Central Council for Research in Homeopathy, under the Ministry of AYUSH.

- International drug regulators dealing with homeopathic/traditional medicines from various countries are expected to participate. The regulation of homeopathic medicinal products is highly variable worldwide, ranging at a national level from highly advanced to none whatsoever. There is a tension between different regulatory needs: on the one hand there is a need for standardization, harmonization and reducing complexity;

- On the other hand there is need for a pluralistic regulatory system, which respects the specific characteristics of homeopathy as a holistic, patient-centred medical system.

- The forum will explore and illustrate the potential benefits and pitfalls of bi-lateral/multilateral collaboration and advance global cooperation on a synergistic basis.

BHARAT PARV 2019

GS 2: Governance

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Tourism in collaboration with other central Ministries is organizing the 4th edition of 'Bharat Parv' event showcasing the spirit of Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat at Red Fort as a part of Republic Day 2019 Celebrations.

Objective:

- The prime objective of organizing the event is to generate a patriotic mood promote the rich cultural diversity of the country and to ensure wider participation of the general public.

Highlights:

- The Bharat Parv event includes display of Republic Day Parade Tableaux, Performances by Armed Forces Bands, Cultural Performances from different regions of country, Multi-Cuisine Food Court, Craft Mela and Photo Exhibition by Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (DAVP). It will also include cultural performances choreographed in Folk and Tribal Dances and Music arranged through North Zonal Cultural Centre as well as performances by cultural troupes from different States and Union Territories. The Food Court will have stalls set up by States/UTs.

- Moreover, National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI) will showcase street food from different regions as well as by Institutes of Hotel Management and ITDC.

- There will also be Theme State Pavilions where each State will showcase their strengths along with tourism products.

CREATION OF THE NATIONAL BENCH OF THE GOODS AND SERVICES TAX APPELLATE TRIBUNAL (GSTAT)

GS 2: Governance | Government policies & interventions for development in various sectors & issues arising out of their design & implementation

Why in news?

- The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister, has approved the creation of National Bench of the Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT).

Highlights:

- Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunal is the forum of second appeal in GST laws and the first common forum of dispute resolution between Centre and States.

- The appeals against the orders in first appeals issued by the Appellate Authorities under the Central and State GST Acts lie before the GST Appellate Tribunal, which is common under the Central as well as State GST Acts.

- GSTAT shall be presided over by the President and shall consist of one Technical Member (Centre) and one Technical Member (State) and the appellate Tribunal shall be situated at New Delhi.

- Being a common forum, GST Appellate Tribunal will ensure that there is uniformity in redressal of disputes arising under GST, and therefore, in implementation of GST across the country.

INDIA RANKS 80TH ON GLOBAL TALENT COMPETITIVE INDEX 2019

GS 2: Governance | Government policies & interventions for development in various sectors & issues arising out of their design & implementation

Why in News?

- Global Talent Competitive Index (GTCI) for 2019 was recently released.

India's Progress:

- At 80th rank, India moves up one position on the Global Talent Competitive Index (GTCI) 2019, according to a report.

- According to the report, India's biggest challenge is to improve its ability to attract and retain talent. There is a need to address its poor level of Internal Openness in particular with respect to weak gender equality and low tolerances towards minorities and immigrants. China emerged as the best performer among the BRICS countries, with an overall position of 45th.

- However, India performed better than its lower-income peers when it comes to growing talent and access to growth opportunities.

Global Performance:

- Switzerland followed by Singapore, the US, Norway and Denmark were in the top five on the list.

- In the top ten of talent competitiveness ranking, only two non-European countries can be seen: Singapore and the USA.

- This underlines that Europe remains a talent powerhouse, but also that countries with great universities and a strong education sector are best at attracting talents.

GTCI:

- Launched for the first time in 2013, the GTCI is an annual benchmarking report that measures the ability of countries to compete for talent.

- It is released by INSEAD business school in partnership with Tata Communications and Adecco Group.

- The report measures levels of Global Talent Competitiveness by looking at 68 variables such as ease of ease of hiring, gender earnings gap, and prevalence of training in firms.

ECI REAFFIRMS NON-TAMPERABILITY OF EVMS

GS 2: Governance | Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential

Why in News?

- In wake of rumours about EVMs tampering and manipulating, ECI rules out all such possibilities.

EVMs:

- The ECI-EVMs are stand-alone machines designed to connect only amongst ECI-EVM units (Ballot Unit, Control Unit and VVPAT) through cables that remain in full public view. There is no mechanism in them to communicate with any device through wireless communication on any Radio Frequency. All their versions are regularly and rigorously tested against low to high wireless frequencies. These tests include and go beyond the standard tests specified for electronic equipment's

- They are regularly tested for proper functioning under all kind of operating conditions.

- They are also regularly tested for code authentication and verification.

VVPAT:

- In the context alleging about the two side printing of VVPAT paper which allegedly retains lower tampered print while the front side print as verified by the voter, getting erased.

- VVPATs use thermal printers which can print only on one side of thermal paper.
- The print is fully visible through the viewing window.
- The paper rolls used in VVPATs have only one-sided thermal coating and hence can be printed only on one side.
- The VVPAT paper print lasts atleast for five years.

EVMs and VVPATs Non-Tamperable:

- Bharat Electronics Limited and Electronics Corporation of India Limited, are the sole manufacturers of EVMs and now also VVPATs.
- They also reaffirmed that all the TEC prescribed Standard Operating Procedures are scrupulously adhered to and observed.
- It is however reiterated that while ECI-EVMs might malfunction sometimes like any other machine due to component failures and stop working, but even such a malfunctioning ECI-EVM would not record any vote incorrectly.
- It is reaffirmed that ECI-EVMs are not tamperable.

NATIONAL GIRL CHILD DAY

GS 2: Governance | Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential

Why in news?

- The Women & Child Development Ministry will celebrate National Girl Child Day (NGCD) on 24th January, 2019. The programme will also observe anniversary of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme.

Theme:

- The theme of this NGCD is "Empowering Girls for a Brighter Tomorrow" and celebrating with objectives of generating awareness on the issue of declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR) and create a positive environment around valuing the girl child.

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP):

- BBBP Scheme is a Central Sector Scheme with 100% financial assistance for District level component and the fund are directly released to the DC/DM's account for smooth operation of the Scheme.

- BBBP is a comprehensive programme to address the declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR) and related issues of empowerment of women over a life-cycle continuum.

- The Child Sex Ratio (CSR), defined as number of girls per 1000 boys in the age group of 0-6 years.

- The specific objectives of the scheme include preventing gender biased sex selective elimination; ensuring survival and protection of the girl child and ensuring education and participation of the girl child.

International day of the girl child: October 11:

- It is an international observance day declared by the United Nations; it is also called the Day of Girls and the International Day of the Girl.

- The observation supports more opportunity for girls and increases awareness of gender inequality faced by girls worldwide based upon their gender.

- This inequality includes areas such as access to education, nutrition, legal rights, medical care, and protection from discrimination, violence against women and forced child marriage.

eCOURTS SERVICES THROUGH COMMON SERVICE CENTRES

GS 2: Governance | Government policies & interventions for development in various sectors & issues arising out of their design & implementation

Why in News?

- To provide efficient and time-bound access to the Courts services to litigant public, who are on the other side of the digital divide and don't have access to internet, the Department of Justice has decided to deliver eCourts services to them through around 2 lakh Common Service Centres (CSCs).

Highlights:

- The rural reach of the CSC's is extensive, envisaging a minimum of one CSC in each Gram Panchayat, thus enabling eCourts services to reach all corners of the country.

- The collaboration between Department of Justice and Common Service Centers would thus mean that litigants can access easily, and readily case status information available on eCourts database from any CSC.

- To ensure affordability, Department of Justice has decided not to charge any fee from the customers for eCourts related services delivered through CSC's.

Significance of eCourts:

- The Government of India had initiated second phase of the eCourts project as one of the National e-Governance projects.

- Computerizing district and subordinate courts of the country through installation of case information software, hardware and local area network in courts.

- They are also being connected on Wide Area Network through a dedicated network offering bandwidth upto 100 Mbps.

- eCourts services have now been successfully rolled out through SMS, email, web, mobile app etc. benefiting millions of litigants and advocates.

Common Service Centres:

- Common Services Centre (CSC) programme is an initiative of the Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY), Government of India.

- CSCs are the access points for delivery of various electronic services to villages in India, thereby contributing to a digitally and financially inclusive society.

- They are positioned as change agents, promoting rural entrepreneurship and building rural capacities and livelihoods.

QUALITY OF MEDICAL EDUCATION RANKING

Why in news?

- The Union health ministry plans to grade and rank government-run medical colleges to improve the quality of medical education.

Highlights:

- Proposed mandatory grading of all government medical colleges and for private institutions grading will be done at a later stage. National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), which grades IIMs in a similar manner, had started ranking medical colleges on its own in 2018. Ranking of medical colleges will be done on the basis of choices of students during counselling.

Significance:

- With good ranking and grades, the medical colleges will compete for best facilities.

- Improve the quality of medical education.
- The move will help in establishing the reputation of medical colleges on an international level.

NIRF parameters:

- Teaching, learning and resources, research and professional practices, graduation outcomes, outreach and inclusivity, and perception.
- The significant sub-parameters are student strength, including doctoral students, faculty-student ratio, total budget and its utilization, research and professional practice,
- Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) and patents filed, published, granted and licensed, percentage of women, economically and socially challenged students, and facilities for physically challenged students.

Highest Civilian honour - Bharat Ratna 2019

GS 2: Governance

Why in News?

- The President, Ram Nath Kovind conferred the 2019 Bharat Ratna Award, country's highest civilian honour, on former president and Congress leader Pranab Mukherjee.

Highlights - awardees:

- The award was also conferred on RSS ideologue Nanaji Deshmukh and singer Bhupen Hazarika, both posthumously.
- **Congress leader Pranab Mukherjee**, who was the 13th President of India and served from 2012 until 2017, had served under Indira Gandhi. He was also the Finance Minister under the premiership of Manmohan Singh.
- **Nanaji Deshmukh**, who passed away in 2012 at the age of 94, was a member of the Lok Sabha from 1977 to 1979 representing the Balrampur in Uttar Pradesh. He also served as a nominated member of the Rajya Sabha from 1999 to 2005. His contribution towards rural development showed the way for a new paradigm of empowering those living in villages.
- **Bhupen Hazarika**, who died in 2011, was the legendary singer-composer from Assam. As put by PM Narendra Modi, "songs and music of Bhupen Hazarika are admired by people across generations. From them radiates the message of justice, harmony and brotherhood."

Bharat Ratna Award:

- Bharat Ratna is the highest civilian award of India that was instituted on January 2, 1954 by the order of Rajendra Prasad, the former President of India.

- Bharat Ratna recipients rank seventh in the Indian order of precedence, but constitution prohibits using the award name as title.

- The award is conferred in recognition of exceptional service or performance of the highest order, without distinction of race, occupation, position, or gender.

- The award was originally limited to achievements in the arts, literature, science and public services but the union government expanded the criteria to include any field of human endeavour in 2011.

- Recommendations for the Bharat Ratna are made by the Prime Minister to the President, with a maximum of three nominees being awarded per year.

- Recipients receive a certificate signed by the President and a peepal-leaf–shaped medallion and award does not contain any monetary grant.

- The award can also be bestowed posthumously, as per the provision inserted in January 1966.

- The former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri was the first individual to be honoured posthumously in 1966.

- The first recipients of the Bharat Ratna were C Rajagopalachari, scientist C V Raman and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan in 1954.

YUVA SWABHIMAN YOJANA

Prelims level: Yuva Swabhiman Yojana

Why in news?

- The Madhya Pradesh government has announced the launch of a scheme to ensure temporary employment to the youths from the economically weaker sections (EWS) in the urban areas.

Yuva Swabhiman Yojana:

- The Scheme would guarantee 100 days of employment every year to the EWS youths.

- During their employment, youths would be given skills training of their choice, so that they can take benefits of the available job opportunities.

- While those in rural areas get employment under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA), the urban poor youth are left out.
- This scheme will effectively cover them.

MINISTRY OF STATISTICS AND PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION SIGNS AN MOU WITH NATIONAL COUNCIL OF APPLIED ECONOMIC RESEARCH

GS 2: Governance | Government policies & interventions for development

Why in news?

- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Government of India and National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to use new data technologies, knowledge generation and knowledge sharing, and capacity building in the field of Official Statistics.

Significance:

- The MoU would lead to strengthening and better monitoring of data quality and timeliness of various statistical products and services generated by the Ministry including, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Economic Census, Price Statistics, Index of Industrial Production (IIP), and Annual Survey of Industries (ASI), etc.

Highlights of the MoU:

- Business Process Review ("BPR") of the existing official statistics system and development of an information and communication technology ("ICT") plan for mainstreaming data integration across various domains and agencies.
- Using technology for survey instruments and processing of data for large scale surveys and data analytics.
- Creation of a national data warehouse to integrate administrative statistical datasets available up to the local Government level.
- Leveraging administrative data to improve the quality and coverage of core statistics with technical support and collaboration with data producers.
- Setting up common standards and protocols for data collection, its quality, meta-data and use across line ministries and sub-national entities.

- Development of new ICT based framework for measurement of social and economic indicators in the emerging knowledge-based economy.

- Capacity building for statistical activities including big data analytics, technical reporting, etc.

ICAR LAUNCHES NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL HIGHER EDUCATION PROJECT (NAHEP)

GS 2: Governance | Government policies & interventions for development

Why in News?

- The ICAR has recently launched Rs 1100 crore ambitious National Agricultural Higher Education Project (NAHEP) to attract talent and strengthen higher agricultural education in the country.

Highligts:

- This project will be funded by the World Bank and the Indian Government on a 50:50 basis.

- The objective of the NAHEP for India is to support participating agricultural universities and ICAR in providing more relevant and higher quality education to Agricultural University students.

- In addition, a four year degree in Agriculture, Horticulture, Fisheries and Forestry has been declared a professional degree.

- In order to promote the participation of students in agricultural business, Student READY (Rural Entrepreneurship Awareness Development Yojana) scheme is being run.

- Under this, practical experience of agriculture and entrepreneurship is provided to undergraduate students.

INDIAN STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN PISA 2021

GS 2: Governance | Government policies & interventions for development

Why in News?

- The HRD Ministry has signed a pact with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) for the participation of students from Central government schools in PISA-2021.

- With the signing of the pact, Indian students aged 15 will be able to take the Programme for International Student Assessment or PISA, which is conducted every three years.

PISA 2021:

- It will be a competency-based test, which evaluates the learning level of 15YO students in reading, mathematics and science.

- The outcomes of the test will be used to do more teacher training programmes and curricular reforms.

- The questions in the test will be contextualized according to the Indian setting to help students understand them better.

- Schools run by Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS), Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti (NVS) and schools in the UTs of Chandigarh will participate.

- The CBSE and NCERT will be part of the process and activities leading to the actual test.

CENTRE RELAXES ENVIRONMENTAL CLEARANCE FOR SUGAR MILLS

GS 2: Governance | Government policies & interventions for development

Why in news?

- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) notified a special provision that relaxes norms for getting prior environmental clearance (EC) to sugar manufacturing and distillery projects.

Highlights:

- The Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) notification of 2006 makes it mandatory to get an EC for all new projects, their expansion and modernisation as well as change in product mix.

- The EC has to be acquired before beginning construction work or preparation of land by the project management, except for securing the land.

- The latest notification allows all sugar manufacturing and distillery expansion projects to be treated as B2 category under the EIA notification 2006.

- The new provision applies to all expansion projects of sugar manufacturing or distilleries, having environmental clearances for their present industrial operations and intend to produce ethanol for blending with petrol under the Ethanol Blended with Petrol (EBP) programme.

EBP programme:

- Ethanol Blended with Petrol (EBP) programme was launched by the government in 2003 to promote the use of alternative and environmental friendly fuels.

- This intervention also seeks to reduce import dependency for energy requirements, and give boost to the agriculture sector.

The Environment Impact Assessment:

- It is the assessment of the environmental consequences (positive and negative) of a plan, policy, program, or actual projects prior to the decision to move forward with the proposed action.

- The purpose of the assessment is to ensure that decision makers consider the environmental impacts when deciding whether or not to proceed with a project.

- The EIA notification has three categories; A, B1 and B2.

- The projects under category A require EC from MoEF&CC.

- Category B1 projects get the EC from the state/union territory Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA).

- Category B2 get EC from the SEIAA, the requirements for getting clearance for such projects is easier than category A or B1 projects.

3. SCIENE & TECHNOLOGY
SETTING UP OF SPACE TECHNOLOGY PARK AND MUSEUMS

GS 3: Science & Technology | Developments and their applications and effects in everyday life

Why in News?

- The ISRO (Department of Space) has planned to set up Space Galleries in various parts of the country.

Highlights:

- The Space Galleries are expected to disseminate the knowledge about space science and technology amongst the citizens of our country.

- The Gallery will consist of interactive methods/ models describing the principles of Space science and technology.

- Space Galleries are planned to be established at Birla Science Centre at Hyderabad, Nehru Science Centre at Mumbai and National Science Centre at Pragati Maidan in New Delhi.

- ISRO has taken initiatives to establish space gallery in all the national museums/science centres (under Ministry of Culture) across the country in a phased manner.

- ISRO is also planning to establish Knowledge centres, mobile exhibitions, competitions amongst students and various talks/ lectures on Space Science/ technology related aspects.

ULTIMA THULE: FARTHEST OBJECT EVER VISITED

GS 3: Science & Technology | Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology

Prelims level: New Horizon Probe, Kupier Belt, Ultima Thule

Why in news?

- Recently NASA's New Horizons spacecraft carried out a historic flyby of a distant object called Ultima Thule followed by beaming back of the first images.

- It is the most distant object ever visited, which is one of the reasons that make the mission special.

Ultima Thule:

- Officially named (486958) 2014 MU69, it earned the nickname Ultima Thule following a public contest in 2018.

- It is located in the Kuiper Belt, a disc in the outer Solar System (beyond Neptune) that consists of small bodies including Pluto.

- 2014 MU69 was discovered in June 2014 by astronomers using the Hubble Space Telescope but is so distant that many of its characteristics remain to be understood.

Peculiarity of the object:

- Located about 6.5 billion kilometres from Earth, 2014 MU69 is believed to be a peanut-shaped space rock about 32 km long and 16 km wide.

- Its shape has given rise to the theory that it might actually be two rocks moving in tandem. It orbits the Sun once every 298 years. In March 2018, NASA invited suggestions for a nickname for 2014 MU69. Out of 34,000 submissions, NASA chose Ultima Thule, which means "beyond the borders of the known world".

- In July 2018, scientists calculated that they would be able to see the object's shadow from the southern tip of Argentina.

The mission:

- New Horizons, a space probe that was launched in 2006, became the first mission to visit Pluto in 2015.

- Travelling farther into the Kuiper Belt, the nuclear-powered space probe has come within 3,500 km of Ultima Thule.

- Images taken revealed that the object may have a shape similar to a bowling pin, or a "snowman", or a peanut spinning end over end, or could be two objects orbiting each other.

- Flyby data showed that Ultima Thule is spinning like a propeller with the axis pointing approximately toward New Horizons.

- NASA released a composite of two images taken by New Horizons' high-resolution Long-Range Reconnaissance Imager.

Importance of the Probe:

- The mission will look for more exact details of the object's size, shape, orbit and environment.

- The probe is important because it holds remnants from the birth of the Solar System.

- Many Kuiper Belt objects have remained unchanged for billions of years, and could provide clues to the history of the Solar System, and possibly the conditions that led to the evolution of a habitable world like Earth.

Kuiper Belt:

- Kuiper belt is a region of the solar system beyond the planets, extending from the orbit of Neptune. It consist mainly small bodies or remnants from the solar system's formation.

- It is similar to the asteroid belt, although it is far larger 20 times as wide and 200 times as massive.

- The Kuiper belt objects (KBO) are composed largely of frozen volatiles (termed 'ices'), such as methane, ammonia and water.

- Kuiper belt is home to at least three dwarf planets Pluto, Haumea and Makemake.

- Pluto, discovered in 1930, is considered its largest member.

DD SCIENCE AND INDIA SCIENCE.

GS 3: Science & Technology | Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology

Why in News?

- The Department of Science and Technology (DST) along with Doordarshan (DD), Prasar Bharati today launched two science communication initiatives, DD Science and India Science.

Highlights:

- DD Science is a one-hour slot on Doordarshan National channel, which will be telecast Monday to Saturday from 5 pm to 6 pm, India Science is an Internet-based channel, which is available on any internet-enabled device, and will offer live, scheduled play and video-on-demand services. The two channels will have science-based documentaries, studio-based discussions, and virtual walkthroughs of scientific institutions, interviews and short films and will be completely free to access. The two science communication platforms are National level initiatives to elevate science into a celebration and bring it close to everyday life. It also helps in developing the scientific temper of our society.

- DST and DD aim to make them jewels in the crown of the country for serving humanity for the furtherance of science.

UNNATI– UNISPACE NANOSATELLITE ASSEMBLY & TRAINING PROGRAMME

GS 3: Science & Technology | Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology

Why in News?

- Union Minister of State for Atomic Energy and Space inaugurated the UNNATI- (Unispace Nanosatellite Assembly & Training) programme organized by ISRO in Bengaluru.

UNNATI programme:

- UNNATI, a capacity building programme on Nanosatellite development, is an initiative by ISRO to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the first United Nations conference on the exploration and peaceful uses of outer space (UNISPACE-50).

THE HINDU
PIB COMPILATION
JANUARY - 2019

Vetrii IAS Study Circle
The Best Academy for IAS & TNPSC Exams

IAS GATEWAYY | AN INITIATIVE BY VETRII IAS

- The programme provides opportunities to the participating developing countries to strengthen in assembling, integrating and testing of Nanosatellite. UNNATI programme is planned to be conducted for 3 years by U.R. Rao Satellite Centre of ISRO in 3 batches and will target to benefit officials of 45 countries. U.R. Rao Satellite Centre (URSC), Bengaluru is the lead centre of ISRO for design, development and integration of satellites for communication, remote sensing, navigation and scientific studies

Objectives:

- The primary objectives of the programme are:
- To offer a simplified and increased exposure to satellite fabrication technologies, as part of the UNISPACE initiative. To provide theoretical course on satellite technology.
- To provide intensive course on nano satellite realisation, covering mission aspects, design, fabrication, assembly, integration & testing.
- To provide hands-on training to assemble, integrate and test a low cost, modular nano satellite.

UNOOSA:

- UNOOSA (United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs) works to promote international cooperation in the peaceful uses and exploration of space.
- It also promotes the utilisation of space science and technology for sustainable economic and social development.
- The Office assists any United Nations Member State to establish legal and regulatory frameworks to govern space activities.

IIT-HYDERABAD TO LAUNCH FULL-FLEDGED BACHELOR'S PROGRAMME IN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

GS 3: Science & Technology | Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology

Why in News?

- The Indian Institute of Technology-Hyderabad (IIT-H) has announced the launch of a full-fledged bachelor's programme in Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology from the new academic session, which is a first for the country and only the third globally.

![Vetrii IAS Study Circle logo]

IAS GATEWAYY — AN INITIATIVE BY VETRII IAS

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PIB COMPILATION
JANUARY - 2019

Highlights:

- The Institute was already offering a Masters in Technology programme in AI-Machine Learning (ML). Besides IIT- Hyderabad, only Carnegie Mellon University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), both of which are in the US, offer full-fledged B.Tech programmes in AI.

- The new course will have 20 seats and the eligibility will include clearing the JEE-Advanced test.

- The AI solutions are particularly promising for India, given the availability of a large corpus of data, where it can have a major positive impact on several critical domains such as healthcare, crop and soil management, weather prediction, surveillance and security, and defence.

- However, the demand for professionals trained in this area exceeds the current supply.

- Hence, the B.Tech programme in AI is a step in the direction of addressing this highly skewed demand-supply scenario.

- The course will focus on application verticals such as healthcare, agriculture, smart mobility, among many others.

- The students pursuing other degrees such as B.Tech in Chemical Engineering or Mechanical Engineering will be able to do a minor in AI as well from the coming academic year.

IAFTX- 2019

GS 2: IR | Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

Why in News?

- The joint exercise named 'India-Africa Field Training' is being conducted with an aim to synergise United Nations peacekeeping operations.

IAFTX 2019:

- Nigeria, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Senegal, Sudan, Tanzania, Zambia, Namibia, Mozambique and Uganda will be participating in the joint military exercise. It scheduled to be conducted at Aundh Military Station and College of Military Engineering, Pune from

18 March to 27 March 2019. The joint training exercise is being conducted with more than a dozen African countries & India.

- The IAFTX-2019 is a positive step towards growing political and military ties with the member nations of African continent.

- It aims at synergizing humanitarian mine action and joint peace operations.

- It will boost the already strong strategic cooperation between the countries.

ISRO's PSLV C- 44 LAUNCH

GS 3: Science & Technology | Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, Nano-technology, Bio-technology

Why in News?

- Isro's PSLV-C44 lifted off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre on Thursday (January 24), carrying India's military satellite Microsat-R and students' payload Kalamsat.

Details of launch:

- The national space agency's rocket, PSLV C44 carried the satellites into the orbit.

- After about 14 minutes into the flight, the rocket ejected the 700-kg Microsat R satellite at an altitude of about 277 km.

- With this launch, India became the first country to use the fourth stage of a space rocket as an orbital platform for micro-gravity experiments.

Kalamsat Satellite:

- The Kalamsat is a 10 cm cube nanosatellite weighing about 1.2 kg and has a life span of about two months.

- Kalamsat, prepared by a student and Chennai-based Space Kidz India, is a small satellite (10 x 10 x 10 cm) and is meant for HAM radio services.

- It has been developed by Space Kidz India and their team including Rifath Sharook, Srimathy Kesan, among others.

- The Kalamsat satellite was the first to use fourth stage (PS4) of the launch vehicle PSLV-C44 as an orbital platform. The fourth stage moved to higher circular orbit so as to establish an orbital platform for carrying out experiments.

PSLV-C44 rocket:

- The PSLV is a four-stage engine expendable rocket with alternating solid and liquid fuel.

- One of the specialties of the launch was the configuration of the rocket. ISRO used the aluminium tank for the first time in the fourth stage of the launch of PSLV C 44.

- In its normal configuration, the rocket would have six strap-on motors hugging the its first stage. However, for the launch of Kalamsat and Microsat-R satellites, the rocket carried only two strap-on motors by the sides of the first fuel stage at the bottom.

- This was the first time the launch vehicle is built in this configuration known as PSLV-DL.

- This will reduce the weight and increase the mass in the four-stage engine expendable rocket with alternating solid and liquid fuel.

- After parking the satellites in the intended orbits, the fourth stage of the rocket will be taken to a circular orbit in space for carrying out certain experiments by the scientists.

- Normally, the fourth stage is kept deserted in space after the injection of the satellites. This time, it will be kept 'live' for carrying out innovative studies.

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Prelims & Mains level: National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence Report and particulars

Why in news?

- NITI Aayog published the National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence.

Key findings of the report:

- Opportunities and economic impact of Artificial Intelligence for India

- India specific key challenges and focus areas of AI implementation

- Different initiatives identified for AI implementation in India and the role of different parties and the role of our government to make those successful.

Challenges:

- Shortage of expertise

- Absence of data ecosystem

- Privacy & security issues

- Lack of awareness

- Absence of any collaboration

Focus areas:

- Healthcare-Application of AI in Healthcare can help address issues of high barriers of access to healthcare facilities.

- Agriculture-Artificial Intelligence will have significant global impact on agricultural productivity at all levels of the value chain.

- Education-AI tools can be used to overcome the difficulties and challenges faced by Indian Education system. Smart Cities and Infrastructure: AI helps in improving public safety and eliminate most of the issues with Smart City and Intelligent City concepts.

- Smart Mobility and Transportation-AI aided smart technologies like Assisted Vehicle, Greenfield Infrastructure, Autonomous Trucking, Intelligent Transportation Systems, Travel Route & Flow Optimization and Community Based Parking can be used to address many of the challenging areas faced by cities.

Way forward:

- To encourage the development of sustainable AI solutions at an appropriate price.

- Facilitating creation of large foundational annotated data sets which will enable and accelerate development of AI solutions by start-ups. Partnership and collaborative approach involving various stakeholders and the government. Spreading awareness of the advantages of AI offers. Regulatory measures for ethics, Privacy and Security related concerns.

SOUTH ASIAN NITROGEN HUB" RESEARCH PROJECT

GS 3: Science & Technology

Why in news?

- The British Government has announced a research project- South Asian Nitrogen Hub to study nitrogen pollution in India and South Asia.

Highlights:

- The project led by UK's Centre for Ecology and Hydrology will partner with 50 organisations from the UK and South Asia.

- The project aims to study the impact of different forms of nitrogen pollution, particularly looking at nitrogen in agriculture in eight countries of South Asia which includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Maldives.

Nitrogen Pollution:

- Pollutant Gases like ammonia (NH_3) and nitrogen dioxide (NO_2) are produced from chemical fertilizers, livestock manure, and burning fossil fuels and is connected to air

pollution, biodiversity loss, the pollution of rivers and seas, ozone depletion, health, economy and livelihoods. Gases like Ammonia and nitrogen dioxide can aggravate respiratory and heart conditions.

- Nitrous oxide is a greenhouse gas that depletes the ozone layer. Nitrate from chemical fertilisers, manure and industry pollutes rivers and seas, poses a health risk for humans, fish, coral and plant life.

Indian Institutions partnering for the study are:

- National Institute of Oceanography
- Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University
- Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology
- Jawaharlal Nehru University
- Aligarh Muslim University
- National Physical Laboratory
- TERI University

4. INTERNAL SECURITY
DEFENCE INDIA STARTUP CHALLENGE

GS 2: Internal Security

Why in news?

- An innovation ecosystem for Defence titled Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) was launched in April 2018. iDEX is aimed at creation of an ecosystem to foster innovation and technology development in Defence and Aerospace by engaging Industries including MSMEs, Startups, Individual Innovators, R&D institutes and Academia and provide them grants/funding and other support to carry out R&D which has good potential for future adoption for Indian defence and aerospace needs.

Defence India Start Up Challenge:

- Taking the iDEX initiative further, Defence India Startup Challenge "has been launched by Ministry of defence in partnership with Atal Innovation Mission, aimed at supporting Startups/MSMEs/Innovators to create prototypes and/or commercialize products/solutions in the area of National Defence and Security.

- The vision of the Challenge is two-fold:
  - ✓ Help create functional prototypes of products/technologies relevant for national security (prototyping), and spur fast-moving innovation in the India defence sector;
  - ✓ Help new tech products/technologies find a market and early customer (commercialization) in the form of the Indian Defence Establishment.

Who can Apply:

- Start-ups, as defined and recognized by Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP), Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India.
- Any Indian Company incorporated under the Companies Act 1956/2013, primarily a Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) as defined in the MSME Act, 2006.
- Individual innovators are also encouraged to apply (research & academic institutions can use this category to apply).

INS KOHASSA

GS 2: Internal Security

Why in News?

- Naval Air Station (NAS) Shibpur will be commissioned as INS Kohassa by Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Sunil Lanba on January 24, 2019. The move is being undertaken to enhance the operational capability of Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC). NAS Shibpur was established in 2010.
- The NAS Shibpur was set up as a Forward Operating Air Base (FOAB) for surveillance in North Andaman. Located in the northern-most part of the islands, the airfield holds strategic importance not only for the security of the islands but also for its overall development.

INS Kohassa:

- INS Kohassa has been named after a White-Bellied Sea Eagle, which is a large bird of prey endemic to Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- By commissioning NAS Shibpur as INS Kohassa, the ANC's ability to operate independently from all the regions of Andaman and Nicobar Islands will get a great boost.
- Post commissioning, the station will function as a base for joint operation of both military and civil aircraft in keeping with the UDAN scheme of the government.

- INS Kohassa will become the third Naval Air Base in the Andaman and Nicobar islands after INS Utkrosh at Port Blair and INS Baaz at Campbell Bay.

- As part of the Phase II expansion plan, the runway length would subsequently be extended to 3000 metre. This would enable the operation of wide-bodied civil and defence aircraft in the future.

- Naval Air Station (NAS) Shibpur was established in 2001 as a Forward Operating Air Base (FOAB) for enhanced surveillance in North Andaman.

- In 2009, the government of India accorded sanction to commission NAS Shibpur as a full-fledged air station.

- The length of the runway was extended to 12,000 ft, enabling both day and night operations.

- Dornier Do 228s of the navy and coast guard conducted the search for Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 from this base.

- In 2017, it was reported that the runway length would be extended to 3000m after the acquisition of about 100 hectares of land. This enabled the operation of wide-bodied civil and defense flights.

USE OF SPACE TECHNOLOGY REPORT IN BORDER MANAGEMENT

GS 2: Internal Security

Why in news?

- Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh has approved the report of a task force created by MHA to identify areas for use of space technology in improving Border Management.

Objective:

- The key aim is to strengthen island and border security and facilitate the development of infrastructure in border and island areas.

- The report has identified the following areas for the use of space technology:
  - ✓ Island development
  - ✓ Border Security
  - ✓ Communication and Navigation
  - ✓ GIS and Operations Planning System
  - ✓ Border Infrastructure Development

Highlights:

- Headed by Joint Secretary (Border Management) and comprising members from BSF, Department of Space and BM Division, MHA, the task force consulted all stakeholders including Border Guarding Forces (BGFs), ISRO, National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) and Ministry of Defence (MoD) to finalise the report.

- The major recommendations of the report include building capacity in BGFs to use space resources for security, operational planning and border infrastructure development.

- To execute the project in a time bound manner, the report has proposed a short, medium and long term plan for implementation in five years in close coordination with ISRO and MoD.

- In short term, the report proposes to meet the immediate needs of BGFs through procurement of high-resolution imagery and the hiring of bandwidth for communications.

- In the midterm, one satellite will be launched by ISRO for the exclusive use of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

- Over the long term, the Home Ministry will develop ground segment and network infrastructure to share satellite resources by user agencies, develop a Central Archival Facility for storing various imagery resources and dissemination of the same to user agencies.

- The deployment of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) in remote areas will be also coordinated by satellite communications.

- Besides, the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) -based GPS will provide navigation facilities for operational parties in high altitude, remote and difficult borders and naxal areas.

DIFFO BRIDGE

GS 2: Internal Security

Why in News?

- The Union Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman inaugurated the 426.60 m long 'Pre Stressed Concrete Box Girder' type Diffo Bridge over Diffo river on Roing-Koronu-Paya road in Arunachal Pradesh. The construction of the bridge was undertaken by the Project Udayak of the Border Roads Organisation (BRO).

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Significance of the Diffo Bridge:

- The Diffo Bridge will provide for uninterrupted access between Dibang Valley and Lohit valley region of Eastern Arunachal Pradesh together with providing an all-weather road to our troops deployed on the China border.

Project Udayank:

- Project Udayank of the Border Roads Organisation was raised on June 1990 at Doomdooma Assam.

- The name of the project Udayank is synonymous to the land of rising sun which fits appropriately to the area it operates.

- It consists of two border road taskforces undertaking construction activities in the North Eastern region.

Border Roads Organisation (BRO):

- Border Roads Organisation (BRO) develops and maintains road networks in India's border areas and friendly neighbouring countries. Border Road Organisation has also undertaken the infrastructure development activities in neighbouring countries such as Afghanistan, Bhutan, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka. The Border Roads Organisation works under the Ministry of Defence. Develop & Maintain the operational road infrastructure of General Staff (GS) in the border areas. Contribute to the socio-economic development of the border states. Developing & Maintaining roads to keep line of control through in Original Sectors and Re-deployed Sectors.

- Executing additional tasks as laid down by the government contributing to the war effort.

ARMOURED SYSTEMS COMPLEX (ASC)

GS 3: Internal Security

Why in news?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Armoured Systems Complex (ASC), developed by Larsen & Toubro (L&T) at Hazira near Surat in Gujarat.

Armoured Systems Complex (ASC):

- This Armoured Systems Complex (ASC) is the country's first private facility where the K9 Vajra self-propelled Howitzer guns will be manufactured. The Armoured Systems Complex (ASC) at Hazaria is a striking example of Make in India Defence.

- The L&T is executing the production of the K9 Vajra self-propelled Howitzer guns and has signed a transfer of technology contract for guns with South Korean company Hanwha Corporation.
- Also, around 400 SMEs are involved in developing 13,000 parts and steps are being taken to make a totally indigenous battle tank without having to depend on external help.
- The Army now doesn't have to depend on foreign nations for spare parts during its 40-year life cycle.
- The Army's life cycle cost will be drastically reduced.

K9 Vajra self-propelled Howitzer gun:

- The gun weighs 50 tonnes and can fire 47kg bombs at a 43-kilometre distance target.
- It can turn around at zero radii. K9 Vajra is a variant of K9 specially designed for operation in the desert areas bordering Pakistan.

SEA VIGIL

GS 2: Internal Security

Why in news?

- The first coastal defence Exercise Sea Vigil, conducted by the Navy and Coast Guard, in close coordination with State Governments and Union Territories concluded.

Higlights:

- It was the largest such exercise the country had ever witnessed in recent times and saw participation by more than 100 ships, aircraft and patrol boats manned and operated by various security agencies.
- Sea Vigil conducted by Indian Navy and assisted by all stakeholders will facilitate in establishing shortfalls, working out new ways to optimise resources, recommend solutions to higher authorities and refine Standard Operating Procedures.
- With active support from all stakeholders, such exercises further strengthen the overall security architecture and enhance confidence to thwart any misadventure by anti-national elements.

5. GEOGRAPHY/ENVIRONMENT
GREEN – AG PROJECT

GS 3: Agriculture

Why in news?

- The government has launched a Global Environment Facility (GEF) assisted project namely, "Green – Ag: Transforming Indian Agriculture for global environment benefits and the conservation of critical biodiversity and forest landscapes" in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in high-conservation-value landscapes.

Highlights:

- The project seeks to mainstream biodiversity, climate change and sustainable land management objectives and practices into Indian agriculture.

- The overall objective of the project is to catalyze transformative change of India's agricultural sector to support achievement of national and global environmental benefits and conservation of critical biodiversity and forest landscapes.

- The project will support harmonization between India's agricultural and environmental sector priorities and investments so that the achievement of national and global environmental benefits can be fully realized without compromising India's ability to strengthen rural livelihoods and meet its food and nutrition security.

- The project is to be implemented in high-conservation-value landscapes of five States namely
    - ✓ Madhya Pradesh : Chambal Landscape,
    - ✓ Mizoram: Dampa Landscape,
    - ✓ Odisha: Similipal Landscape,
    - ✓ Rajasthan: Desert National Park Landscape
    - ✓ Uttarakhand: Corbett-Rajaji Landscape.

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SHIFT TO TOBACCO FARMING

GS 3: Agriculture

Mains level: Initiatives to shift to alternative crops/cropping system in tobacco growing

Why in News?

- The Department of Agriculture, Cooperation & Farmers Welfare (DAC&FW) had made budgetary allocations from 2015-16 onwards as Central share under Crop Diversification Programme (CDP), an ongoing sub-scheme of Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) to encourage tobacco growing farmers to shift to alternative crops/cropping system in tobacco growing states.

Crop Diversification Programme:

- Under CDP, tobacco growing States have given flexibility to take suitable activities/interventions for replacing the tobacco to alternative crops/cropping system as per the cost norms approved under any Centrally Sponsored Scheme/State Scheme.

- The States may also organize study tours/ exposure visits and campaigns etc. for highlighting harmful effects of tobacco and long term benefits of alternative crops under CDP.

- In order to encourage tobacco growing farmers to shift to other crops, a National Seminar on Crop Diversification sponsored by DAC&FW was organized by the ICAR-Central Tobacco Research Institute (CTRI) at Rajahmundry to exchange information and experiences of various stakeholders on various issues relating to tobacco diversification.

- The research work carried out by ICAR- CTRI, Rajahmundry revealed that a remunerative cropping system rather than a sole crop can be a viable alternative to sole tobacco crop.

- Alternative crops/cropping systems like maize, wheat, ragi, cotton, soybean, mustard, castor, groundnut, black gram, red gram, green gram, chilly, chickpea, potato, ginger, sugarcane, turmeric, moringa, oil palm etc. have been identified for the tobacco growing areas in different states.

PARIVESH - PORTAL FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CLEARANCE

GS 3: Environment | Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Prelims level: PARIVESH portal Particulars

Why in news?

- An ambitious web-based single-window system 'Parivesh' will be rolled-out at state levels by January 15, bringing an end to the clearance nightmare for entrepreneurs.

- This automated clearance has already been implemented at the Central level, while various States starting from Gujarat will begin to implement the scheme by January 15.

PARIVESH Portal:

- It is a Single-Window Integrated Environmental Management System which stands for Pro-Active and Responsive facilitation by Interactive, Virtuous and Environmental Single-window H

- It is a workflow based application and portal, based on the concept of web architecture.

- The system has been designed, developed and hosted by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, with technical support from National Informatics Centre, (NIC).

- It automates the entire process of submitting the application and tracking the status of such proposals at each stage of processing.

Utility of the portal:

- It facilitates for online submission, monitoring and management of proposals submitted by Project Proponents to the MOEFCC, as well as to the State Level Environmental Impact Assessment Authorities (SEIAA).

- It will also help seek various types of clearances (e.g. Environment, Forest, Wildlife and Coastal Regulation Zone Clearances) from Central, State and district-level authorities.

Key highlights of PARIVESH:

- Single registration and single sign-in for all types of clearances (i.e. Environment, Forest, Wildlife and CRZ),

- Unique-ID for all types of clearances required for a particular project and

- Single Window interface for the proponent to submit applications for getting all types of clearances (i.e. Environment, Forests, Wildlife and CRZ clearances)

- The facility of Geographic Information System (GIS) interface will help them in analyzing the proposal efficiently, automatic alerts (via SMS and emails) at important stages to the concerned officers, committee members and higher authorities to check the delays if any.

CLIMATE CHANGE PERFORMANCE INDEX (CCPI) 2019

GS 3: Environment | Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Prelims Level: CCPI 2019

Why in News?

- The Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) 2019 recently released shows that only few countries have started working towards limiting global warming below 2°C or even at 1.5°C.

CCPI:

- The Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) is an annual publication by Germanwatch, NewClimate Institute and Climate Action Network Europe.

- Its aim is to put political and social pressure on those countries that have, until now, failed to take ambitious action on climate protection, and to highlight those countries with best practice climate policies.

- It evaluates the climate protection performance of 60 countries, responsible for over 90% of global energy-related CO_2 emissions.

India's Performance:

- India ranks 11th in this year's CCPI, improving its standing by three places compared to the previous edition.

- Most notably India improved its performance in the Renewable Energy category, joining the group of medium

- However, national experts argue that plans to build new coal-fired power plants may pose a risk of offsetting positive developments in the renewable energy sector.

- Comparatively low levels of per capita GHG emissions and a relatively ambitious mitigation target for 2030 give India an overall high rating in the emissions category.

Global Performance:

- Morocco has been named the second best performing country after Sweden in the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI).

- With the connection of the world's largest solar plant to the grid, Morocco is on track for achieving its target of 42% installed renewable energy capacities by 2020.

- Sweden is in top position, followed by Morocco and Lithuania in the CCPI 2019.

- The bottoms five in the list are Saudi Arabia, U.S., Iran, South Korea and Taiwan.

NATIONAL WORKSHOP ON AGRI EXPORT POLICY

GS 3: Agriculture

Why in news?

- Minister of State for Commerce & Industry hosted a workshop on new agri export policy.

- This is the first time that an agri export policy has been formulated and it is comprehensive involving all related sectors like R&D, clusters, logistics and transportation. Workshops like these will help to identify bottlenecks, get feedback and suggestions to improve and overcome difficulties in the implementation of the policy.

Aim:

- To harness the export potential of Indian agriculture, through suitable policy instruments and make India a global power in agriculture and double farmers income by 2022.

Objectives:

- To double agricultural exports from present USD 30 billion to USD 60 billion by 2022 and reach USD 100 billion in the next few years.

- To diversify export basket, destinations and boost high value and value-added agricultural exports including a focus on perishables,

- To promote novel, indigenous, organic, ethnic and non-traditional agri products, institutional mechanism for pursuing market access, tackling barriers/SPS,

- To strive to double India's share in world agri exports by integrating with GVC and enable farmers to get the benefit of export opportunities in overseas markets.

NATIONAL CLEAN AIR PROGRAMME (NCAP)

GS 3: Environment | Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Prelims level: National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) & Particulars

Why in news?

- Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, launched a time-bound national level strategy for pan India implementation to tackle the increasing air pollution problem across the country in a comprehensive manner in the form of National Clean Air Programme (NCAP).

Objective:

- "Overall objective of the NCAP is comprehensive mitigation actions for prevention, control and abatement of air pollution besides augmenting the air quality monitoring network across the country and strengthening the awareness and capacity building activities."

Highlights:

- Today cities occupy just 3% of the land, but contribute to 82% of GDP and responsible for 78% of Carbon dioxide emissions; cities though are engines of growth and equity but they have to be sustainable and it is in this context that NCAP being a very inclusive program holds special relevance.

- The tentative national level target of 20%–30% reduction of PM2.5 and PM10 concentration by 2024 is proposed under the NCAP taking 2017 as the base year for the comparison of concentration.

- City specific action plans are being formulated for 102 non-attainment cities identified for implementing mitigation actions under NCAP. In addition, sectoral working groups, national level Project Monitoring Unit, Project Implementation Unit, state level project monitoring unit, city level review committee under the Municipal Commissioner and DM level Committee in the Districts are to be constituted under NCAP for effective implementation and success of the Programme. Collaborative and participatory approach involving relevant Central Ministries, State Governments, local bodies and other Stakeholders with focus on all sources of pollution forms the crux of the Programme.

INDUS FOOD 2019

GS 3: Agriculture | Food processing & related industries in India- scope & significance, location, upstream & downstream requirements, supply chain management

Prelims level: Indus Food

Why in news?

- INDUS FOOD-II with the theme of 'World Food Supermarket' will be held on 14th and 15th January, 2019, at India Expo Mart, Greater Noida.

INDUS FOOD:

- INDUS FOOD is a platform of its kind exclusively devoted to enhancing Indian exports in F&B sector. It enables B2B engagements of buyers and suppliers, after careful business matchmaking, which takes care of precise business requirements of each participant, and enables him to pick and choose whom to meet. The event is aimed at promoting India as a strong and reliable exporter of food and beverage products to the world.

Indus Food 2019:

- INDUS FOOD 2019 will promote value addition to India's agriculture exports and integrate Indian farmers and agricultural products with global value chains.

- After the success of the first edition of INDUS FOOD in 2018, Trade Promotion Council of India (TPCI) has scaled up the Reverse Buyers-Sellers Meet (RBSM) with the financial assistance under Market Access Initiative (MAI) scheme of Department of Commerce.

- With more than 700 buyers from 70 countries visiting INDUS FOOD-II and more than 500 food suppliers, the event will lead to greater interaction of Indian exporters with global customers.

- It will bring business opportunities to the doorstep of Indian producers and manufacturers and help small exporters, who cannot afford participation in overseas fairs, to have a direct interface with foreign buyers who visit India for this show.

- The event is divided into 15 product display zones viz. sweets & confectionary, dairy, dry fruits, fruits & vegetables, Indian ethnic food & snacks, meat poultry & seafood, non-alcoholic beverages, oil & oil seeds, organic & health food, pulses grain and sugar, spices, tea & coffee, wine & alcoholic beverages, consumer food, and ingredients and fragrances & extracts.

SHIFTING NORTH MAGNETIC POLE

GS1: Geography | Changes in critical geographical features

Prelims level: World Magnetic Model

Why in news?

- Rapid shifts in the Earth's north magnetic pole are forcing researchers to make an early update to a model that helps navigation by ships, planes and submarines in the Arctic.

Shifting Magnetic North Pole:

- Magnetic North Pole wanders, and every few hundred thousand years, the polarity flips so that a compass would point south instead of north.

- Liquid churning in Earth's core generates most of the magnetic field, which varies over time as the deep flows change.

- However, the magnetic field has been changing so quickly and erratically that while conducting a routine check in early 2018, British and US researchers realized drastic steps were needed.

- The shift they observed was so large it was on the verge of exceeding the acceptable limit for navigation errors.

- Scientists must periodically update the World Magnetic Model to map this process, and the most recent version – produced in 2015 – was intended to last until 2020.

Tracking the movement:

- The wandering pole is driven by unpredictable changes in liquid iron deep inside the Earth.

- It's moving at about 50 km (30 miles) a year.

- It didn't move much between 1900 and 1980 but it's really accelerated in the past 40 years.

- On the contrary, the South magnetic pole drift is very slow (less than 10 km per year).

- It has not changed much over the past few decades, and hence provided a much smaller contribution to the overall model declination error.

What causes the Drift?

- The Earth's magnetic field is in a permanent state of change.

- Magnetic north drifts around and every few hundred thousand years the polarity flips so a compass would point south instead of north.

- The strength of the magnetic field also constantly changes and currently it is showing signs of significant weakening.

Effect on Life:

- Life has existed on the Earth for billions of years, during which there have been many reversals.

- There is no obvious correlation between animal extinctions and those reversals. Likewise, reversal patterns do not have any correlation with human development and evolution.

- It appears that some animals, such as whales and some birds use Earth's magnetic field for migration and direction finding.

- Since geomagnetic reversal takes a number of thousands of years, they could well adapt to the changing magnetic environment or develop different methods of navigation.

Effect on Climate:

- Earth's magnetic field, which has existed for at least 3.45 billion years, provides a shield from the direct impact of solar radiation. Even with Earth's strong magnetic field today, we're still susceptible to solar storms that can damage our electricity-based society.

- The fluctuations in the number of cosmic rays hitting the atmosphere directly alter the amount of cloud covering the planet.

World Magnetic Model:

- The World Magnetic Model (WMM) is a large spatial-scale representation of the Earth's magnetic field. It consists of a degree and order 12 spherical harmonic expansion of the magnetic potential of the geomagnetic main field generated in the Earth's core.

- The charts are used to convert between compass measurements of magnetic north and true north. It can be found in the navigation systems of ships and airplanes as well as geological applications (such as drilling and mining).

- Researchers from the U.S.'s National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) maintain the WMM.

- The charts, known as the World Magnetic Model (WMM), are used to convert between compass measurements of magnetic north and true north

- The WMM is also part of map applications in smartphones, including the Google Maps App.

CONFERENCE ON MICRO IRRIGATION

GS 3: Agriculture

Why in news?

- Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, Government of India is organizing the 9th International Micro Irrigation Conference on Modern Agriculture at Aurangabad in Maharashtra in association with International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID), Indian National Committee on Surface Water (INCSW) and WAPCOS Limited. The government of Fiji will be the Special Invitees.

Highlights:

- The event will be a multi-disciplinary dialogue in the form of a conference discussing issues related to micro irrigation for modern agriculture and various related issues like new techniques in micro irrigation for increased crop productivity, micro irrigation in cluster level farming etc. A large group of eminent international and national experts and local farmers will be sharing their experiences in the fields of latest developments in micro irrigation technology to enhance crop production and water management for optimal use in agriculture, technical and sociological interventions for sustainable water, food & agriculture. The Conference will provide a forum for discussions and deliberation through seminars, exhibitions and sessions and will serve to build awareness regarding large-scale use of micro irrigation, strategies for water conservation, advanced crop technology, engineering techniques, etc.

CENSUS OF ESTUARINE CROCODILES

GS 3: Environment | Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Why in news?

- The number of crocodiles rose to 1742 from last year's census of 1698 in the Bhitarkanika National Park in Odisha's Kendrapara district.

Census of Estuarine Crocodiles:

- The latest census figure of these reptiles, which was released by forest department, has come out with an encouraging trend of rise in the number of estuarine crocodiles. The census of estuarine or saltwater crocodiles was carried out along the water-bodies of

Mahanadi deltaic region in and around the Bhitarkanika National Park between Thursday and Monday.

- The enumerators sighted 619 hatchlings, 347 yearlings, 273 juveniles, 178 sub-adults and 325 adults, according to the census report.

- The giants included a 21 feet long croc which finds a pride of place in the Guinness Book of Records as the world's largest living crocodile, he said.

- Four decades ago when the Govt. of India and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) had thought of saving crocodiles in Bhitarkanika area.

- The population was then estimated to be 95, including 34 adult but now, it stands to 1742.

- Since 1977, salt-water crocodile eggs have also been collected locally, and young crocodiles have been released in the creeks and the estuaries.

Estuarine crocodiles in India:

- Estuarine crocodiles are also found in West Bengal's Sunderbans, having the country's largest mangrove cover.

- The mangrove wetlands in Andaman Islands are also home to these species, but those cannot match the density and population of crocodile available in wild habitats of Bhitarkanika.

- The region is criss-crossed by innumerable water inlets, creeks and nullahs all forming the part of Bhitarkanika river system.

SMALL FARMERS AGRI-BUSINESS CONSORTIUM

GS 3: Agriculture

Why in News?

- The Government established Small Farmers' Agri-Business Consortium (SFAC) as a Society in January 1994 to facilitate agri-business ventures by catalysing private investment through Venture Capital Assistance (VCA) Scheme in close association with financial institutions.

Objectives:

- To catalyse agro-industrial growth in the country based on the principles of:
  - ✓ Ecological sustainability
  - ✓ Economic efficiency

✓ Social equity

- To undertake or assist in undertaking programs for employment generation, growth and diversification of agriculture & agro-based industries to increase food production and export of agriculture products, in both primary and processed forms.

- To identify and promote post-harvest processing/manufactures units in the public, private and cooperative sector.

- To promote organization of marketing chain both for domestic and export marketing.

- To influence Government policies for agriculture, thereby increasing the flow of resources and augmenting the rate of capital formation in agriculture sector.

- To pave the way for establishment of integrated producers' organizations with forward and backward linkages.

- To prepare, print and publish papers, periodicals, monographs in furtherance of the objectives of the society.

Role of SFAC:

- The role of State SFACs is to aggressively promote agribusiness project development in their respective States. The main functions of SFAC are:

- Promotion of development of small agribusiness through VCA scheme;

- Helping formation and growth of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) / Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs);

- Improving availability of working capital and development of business activities of FPOs/FPCs through Equity Grant and Credit Guarantee Fund Scheme;

- Implementation of National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) Electronic Trading platform.

TRIPURA LAUNCHES SUSTAINABLE CATCHMENT FOREST MANAGEMENT PROJECT

GS 3: Environment

Why in news?

- Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb launched the Sustainable Catchment Forest Management (SCATFORM) Project which is undertaken with the assistance of JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency).

Sustainable Catchment Forest Management (SCATFORM) Project:

- The SCATFORM project aims to address issues such as forest cover loss and forest degradation that have been mainly caused by shifting cultivation, which increases soil erosion risks on hill slopes especially in upper catchment areas.

- The SCATFORM project would be implemented mainly in upper catchments where forest degradation and soil erosion are severe and livelihood improvement needs are high.

- The project aims to the improve quality of forest in the catchment area by sustainable forest management, soil and moisture conservation and livelihood development.

- The activities undertaken under the project involves:
    - ✓ Promotion of bamboo plantation Agroforestry based livelihood.
    - ✓ Eco-Tourism Development
    - ✓ Development of value addition for bamboo and other Non-Timber Forest Product (NTFP) in order to create alternate livelihood opportunities for local communities
    - ✓ The 80 per cent of the cost is contributed by JICA and the rest would be funded by the state and Central Governments.

Japan International Cooperation Agency:

- Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) aims to promote international cooperation as the Japanese Governmental Agency in charge of official development assistance implementation.

- JICA which is an incorporated administrative institution under the Government of Japan is the world's largest bilateral donor agency.

GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD MAY BE EXTINCT SOON

GS 3: Environment | Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Why in News?

- The GIB's last remnant wild population of about 50 in Jaisalmer district accounts for 95% of its total world population.

- No progress has been made on the proposal for establishing a captive breeding centre at Sorsan in Kota district and a hatchery in Jaisalmer for conservation of the State bird of Rajasthan.

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Great Indian Bustard:

- The Great Indian Bustard, one of the heaviest flying birds, can weigh up to 15 kg and grow up to one metre in height.

- It is considered the flagship grassland species, representing the health of the grassland ecology.

- For long, conservationists have been demanding to secure this population, warning that the bird might get extinct in the coming decades.

- It would become the first mega species to disappear from India after Cheetah in recent times.

- Till 1980s, about 1,500-2,000 Great Indian Bustards were spread throughout the western half of India, spanning eleven states.

- However, with rampant hunting and declining grasslands, their population dwindled.

- In July 2011, the bird was categorised as "critically endangered" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Protection Measures:

- Birdlife International uplisted this species from Endangered to Critically Endangered (2011). Protection under CITES Appendix I. Protection under Schedule I Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act 2002. Project Great Indian Bustard (Rajasthan): aims at identifying and fencing off bustard breeding grounds in existing protected areas as well as provide secure breeding enclosures in areas outside protected areas.

GLOBAL ALLIANCE OF COMPANIES TO ELIMINATE PLASTIC WASTE

GS 3: Environment | Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Why in News?

- An alliance of global companies launched a new organisation to help eliminate plastic waste, especially in the ocean.

Alliance to End Plastic Waste (AEPW):

- The AEPW comprises of about 30 companies, which pledged over $1 billion to eliminate plastic waste across the world.

- The aim is to develop solutions to mitigate plastic pollution and promote a circular economy by utilising used plastics.

- The Alliance has been working with the World Business Council for Sustainable Development as a founding strategic partner.

- Designed as a non-profit organization, the Alliance includes companies from across North and South America, Europe, Asia, Southeast Asia, Africa as well as the Middle East are part of the Alliance.

- Member companies include those that make, use, sell, process, collect and recycle plastics, as well as chemical and plastic manufacturers, consumer goods companies, retailers, converters, and waste management companies, also called the plastics value chain.

- From India, Reliance Industries will advance efforts towards a sustainable future.

- Infrastructure development to collect and manage waste and increase recycling

- Innovation to advance and scale up new technologies that make recycling and recovering plastics easier and create value from post-use plastics

- Education and engagement of governments, businesses, and communities to mobilize action;

- Clean-up of concentrated areas of plastic waste in the environment, particularly the major conduits of waste, such as rivers, that carry land-based waste to the ocean

BIO-JET FUEL FOR MILITARY AIRCRAFT

GS 3: Environment | Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Why in News?

- After months of exhaustive ground and flight trials, the indigenous produced bio-fuel has been finally cleared for use by the premier airworthiness certification agency of the country.

Bio-Jet Fuel for Military Aircrafts:

- The Centre for Military Airworthiness and Certification (CEMILAC) conducted various checks and tests conducted on bio-jet.

- It has formally granted its approval for use of this fuel, produced from non-conventional source i.e. non-edible vegetable/ tree borne oil to be used on military aircraft.

- The bio-jet fuel has been produced from seeds of Jatropha plant sourced from Chhattisgarh and processed at CSIR-IIP's lab at Dehradun.

- This approval enables the IAF to fulfil its commitment to fly the maiden IAF An-32 aircraft with a blend of bio-jet fuel. Any hardware or software which is to be used on Indian military aircraft, including those operated by Indian Navy or Army has to be cleared for use by CEMILAC before being inducted for regular use. This clearance is a major step for continued testing and eventual full certification of the bio-jet fuel for use on a commercial scale by civil aircraft as well.

Significance:

- Increased demand of bio-jet fuel would give impetus to increase in collection of tree-borne non-edible oil seeds.

- It will help generate ancillary income, increase remuneration for tribal and marginal farmers, and enthuse cultivation/ collection of oilseeds.

STUDY ON NITROGEN POLLUTION

GS 3: Environment | Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Prelims & Mains Level: Nitrogen pollution - Causes, sources and ways to contain them

Why in news?

- Eighteen research institutions in India are among a group of 50 institutions — called the South Asian Nitrogen Hub (SANH) — in the United Kingdom and South Asia that have secured £20 million (about ₹200 crore) from the U.K. government to assess and study the quantum and impact of "nitrogen pollution" in South Asia.

- While nitrogen is the dominant gas in the atmosphere, it is inert and doesn't react. However, when it is released as part of compounds from agriculture, sewage and biological waste, nitrogen is considered "reactive", and may pollute and even exert a potent greenhouse gas (heat trapping) effect.

Nitrogen Pollution:

- Nitrogen compounds running off farmland have led to water pollution problems around the world, while nitrogen emissions from industry, agriculture and vehicles make a big contribution to air pollution.

- Over 80% of the nitrogen in soil is not utilised by humans. While over four-fifths of the nitrogen is used to feed livestock, only about six per cent reaches humans in case of non-vegetarian diet, as compared to the 20% that reaches the plate of a vegetarian.

- Nitrogen becomes a pollutant when it escapes into the environment and reacts with other organic compounds. It is either released into the atmosphere, gets dissolved in water sources such as rivers, lakes or groundwater, or remains in the soil.

- While it might lead to favourable growth of species that can utilise this nutrient, nitrogen as a pollutant is often detrimental to the environment and health.

- According to the World Health Organization, nitrate-contaminated drinking water can cause reduced blood function, cancer and endemic goiters. Surplus inputs of nitrogen compounds have been found to cause soil acidification.

- The lowering pH, as a result of the acidification, can lead to nutrient disorders and increased toxicity in plants. It may also affect natural soil decomposition.

- It creates of harmful algal blooms and dead zones in our waterways and oceans; the algae produce toxins which are harmful to human and aquatic organisms (and indirectly affects fisheries and biodiversity in coastal areas)

- Over 10 million people in Europe are potentially exposed to drinking water with nitrate concentrations above recommended levels. This can have an adverse effect on human health.

- Excessive nitrogen fertiliser application contributes to soil nutrient depletion. As the world needs to feed an ever growing population loss of arable land is major global problem.

- The release of Nitrous Oxide is essentially a greenhouse gas which is harmful to the environment.

CROCODYLUS PALUSTRIS - A CROCODILE SPECIES THAT IS BEING REMOVED FROM THE NARMADA

GS 3: Environment | Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Prelims level: Narmada River Crocodile - Crocodylus palustris

Why in News?

- The Gujarat Forest Department has started evacuating muggers from two ponds on the Sardar Sarovar Dam premises on the Narmada, to facilitate a seaplane service at the Statue of Unity.

Narmada Crocodile:

- The mugger crocodile, also called marsh crocodile or broad-snouted crocodile, is a species (Crocodylus palustris) native to freshwater habitats from southern Iran and Pakistan to the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lanka.

- Already extinct in Bhutan and Myanmar, the mugger has been listed as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List since 1982.

- In India, it is protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

- Vadodara, 90 km from the Narmada dam, is the only city in the country where crocodiles live in their natural habitat amidst human population.

Legal provisions for relocation of species:

- Among the six schedules in the Act, Schedule I and part II of Schedule II provide the highest degrees of protection to listed species, with the most stringent penalties for offenders.

- For animals listed in Schedule I, any of kind of population control activity, capture for captivity, or transportation can involve cumbersome processes.

- This includes even transportation of crocodiles. So its relocation or capture is definitely illegal without permission.

- Experts say crocodiles were listed under Schedule I not because of the fear of extinction but to prevent their trade.

- However, state governments have the authority to give permissions in some situations where they become a danger for the human population.

INTERNATIONAL STOCK TAKING CONFERENCE ON TIGER CONSERVATION

GS 3: Environment | Conservation

Why in News?

- The 3rd Stock Taking Conference on Tiger Conservation was inaugurated in New Delhi. Third in a series of Stock Taking Conferences, this is the second to be held in India after 2012 and is expected to have wide-ranging discussions on the status of the Global Tiger Recovery Program (GTRP) by the 13 tiger range countries besides deliberations on combating wildlife trafficking.

Highlights:

- Tigers are part of our planet's natural heritage, a symbol of Earth's biodiversity. They are a key species, crucial for the integrity of the ecosystems in which they live.

- As top predators, they keep populations of prey species in check, which in turn maintains the balance between herbivores and the vegetation upon which they feed.

- In short, when tigers thrive, the whole ecosystem thrives. This, in turn, provides important financial, cultural and spiritual benefits for local communities who live with or near tigers.

- This is the second stock-taking conference to be held in India after 2012, wherein progress against resolution adopted by tiger range countries in 2010 at St. Petersburg, Russia, is measured against Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as decided by the said countries.

- Global and National Tiger Recovery Programs (GTRP/NTRP) were formulated by respective tiger range countries as a consequence of this historic decision.

St. Petersburg Declaration in 2010:

- During the St. Petersburg declaration in 2010, tiger range countries had resolved to double tiger numbers across their range by 2022.

- At the time of deliberations at St. Petersburg, India's tiger estimate stood at 1411, which after the third cycle of the All India Tiger Estimation, 2014 has nearly been doubled to 2226.

- This has largely been possible because of strides made against Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), predominant among them being legislation to ensure protection of tiger habitat and enhancement of penalties, besides providing a statutory basis for inviolate space.

Tiger range countries:

- The 13 Tiger Range Countries (TRCs) are Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Russia, Thailand and Vietnam.

NGT DISSATISFIED WITH STATE GOVERNMENTS OVER CLEANING OF RIVER YAMUNA

GS 3: Environment | Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Why in news?

- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has asked for a performance guarantee of Rs 10 crore each from the governments of Delhi, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh expressing dissatisfaction over the cleaning of river Yamuna.

Highlights:

- The order comes after the interim report filed by the monitoring committee comprising of expert member B S Sajwan and former Delhi Chief Secretary Shailaja Chandra.

Recommendations of the Monitoring Committee:

- A study to assess the environmental flow of the river Yamuna for the stretch between Hathanikund and Okhla and notes that it would not be possible to rejuvenate it unless minimum environmental flow was provided.

- Creating ponds and pits in various localities to facilitate idol immersion.

- Building awareness about why the floodplains are sacrosanct and why they need conservation.

- Involvement of citizens by dissipating knowledge about why the river is important and why it is worth preserving and restoring.

- River Yamuna is a unique birding destination and there is a need for the Delhi Development Authority to preserve the birding hot spots.

Other observations:

- The performance guarantee would be forfeited if the work was not carried out as per the recommendations of the monitoring committee.

- The monitoring committee was asked to expeditiously submit its final report.

- Steps to be taken by the three states at the earliest for disposal of municipal solid waste, cleaning of drains and ensuring cleaning of garbage.

- Haryana pollution control board to conduct a study of water quality and the flow of Yamuna at the point it enters Haryana, and submit the list of industries located in the catchment area.

139 POLLUTED CITIES NOT ON CLEAN AIR PLAN: GREEN PEACE REPORT

GS 3: Environment | Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Why in News?

- There are 139 Indian cities that breach air pollution standards but are not included in the Centre's National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), says a report by Greenpeace.

- The NCAP was launched by the government earlier this month and is a ₹300 crore initiative to reduce particulate matter (PM) pollution by 20-30% in at least 102 cities by 2024.

Highlights of the Report:

- Airpocalypse III, as the Greenpeace report is titled, analyses air pollution data of 313 cities and towns for the year 2017.

- Of these 313 cities, 241 (77%) had PM10 levels beyond the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). These specify upper limits to a range of airborne chemicals and compounds. While 102 of these cities were included in the NCAP, the remaining 139 cities were left out. That's because the government's list of 102 cities relied on average pollution data until 2015, whereas Airpocalypse III used data updated up to 2017.

- Even if the NCAP were to able to reduce pollution by 30% by 2024, 153 cities would still be left with pollution levels exceeding the NAAQS.

- Of the 139 cities that have not been included in the non-attainment list under the NCAP, there are several cities that have a population of more than 1 million, and PM levels (recorded in 2017) above NAAQS. These include: Ranchi, Dhanbad (Jharkhand); Jabalpur (Madhya Pradesh); Chennai, Madurai (Tamil Nadu); Meerut (Uttar Pradesh); Pimpri-Chindwar, Thane, (Maharashtra); Surat, Rajkot, Vadodara (Gujarat); and Howrah (West Bengal).

National Clean Air Programme (NCAP):

- The Centre has launched the programme to reduce particulate matter (PM) pollution by 20-30% in at least 102 cities by 2024.

- It is envisaged as a scheme to provide the States and the Centre with a framework to combat air pollution.

- Overcome the deficits of the ongoing government initiatives targeted towards air pollution control

- Expand existing air quality monitoring network by – increasing number of existing manual and continuous monitoring stations and introducing rural monitoring stations, identifying alternative technology for real-time monitoring network and

- Strengthening the capabilities of existing monitoring stations to measure Particulate matter (PM) 2.5 concentration.

- Devise air quality management plans for the cities calls for detailed source apportionment (identification of pollution sources) studies for each city

- Constitute a high-level apex committee and working group under the Indian Council of Medical Research and the MoEF&CC;

- Set up an Air Information Centre that would analyse and disseminate monitored data; a technology assessment cell for evaluation of new pollution prevention and control technologies; and an Air Quality Forecasting system.

FIRST CAPTIVE ELEPHANT SURVEY

GS 3: Environment | Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Why in news?

- The details of the first survey of captive elephants in the country were submitted in an affidavit by the MoEFCC to the Supreme Court.

- The affidavit comes in the wake of rising elephant deaths and human-elephant conflicts, particularly in Kerala and Assam.

Highlights:

- According to the affidavit, there are 2,454 elephants in captivity, of which 560 are in possession with forest departments and 1,687 with private individuals.

- However, 664 of the total captive elephants in the country are without ownership certificate while there are 85 in zoos, 26 in circuses and 96 in temples. The affidavit covers data for 28 states and Union Territories. It shows that Assam and Kerala account for more than half the nationwide total of 2,454.

- Assam has 37% of these captive elephants and Kerala has 21%.

- Concentration in two states means a wide gap with the count in other states — the third highest is Karnataka's 184, roughly one-fifth of Assam's 905 and a little over one-third of Kerala's 518. Of these, one-third are in private custody without any ownership certificate mandated by law; zoos, circuses and temples account for 207 elephants in captivity.

Background:

- In Nov 18, the Court had pulled up the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) for not having data on the number of elephants held captive. The apex court had directed the MoEFCC to identify elephants in captivity and whether their owners have an ownership certificate. It was hearing a writ petition filed by Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre.

- The bench has now directed the Chief Wildlife Wardens of states to ascertain the age of all the captive elephants.

6. INDIAN ECONOMY
INDIAN BRIDGE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (IBMS)

GS 3: Economy | Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Road Transport & Highways has inventoried 1,72,517 bridges/structures under Indian Bridge Management System (IBMS).

Indian Bridge Management System (IBMS):

- The IBM System has been established to develop the data in digital form, to identify, survey and inventorize the number of bridges and other structures on National Highways.

- It crucially aims to identify the distressed bridges which need immediate attention and to sensitize the concerned implementation agency for taking corrective measures such as repair, rehabilitation reconstruction/ new construction etc.

Inventory process for Bridge Location Number:

- During inventory creation each bridge is assigned a unique identification number or National Identity Number based on the state, RTO zone and whether it is situated on an National Highway, State Highway or is a district road.

- Then the precise location of the bridge in terms of latitude-longitude is collected through GPS and based on this, the bridge is assigned a Bridge Location Number.

- Thereafter, engineering characteristics like the design, materials, type of bridge, its age, loading, traffic lane, length, width of carriage way etc are collected and are used to assign a Bridge Classification Number to the structure.

- These are then used to do a structural rating of the structure on a scale of 0 to 9, and each bridge is assigned a Structural Rating Number.

- The rating is done for each component of the structure like integral and non-integral deck, superstructure, substructure, bank and channel, structural evaluation, deck geometry, vertical clearance, waterway efficiency etc.

- In addition to the structural rating, the bridges are also being assigned Socio-Economic Bridge Rating Number which will decide the importance of the structure in relation to its contribution to daily socio-economic activity of the area in its vicinity.

YARN BANK SCHEME

GS 3: Economy | Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth

Prelims level: Yarn Bank Scheme & Particulars

Why in News?

- To avoid fluctuation in yarn price, government has launched a Yarn Bank Scheme as one of the component of PowerTex India with effect from 01.04.2017 to 31.03.2020.

Yarn Bank Scheme:

- The Scheme provides interest free corpus fund up to Rs.2.00 crore to the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV)/Consortium formed by powerloom weavers to enable them to purchase yarn at wholesale rate and give the yarn at reasonable price to the small weavers

- It aims to avoid middleman and local supplier's brokerage charge on sales of yarn.

Eligibility Beneficiaries:

- Registered Co-operative Society.

- Trusts

- Company set-up under the Companies Act, 1956 as amended.

- Firm set-up under the Limited Liability Partnership Act, 2008 as amended.

INDIA-MYANMAR-THAILAND TRILATERAL HIGHWAY

GS 3: Economy | Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

Prelims Level: India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway & Significance

Why in news?

- The 1360 km long highway project is an initiative pertaining to India, Myanmar and Thailand.

- India is undertaking construction of two sections of the Trilateral Highway in Myanmar namely, Construction of 120.74 km Kalewa-Yagyi road section, and Construction of 69 bridges along with the approach road on the 149.70 km Tamu-Kyigone-Kalewa (TKK) road section.

- The works on both these sections were awarded on Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) mode in May 2018.

- The scheduled time for completion of both the projects is three years from the date of commencement at the project site by the executing agency.

- The above mentioned both the projects are being funded by Government of India under grant assistance to the Government of Myanmar.

- A Motor Vehicles Agreement along with protocols for regulating and facilitating movement of cargo and passenger vehicular traffic is under inter-governmental negotiations between India, Myanmar and Thailand.

Utility of the Project:

- The road is expected to boost trade and commerce in the ASEAN–India Free Trade Area, as well as with the rest of Southeast Asia.

- India has also proposed extending the highway to Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

EPC Model:

- Under this system the entire project is funded by the government.

- The EPC entails the contractor build the project by designing, installing and procuring necessary labour and land to construct the infrastructure, either directly or by subcontracting.

- Under EPC model the contractor is legally responsible to complete the project under some fixed predetermined timeline and may also involve scope for penalty in case of time overrun.

- In EPC as all the clearances, land acquisition and regulatory norms have to be completed by the government itself and the private players do not have to get itself involved in these time taking procedures.

BHOOMI RASHI PORTAL

GS 3: Economy | Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc

Why in news?

- The Ministry of Road Transport & Highways has recently launched the Bhoomi Rashi portal.

Highlights:

- In the past years, acquisition of land for the purpose of National Highway projects, payment of compensation to the land owners etc were done manually by physical movement of documents in the form of files.

- However, in that procedure some constraints like delay in issuing notification, errors in the land/area details etc. were being faced. In order to overcome these issues, to cut short delays and avoid parking of public funds with the Competent Authority for Land Acquisition (CALA), Ministry has developed a web based Utility –Bhoomi Rashi to fully digitize and automate the entire process of land acquisition.

Advantages:

- With the operation of this Portal, the land acquisition process has been expedited significantly, became error-free and more transparent and the notifications at every stage are being processed on real time basis.

- While the physical processing of the cases usually took considerable time, ranging from weeks to even months, and there were errors whose rectification caused further delays,

the processing time using this portal has been reduced to less than two weeks in a majority of cases and even a few days in some cases.

FASTags

GS 3: Economy | Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

Prelims level: FASTags

Why in News?

- To ensure easier availability of FASTags, Indian Highways Management Company Ltd. (IHMCL), a company promoted by NHAI, is signing MoUs with state-run Oil Marketing Companies (IOCL, BPC, and HPC) for issuance of FASTags through petroleum retail outlets.

MyFASTag and IHMCLPOS:

- To further supplement the use of FASTags , IHMCL is also planning the launch of two mobile applications – MyFASTag and IHMCLPOS. These apps will enable customers to link the FASTags with their preferred bank account, recharge the FASTag via UPI platform, and also ensure that the tags are bank neutral.

Significance:

- These measures will eventually help NHAI cater to its commitment of providing a safe, smooth and seamless journey to commuters on National Highways.

- The enhanced adoption of FASTag program will increase user convenience by offering seamless toll-fee payments at Plazas and thus help save time, money and fuel.

- The online payments will improve transparency of toll transactions, reduce revenue leakages, and improve overall efficiency and commercial competitiveness.

- IHMCL is also striving for the vision of One Nation – One Tag by aligning with various State Authorities/SPV to ensure that FASTag becomes the preferred digital payment instrument at State/Municipal Plazas.

FASTags:

- FASTag is device that employs Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology for making toll payments directly from prepaid or savings account linked to it. It is affixed on the windscreen of vehicle and enables the commuter to drive through toll plazas, without stopping for cash transactions.

FREIGHT SUBSIDY SCHEME (FSS) 2013

GS 3: Economy | Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways, et

Why in News?

- In order to facilitate the process of industrialization in hilly, remote and inaccessible areas, transport incentive is provided to:
  - ✓ The states of North Eastern Region (including Sikkim) under North Eastern Industrial Development Scheme (NEIDS) - 2017,
  - ✓ Jammu & Kashmir under Industrial Development Scheme - 2017
  - ✓ Lakshadweep and A&N Islands under Lakshadweep and Andaman & Nicobar Island Development Scheme - 2018

Highlights:

- Under these schemes, all eligible industrial units can avail incentive on transportation of only finished goods through Railways or the Railway Public Sector Undertakings, Inland Waterways or scheduled airline (shipping for Andaman & Nicobar and Lakshadweep islands also) for a period of five years from the date of commencement of commercial production / operation.

- It is applicable to all industrial units (barring Plantations, Fly Ash, Refineries, Power generating units, Coke, including Calcined Petroleum Coke industry and the units producing tobacco and manufactured tobacco substitutes, pan masala and plastic carry bags of less than 20 microns), both in public and private sectors irrespective of their size.

- Under the scheme, subsidy on the transport cost for transportation of raw material and finished goods to and from the location of the unit and the designated rail-head was reimbursed for a period of 5 years from the date of commencement of commercial production.

- The Freight Subsidy Scheme (FSS), 2013 has been discontinued with effect from 22.11.2016. However, the industrial units registered under these schemes during their currency, are eligible for the benefits of the scheme for the period specified therein.

RAILWAY SETS OUT NEW RULES FOR SECURITY CHECKS

GS 3: Economy | Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

Why in News?

- Railways is planning to seal stations just like airports and passengers would have to arrive 15-20 minutes before scheduled departure of trains to complete the process of security checks.

New Security Plan by RPF:

- These are part of a security plan under the Integrated Security System (ISS) which was approved in 2016 to strengthen surveillance mechanism at 202 railway stations.

- It is primarily about identifying openings and to determine how many can be closed.

- There are areas which will be closed through permanent boundary walls, others will be manned by RPF personnel and yet others will have collapsible gates.

- At each entry point there will be random security checks.

- However, unlike at airports, passengers need not come hours in advance, but just 15-20 minutes ahead of their departure times to ensure that they are not delayed because of the security process.

- Passengers will be checked randomly — every eighth or ninth passenger will undergo the process on his arrival at the station.

Integrated Security System:

- The ISS will comprise CCTV cameras, access control, personal and baggage screening system and bomb detection and disposal system which together provide multiple checking of passengers and baggage from the point of entry in the station premises till boarding of train.

- The security plan envisages a layered security check where passengers will be scrutinised even before they enter the station premises to ease the pressure at stations during peak hours.

- It will also include real-time face recognition software which will alert the RPF command centre of any known offenders.

NEW DISCOVERED SMALL FIELD BID ROUND POLICY

GS 3: Economy | Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways, e

Why in news?

- Gross estimated revenue of Rs.45000 crore is anticipated under Discovered Small Field Bid Round-II from 25 Contract Areas; and Rs.9000 crore under Discovered Small Field Bid Round-I from 30 Contract Areas. The gross estimated revenue is based on estimates of oil and gas hydrocarbon in place reserves, assumption in terms of hydrocarbon recovery factor, hydrocarbon sale price, etc., from 25 Contract Areas considering project life of 15 years.

DSF policy:

- The new DSF policy is based on the principle of 'ease of doing businesses'. This policy is an outcome of a long consultation process between the government and the industry.

Key highlights of the DSF policy:

- Revenue sharing with the government instead of the existing cost-recovery based production sharing

- Freedom of marketing and pricing for both oil as well as gas

- Permission to explore all kinds of hydrocarbons such as shale, tight rock, coalbed methane (CBM), etc

- International competitive bidding with no mandatory national oil companies (NOC) participation

- Prior technical experience not required for bidders

- No restrictions on exploration activities during the contract period

- Favourable royalty rate and waiver of oil cess

- Customs duty on goods and services imported for petroleum operations not to be imposed

- Royalty on crude oil is 12.5% and 10% for on land and shallow water respectively. Royalty on natural gas is 10% for both on land as well as shallow-water blocks. Royalty on crude oil and natural gas for deep water blocks is 5% for the initial seven years and thereafter the rate will be 10%.

RBI ISSUES GUIDELINES FOR TOKENIZATION OF CARD TRANSACTIONS

GS 3: Economy | Mobilization of resources, Banking

Why in News?

- Reserve Bank of India has released guidelines on tokenization for various card transactions, including from debit and credit cards.

Tokenised card transactions services:

- RBI has given permission to offer tokenised card transactions services to all channels such as near field communication (NFC), magnetic secure transmission (MST) based contactless transactions, in-app payments, QR code-based payments or token storage mechanisms, including cloud, secure element and trusted execution environment.

- Tokenization and de-tokenization shall be performed only by the authorised card network and recovery of original Primary Account Number (PAN) should be feasible for the authorised card network only, the release said.

- The request for tokenization and de-tokenization should be logged by the card network and available for retrieval.

- A customer would not have to pay any charges for availing this service.

- At present, tokenized card transaction facility would be offered through mobile phones or tablets only and will be extended to other devices later based on experience.

A note for Payment Networks:

- Card networks shall get the card issuers/acquirers, their service providers and any other entity involved in payment transaction chain, certified in respect of changes done for processing tokenised card transactions by them.

- Providing card tokenization services, authorised card payment networks shall put in place a mechanism for periodic system audit, at least annually, of all entities involved in providing card tokenisation services to customers.

- The central bank also asked card issuers to ensure easy access to customers for reporting loss of 'identified device' or any other such event which may expose tokens to unauthorised usage. Registration of a card on token requestors app shall be done only with explicit customer consent through Additional Factor of Authentication (AFA), and not by way of a forced / default/automatic selection of check box, radio button.

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Tokenization:

- Tokenisation, which aims at improving safety and security of the payment system, refers to replacement of actual card details with an unique alternate code called the 'token'.

- It shall be unique for a combination of card, token requestor and identified device.

- Instead of using actual card details, this token is used to perform card transactions in contactless mode at point of sale(POS) terminals, quick response(QR) code payments.

RBI FORMS DIGITAL PAYMENTS PANEL

GS 3: Economy | Mobilization of resources, Banking

Why in news?

- The RBI has constituted a high-level committee headed by former chairman of the UIDAI Nandan Nilekani to set up a robust digital payments ecosystem in the country.

Aim:

- To undertake cross country analyses with a view to identify best practices that can be adopted in our country to accelerate digitization of the economy and financial inclusion through greater use of digital payments.

Terms of Reference:

- The committee has been asked to review the existing status of digitization of payments, identify gaps in the ecosystem and suggest ways to plug them.

- The panel has to suggest a medium-term strategy for deepening digital payments, and measures to strengthen safety and security.

- It shall submit its report within a period of 90 days from the date of its first meeting.

- The panel has also been tasked with the responsibility of increasing customer confidence and trust while they access financial services through digital modes.

Need for panel:

- The promotion of digital payments has been one of the primary agendas of the government in the past four years.

- Payments through all electronic forms such as debit and credit cards, mobile wallets, real-time gross settlement (RTGS), national electronic funds transfer (NEFT) and UPI has seen a huge rise. The newest mode of digital payments, UPI, which was launched in 2016, has

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witnessed an over 300% rise in transaction volumes in the last year and the growth is seen continuing in the near term.

- A/c to National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) , a record 620.17 million UPI transactions worth just over ₹1 trillion were conducted in December 2018.

INDIA SET TO BECOME THIRD-LARGEST CONSUMER MARKET: WEF

GS 3: Economy

Why in news?

- India is set to become the third-largest consumer market behind only the US and China and consumer spending in India is expected to grow from USD 1.5 trillion at present to nearly USD 6 trillion by 2030, as per a World Economic Forum report that released on January 9, 2019.

- The report titled 'Future of Consumption in Fast-Growth Consumer Market – India' noted that growth of the middle class will lift nearly 25 million households out of poverty in India.

Highlights:

- According to the World Economic Forum (WEF), with an annual GDP growth rate of 7.5 per cent, India is currently the world's sixth-largest economy.

- As per the report, growth in income will transform India from a "bottom of the pyramid economy" to a middle class-led one.

- By 2030, domestic private consumption, which accounts for 60 per cent of the country's GDP, is expected to develop into a USD 6-trillion growth opportunity.

- The report stated that if realised, this would make India's consumer market the third-largest in the world, behind the US and China.

- The future consumption growth is expected to come from rich and densely populated cities and the thousands of developed rural towns.

- The report stated that India's top 40 cities will form a USD 1.5 trillion opportunity by 2030, many thousands of small urban towns will also drive an equally large spend in aggregate.

- In parallel, it noted that there will be an opportunity to unlock nearly USD 1.2 trillion of spending in developed rural areas by improving infrastructure and providing access to organised and online retail.

GANGAJAL PROJECT

GS 3: Economy | Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways, etc.

Why in news?

- Giving a major push to develop and enhance Tourism infrastructure in Agra, the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi launched a series of development projects worth Rs. 2900 Crores for the Agra city and the adjoining areas.

Gangajal Project:

- It aims to bring 140 cusecs of Ganga Water to Agra which will help meet the drinking water demands in the city.

- It will provide Agra with better and more assured water supply, at an estimated cost of Rs. 2880 crores.

- The project was launched in 2005 in collaboration with the Japan International Cooperation Agency and was scheduled to be completed by March 2012 but the project has missed several deadlines.

- Under the Gangajal project, Agra will get 140 cusec water supply per day from Palra headworks in Bulandshahr's Upper Ganga canal.

RENUKAJI MULTIPURPOSE DAM PROJECT

GS 3: Economy | Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways, etc.

Why in News?

- An agreement for Renukaji Dam Multipurpose Project will be signed among six states- Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand.

Renukaji Multipurpose Dam Project:

- Three storage projects are proposed to be constructed on the river Yamuna and two of its tributaries – Tons and Giri in the hilly regions of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh of Upper Yamuna Basin. These include Lakhwar project on river Yamuna in Uttarakhand, Kishau on river Tons in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh and Renukaji on river Giri in Himachal Pradesh.

- These three projects were identified as National Projects in 2008 under which 90% funding of the cost of irrigation & drinking water component will be provided by the Govt. of

India as central assistance and the rest 10% cost of the irrigation and drinking water component will be borne by the beneficiary states.

Significance:

- After the construction of the said dam, the flow of river Giri will increase about 110% which will meet the drinking water needs of Delhi & other basin states up to some extent in lean period. Stored water of Renukaji Dam will be used by UP, Haryana & NCT of Delhi from Hathnikund Barrage, by NCT of Delhi from Wazirabad Barrage and by UP, Haryana and Rajasthan from Okhla Barrage.

"ONE FAMILY ONE JOB" SCHEME

GS 3: Economy | Development & Employment

Why in news?

- Sikkim has recently launched the 'One Family One Job' scheme which entitles one government job for every family in the state.

Scheme - Highlights:

- The scheme envisions employment to a member of every family which does not have a government job in the state. Under this scheme, all loan debts in the farming and agriculture sector would be revoked.

- At present recruitments are being made for Group C and Group D posts in 12 government departments. The letters were awarded only to members of those families which do not have a government job at present.

- The task of providing employment was entrusted to the Department of Personnel.

- Over 25,000 already employed but unregularised government employees would also be subsequently regularized within 2019 according to their seniority.

- Sikkim has become the first state in the country to carry out such an exclusive programme for the people who would now be entitled to state government employee benifits.

- Sikkim was the only state that earmarks 70 per cent of its revenues towards salaries for state government employees. As of now, the state government has over 1 lakh regularised employees on its rolls from a population of just 6.4 lakh.

- Sikkim is also the only state in the country that gives the highest salaries to state government employees.

SAKHI ONE STOP CENTRE

GS 2: Governance | Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these scheme

Why in news?

- More than 1,90,000 victims across the country have accessed the OSCs, sponsored by the Centre under the Nirbhaya fund .

Sakhi One Stop Centre:

- Ministry of WCD has formulated a Centrally Sponsored Scheme for setting up One Stop Centre, a sub – scheme of Umbrella Scheme for National Mission for Empowerment of women including Indira Gandhi Mattritav Sahyaog Yojana.

- It is a scheme sponsored under the Nirbhaya fund set up for safety of women after the gang rape of a paramedical student in December 2012 in New Delhi.

- It being established across the country to provide integrated support and assistance under one roof to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces in phased manner.

- The scheme envisages an OSC for medical, legal, psychological and police help for victims of gender-based abuse such as sexual assault or domestic violence.

- So far, 234 OSCs have been set up and 485 more are in the pipeline to cover all 719 districts in the country.

- According to government data shared before Parliament, more than 1,90,000 women across the country have accessed these centres.

Functioning of the OSCs:

- When a victim of domestic violence comes here, she is asked what relief she wants.

- If she wants a compromise, the husband is called and both of them are counselled.

- After this, she is asked to sign on an agreement letter and is sent back to her home and a follow-up is conducted.

- If a rape victim comes to the centre , it is first ascertained whether she is speaking the truth.

- First the centre in-charge speaks to her and then a counsellor cross-examines her.

SAKSHAM 2019

GS 3: Economy | Infrastructure: Energy

Why in News?

- 'Saksham', an annual high intensity one-month long people-centric mega campaign of Petroleum Conservation Research Association (PCRA) under the aegis of Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas was launched.

Highlights:

- Saksham (Sanrakshan Kshamta Mahotsav) is a campaign organised by Petroleum Conservation Research Association (PCRA) to sensitize the masses about conservation and efficient use of petroleum products which will lead towards better health and environment.

- This campaign is aimed at showing the way forward for making a change and enhancing the conservation capabilities of people. It helps understand the need for fuel conservation and find solutions thereof.

- The campaign seeks to promote effective utilization of petroleum products, something that will lead to environmental protection.

- It also educates the masses on how the efficient and optimal use of energy can protect the health and the environment.

CABINET NOD TO INTEGRATED E-FILING AND CENTRALISED PROCESSING CENTRE

GS 3: Economy | Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Why in news?

- The Union Cabinet has approved corpus sum for integrated e-filing and centralised processing centre-2.0, a Project-of the Income Tax Department.

CPC-ITR 2.0:

- The broad objectives of the project include a faster and accurate outcome for the taxpayer, first-time-right approach, enhancing the user experience at all stages, and improving taxpayer awareness and education through continuous engagement.

- It various functionalities such as pre-filling of ITR and acceptance by taxpayer as a means to improve accuracy and to reduce refund/processing turnaround time drastically.

- The decision will ensure horizontal equity by processing returns filed by all categories of taxpayers across the country in a consistent, uniform, rule-driven, identity blind manner.

- This will assure fairness in tax treatment to every taxpayer irrespective of their status.

- The proposal ensures the continuation of the IT Department's goal towards business transformation through technology.

- The E-filing and CPC projects have enabled end to end automation of all processes within the Department using various innovative methods to provide taxpayer services and to promote voluntary compliance.

- At present, it takes around 63 days to deal with income tax return process but this will be completed just in one day after the success of the 'integration project'.

- Through digital media platform, we can provide rapid facilities to taxpayers, be it real-time processing of income tax returns, ease in filing accurate returns, resolve grievances of taxpayers and spread awareness.

REWEAVE - E-COMMERCE PLATFORM

GS 3: Economy

Why in news?

- Microsoft India launched a new e-commerce platform 're-weave.in' under project ReWeave to aid handloom weavers.

Highlights:

- The e-commerce platform would connect artisans to the buyers directly enabling them to expand to newer customers and markets.

- It will provide a platform to showcase signature collections created by the weaver communities, showcase traditional designs and products created from natural dyes to a broad set of customers.

- The e-commerce platform would aid weavers in increasing their income and earning a sustainable livelihood

- Project ReWeave was initiated by Microsoft India (R&D) Pvt. Limited in 2016 as part of its Philanthropies efforts, with the aim to revive the handloom weaving ecosystem in India.

- Under the initiative, Microsoft is working closely with NGO partner, Chaitanya Bharathi to provide infrastructure, financing and marketing support to help weaver families keep their weaving traditions alive by sustaining livelihoods.

WORLD ECONOMIC SITUATION AND PROSPECTS 2019

GS 3: Economy | Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Why in news?

- The United Nations report "World Economic Situation and Prospects 2019" discusses various challenges in attaining the Sustainable Development Goals.

The challenges:

- Economic growth is uneven and is failing to reach where it is most needed.

- Per capita incomes would stagnate or grow only marginally in 2019 in several parts of Africa, Western Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.

- Even where the per capita growth is strong, economic activity is driven by core industrial and urban regions, leaving peripheral and rural areas behind.

- The report notes that eradicating poverty by 2030 will require both double-digit growth in Africa and steep reductions in income inequality which seems a distant possibility in the current scenario.

- The confluence of risks is clouding and it may severely disrupt economic activity and inflict significant damage on longer-term development prospects.

- As the world experiences an increasing number of extreme weather events, other various risks include- escalation of trade policy disputes; financial instabilities linked to elevated levels of debt; and rising climate risks.

- The report notes that the simultaneous appearance of several important risks endangers efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development containing 17 specific goals to promote prosperity and social well-being while protecting the environment.

INDUSTRIAL OUTLOOK SURVEY (IOS) AND SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE OUTLOOK SURVEY (SIOS)

GS 3: Economy | Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Why in News?

- RBI starts Industrial Outlook Survey (IOS) and Services and Infrastructure Outlook Survey (SIOS).

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has initiated two quarterly surveys namely, "Industrial Outlook Survey (IOS)" and "Services and Infrastructure Outlook Survey (SIOS)". The two quarterly surveys aim to examine the current situation including the job scenario in India's manufacturing, services and infrastructure sectors.

Industrial Outlook Survey (IOS):

- The Industrial Outlook Survey (IOS) is based on qualitative responses on a set of indicators pertaining to demand conditions, financial conditions, employment conditions and the price situation.

- The IOS would provide useful insight into the performance of the manufacturing sector.

- The IOS would be undertaken by Hansa Research Group Pvt Ltd.

Services and Infrastructure Outlook Survey (SIOS):

- The Services and Infrastructure Outlook Survey (SIOS) seeks an assessment of the business situation for the current quarter (January-March 2019) from selected companies in the services and infrastructure sectors in India, and their outlook for the ensuing quarter (April-June 2019).

- The SIOS would be undertaken by Spectrum Planning India Ltd.

GOVT. PLANS GODAVARI-CAUVERY INTERLINKING

GS 3: Economy | Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, and Railways etc.

Why in news?

- Union Ministry for Road Transport and Highways, Shipping and Water Resources has revealed Detailed Project Report (DPR) to take the backwaters of the Godavari up to the Cauvery river in Tamil Nadu.

Godavari-Cauvery Interlinking:

- The DPR for the river inter-linking project has already been prepared and is in the process of being submitted to the Cabinet. It is estimated to cost ₹60,000 crore.

- 1,100 tmcft of the backwater of the Godavari river was going into the sea and there was a dispute between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu over 45 tmcft of it.

- To solve the crisis, the Centre has decided to link up the above rivers.

- Once the Cabinet gives its nod, funds will be raised from the World Bank or the Asian Development Bank.

- It will mitigate the scarcity of water in A.P., Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu.

- It was former PM Vajpayee who conceived the idea of linking rivers from Ganga to Cauvery.

Significance:

- The backwaters will be carried through Krishna and Penna using steel pipes instead of developing canals en route as suggested by a non-resident engineer from Andhra Pradesh.

- By doing so, wastage of water from canals could be prevented and overall cost reduced.

GOVERNMENT TO DEVELOP AROUND 400 ABANDONED AIRSTRIPS

GS 3: Economy | Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, and Railways etc.

Why in news?

- The Union Government has decided to renovate and develop around 400 abandoned airstrips across the country to strengthen air-connectivity.

Highlights:

- The Union Government aims to renovate and develop the abandoned airstrips as modern airports along with the respective state governments to improve air connectivity across the country. The Airports Authority of India has prepared a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in this regard and sent it to all the 29 states and seven Union Territories expressing its willingness to develop the unused airstrips along with the respective state governments. The first such MoU was signed with Jharkhand government to develop the abandoned airstrip at Dhalbhumgarh.

- A modern airport at an initial investment of 100 crore rupees will be developed at Dhalbhumgarh and the first phase of the airport would be completed in 18 months.

- The airport will benefit adjoining states like West Bengal and Odisha and help push up economic growth as well as generate employment opportunity.

- The Dhalbhumgarh airstrip had been developed by Britishers during the World War II in Ghatsila sub-division of East Singhbhum district.

- Besides this, the Aviation Ministry is planning to set up an airport at Jamshedpur, which is considered to be the industrial capital of Jharkhand.

- According to estimates, there are 400 such airstrips lying abandoned across the country.

AMENDMENTS TO CURRENCY SWAP ARRANGEMENT FOR SAARC NATIONS

GS 3: Economy

Why in news?

- The Union Cabinet headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved the amendments to the framework on Currency Swap Arrangement for SAARC member countries.

Highlights:

- Amendments to Currency Swap Arrangement for SAARC nations approved by Cabinet

- The amendments incorporate a standby facility of USD 400 million.

- This stand-by facility enables India to provide a prompt response to the current request from SAARC member countries for availing the swap amount exceeding the present limit prescribed under the SAARC Swap Framework.

SAARC Swap Framework:

- The Framework on Currency Swap Arrangement for SAARC Member Countries was formulated with the intention to provide a line of funding for short term foreign exchange requirements or to meet the balance of payments crises till longer-term arrangements are made or the issue is resolved in the short-term itself.

- It was approved by the Government of India on March 1st, 2012.

- The agreement has enabled India to strengthen its ties with the SAARC countries together with improving financial stability in the region.

- This agreement also bolsters the credibility of India among the SAARC countries.

- Together with enhancing India's economic influence in the region, the agreement strengthens regional integration and inter-dependence.

VANDE BHARAT EXPRESS

GS 3: Economy | Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways, etc.

Prelims Level: Vande Bharat Express & Particulars

Why in news?

- Minister of Railways announced the name "Vande Bharat Express" for Train 18, acknowledging its made-in-India status.

Highlights:

- This train set has been manufactured by Integral Coach Factory (ICF) in the period of 18 months under 'Make in India' program.

- It can achieve high speeds (max speed of 160 kmph) due to faster acceleration & deceleration and will reduced journey time by 25% to 45%

- Vande Bharat Express incorporates many modern features which debut for the very first time on Indian Railways.

- It has been provided with 'State of the Art' passenger amenities like On-board wifi entertainment, GPS based passenger information system, CCTVs, bio-vacuum toilets, rotating chairs in executive class, etc. at par with global standards.

- It also has provision of Divyang-friendly facilities.

- It will have 16 coaches with Chair Car type configuration with 2 Executive Class Chair Cars and 14 Chair Cars.

- Further, it has intelligent braking system with power regeneration for better energy efficiency thereby making it cost, energy and environment efficient.

SKILL MINISTRY STRENGTHENS JAN SHIKSHAN SANSTHANS

GS 3: Economy | Development & Employment

Prelims level: Jan Shikshan Sansthan

Why in News?

- The government unveiled new guidelines for Jan Shikshan Sansthans (JSS) aligning them to the National Skills Qualification Framework with an aim to providing standardised training across sectors.

Scope of JSS:

- Develop/Source appropriate curriculum and training modules covering vocational elements general awareness and life enrichment components.

- Wherever possible, JSSs are encouraged to undertake training equivalent to courses designed by the Directorate of Adult Education, National Institute of Open Schooling and Director General, Employment & Training.

- Provide training to a pool of resource persons and master trainers for conducting training as also availability of infrastructure and training – specific equipment.

- Administer simple tests and award certificates.

- Network with employers and industries for trainees to get suitable placements

Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS):

- The scheme of JSS was initially launched in 1967 as Shramik Vidyapeeth, a polyvalent or multi-faceted adult education institution.

- Formerly under the Ministry of Human Resources Development, JSS was transferred to the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship in 2018.

- It was aimed at improving the vocational skills and quality of life of the industrial workers and their family members as well as those persons who had been migrating from rural to urban settings.

- Now it has challenging mandate of providing vocational skills to non-literate, neo-literates as well as school drop-outs by identifying skills that have a market in the region of their establishment.

Benifits and progress:

- JSS guidelines have been reformed keeping in mind the diverse stake-holders engaged in running these institutions.

- The JSS can play an important role in bridging information asymmetry between skill training and market opportunities thereby giving an impetus to the creation of a workforce equipped in technology-driven skills.

- By aligning JSSs to the National Skill Framework, the government aims to provide standardised training across sectors.

- Out of the 247 active JSSs, 43 have been established across 42 Aspirational Districts identified by NITI Aayog.

- The ministry will soon be introducing a few more in the LWE (left-wing extremism affected) regions to promote skill development of the youth in the region.

- In the past five years, over eight lakh people have benefitted from the JSS scheme. More than 86,000 men have been registered.

- More importantly there has been an unprecedented surge in the registration of women, with over 7 lakh registrations.

- It further said the JSSs have helped open over 1 lakh bank accounts under Jan Dhan Yojana and mobilised around 7.5 lakh beneficiaries who were enrolled in PM Suraksha Bima Yojana.

- With a substantial rise in establishment of more than 1 lakh entrepreneurs, JSS has successfully generated employment across various sectors.

EAC-PM REVIEWSSTOCK OF THE STATE OF ECONOMY

GS 3: Economy

Why in News?

- The Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) had a meeting and took stock of the state of the economy.

Challenges Identified and to be addressed:

- Amongst challenges that need to be addressed are reforms in the-
  - ✓ Agricultural sector
  - ✓ The MSME sector
  - ✓ Skill development
  - ✓ Credit issues
  - ✓ Digital payments and the banking sector reforms.

Highlights:

- The Council endorsed that the macro-economic fundamentals of the economy are sound, but challenged remain, several of which are structural in nature. While the prospects for world economic growth does not look very promising, particularly in the advanced

economics, there is sufficient amount of growth momentum in emerging market economies.

- India is not insulted from global developments.

- Nevertheless, India's growth is expected to be in the 7-7.5% range in the next few years; one of the fastest in the world. However, with reforms designed to address the structural problems, growth rates can easily be enhanced by at least 1%.

UDAN 3 SCHEME

GS 3: Economy | Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways, etc.

Prelims level: UDAN 3 Scheme

Why in News?

- The union Minister for Civil Aviation and Commerce announced the results of Phase 3 bidders under Ude Desh Ka Aam Naagrik (UDAN) Scheme.

UDAN 3 Scheme Features:

- Inclusion of Tourism Routes under UDAN 3 in coordination with the Ministry of Tourism

- Inclusion of Seaplanes for connecting Water Aerodromes

- Bringing in a number of routes in the North-East Region under the ambit of UDAN

UDAN Scheme:

- It is an innovative scheme to develop the regional aviation market.

- It is a market-based mechanism in which airlines bid for seat subsidies.

- This first-of-its-kind scheme globally will create affordable yet economically viable and profitable flights on regional routes so that flying becomes affordable to the common man.

- It envisages providing connectivity to un-served and under-served airports of the country through revival of existing air-strips and airports. The operators could seek a Viability Gap Funding (VGF) apart from getting various concessions. The scheme also provides for various benefits including no airport charges and three-year exclusivity on the routes.

- The States have a key role under the scheme. The selection of airports where UDAN would start would be done in consultation with State Government and after confirmation of their concessions.

- The UDAN is likely to a give a major fillip to tourism and employment generation in the hinterland.

WTO e-COMMERCE NEGOTIATIONS

Why in News?

- India decided to stay out of the WTO e-commerce negotiations announced by about 75 members at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

The negotiation agendas:

- Permanent moratorium on customs duties.

- Free flow of data located on computer servers without data localization requirements.

- Non-disclosure of source code.

- Prohibition of forced technology transfer.

Problems with E-commerce:

- Highly asymmetrical space with a few dominant players having the potential to distort a level playing field.

- Meaning of e-commerce varies from one country to the other

- E-commerce rules are yet at nascent stage.

India's stand:

- Not to be part of any plurilateral talks because such initiatives strike at the very root of multilateralism. India's huge data reserve and its impact on real economy and management of data without compromising privacy and security considerations are still in progress. RBI's recent policy mandating data localization. Unsettled E-commerce regulations especially those related to foreign direct investment: marketplace and inventory model.

Way forward:

- India should manage its huge precious data resource on its own terms.

- Status-quo on e-commerce should be maintained till developing countries understand what is at stake in the area of global e-commerce rule-making.

- Provide weight to India similar stand on e-commerce issues at ongoing talk of RCEP.

- China is a proponent of e-commerce negotiations both at the WTO and RCEP is another reason for India to step carefully.

REGIONAL TESTING LABORATORY OF CPRI AT NASHIK

GS 3: Economy | Infrastructure: Energy

Why in news?

- Union Minister of State (IC) for Power and New & Renewable Energy, Government of India laid the foundation stone of Regional testing laboratory of Central Power Research Institute (CPRI) at Nashik, Maharashtra

Significance:

- Manufacturers in the western region will be greatly benefited as they can test their products close to their manufacturing units.

- This would reduce the turnaround time and overhead cost.

- This shall help the power utilities in the country to install reliable and quality equipment in the power system network.

CPRI:

- To cater to the testing needs, CPRI, Autonomous body under Ministry of Power, Govt of India serves as an Independent third party testing laboratory.

- CPRI has been serving for the past five decades in the field of Testing and Certification, Research, Consultancy, Third Party Inspection services, Training & Vendor Analysis.

7. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
PAKISTAN TO ISSUE PANDA BONDS TO RAISE CAPITAL IN CHINA

GS 2: IR | Bilateral, regional & global groupings & agreements involving India &/or affecting India's interests

Why in News?

- The government of Pakistan has decided to launch Panda Bonds to raise loans from Chinese capital markets.

Highlights:

- Launching of Panda Bonds is part of Pakistan's plans to move towards giving the Chinese currency, a status at par with that enjoyed by the US dollar. The interest rates and the size of the bonds would be decided at a later stage. The Finance Ministry of Pakistan has said

that the Panda Bonds are part of its multipronged approach for bridging the foreign financing needs and building foreign exchange reserves.

- Panda Bonds will help Pakistan to diversify the investor base of capital market issuance and provide a source of raising renminbi.

- China is Pakistan's largest trading partner.

- Pakistan has the highest trade deficit with China.

- The raising of capital in Chinese currency will aid Pakistan to bridge the deficit.

Panda Bonds:

- Panda bonds are Chinese renminbi-denominated bonds from a non-Chinese issuer, sold in the People's Republic of China.

- The first two Panda bonds were issued in October 2005 on the by the International Finance Corporation and the Asian Development Bank on the same day.

- The Philippines issued its inaugural Panda bonds in 2018.

- It was the first ASEAN member to issue Panda bonds.

INDIA, PAKISTAN EXCHANGE LIST OF NUCLEAR INSTALLATIONS

GS 2: IR | India & its neighbourhood- relations

Prelims level: Non-nuclear Aggression Agreement

Why in news?

- India and Pakistan has exchanged for the 28th consecutive year a list of their nuclear installations under a bilateral agreement that prohibits them from attacking each other's atomic facilities.

Non-Nuclear Aggression Agreement:

- It is a bilateral and nuclear weapons control treaty between India and Pakistan, on the reduction (or limitation) of nuclear arms and pledged not to attack or assist foreign powers to attack on each other's nuclear installations and facilities.

- It was signed on December 31, 1988 and came into force on January 27, 1991.

- The agreement says that the two countries will inform each other of nuclear installations and facilities to be covered under the agreement on January 1 of every calendar year.

- The two countries have adhered to the practice of exchanging the lists of prisoners and nuclear installations despite recurring tensions.

RAISINA DIALOGUE

GS 2: IR | Bilateral, regional & global groupings & agreements involving India &/or affecting India's interests

Prelims level: Raisina Dialogue

Why in News?

- Admiral Christophe Prazuck, Chief of the Naval Staff, French Navy is visiting India from 06 Jan 19 in conjunction with Raisina Dialogue (08-09 Jan 19).

Aim of the meet:

- The visit aims to consolidate bilateral naval relations between India and France, as also to explore new avenues for naval cooperation.

- A range of issues of mutual interest to both navies, encompassing maritime operations, training, logistics and maintenance would be discussed during these meetings.

Raisina Dialogue:

- Raisina Dialogue is an annual conference held in New Delhi. It is envisioned to be India's flagship conference of geopolitics and geo-economics.

- The name of conference comes from Raisina Hill which is the elevation in New Delhi where presidential palace of India, Rashtrapati Bhavan is located.

- It is premeditated to explore prospects and opportunities for Asian integration and Asia's integration with the bigger world. It is an asserted on India's significant role in the Indian Ocean Region and how India could build a stable regional and world order along with its partners.

- It is organized on the lines of the Shangri-La Dialogue held in Singapore.

- It is structured as a multi-stakeholder, cross-sectorial conclave, involving policy and decision makers, including cabinet ministers from various Governments, high-level Government officials and policy practitioners, leading personalities from business and industry etc.

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LAUNCH OF SINO-INDIAN DIGITAL COLLABORATION PLAZA

GS 2: IR | India & its neighbourhood- relations

Prelims level: SIDCOP

Why in news?

- The Sino-Indian Digital Collaboration Plaza (SIDCOP), an initiative to bring Indian IT companies and Chinese enterprises closer to each other on a single AI enabled platform was launched.

SIDCOP:

- This is a partnership by National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) with Municipal Governments of Guiyang and Dalian , China.

- A Joint Venture comprising of one Indian and Chinese company has been tasked with the running of the platform.

- SIDCOP is a boundary-less marketplace offers this opportunity for Chinese enterprises in order to assist them in operational optimization and adopting industry best practices in business solutions.

- Indian IT enterprises are world renowned for their expertise in business transformation and operational optimization by using IT tools in complex business environments.

- This platform could be useful to connect with top providers from India and help Chinese enterprises source the right solution providers for their projects.

FIRST INDIA-CENTRAL ASIA DIALOGUE TO BE HELD IN UZBEKISTAN

GS 2: IR | Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interest

Prelims level: India-Central Asia Dialogue

Why in news?

- The first India-Central Asia Dialogue will be held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan and will be co-chaired by India's External Affairs Minister (EAM).

Highlights:

- The Foreign Minister of Afghanistan will participate in the dialogue as a special invitee for the session dedicated to connectivity issues in the region. While the representatives from

Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan will represent their respective countries at the event.

- Bound together through shared history and cultural linkages, India and the Central Asian states look forward to the Dialogue as an important initiative to enhance their cooperation in wide-ranging spheres.

- These include exploring ways to substantially enhance India's economic involvement in business and development sector of Central Asia.

- The participants will deliberate on developing viable connectivity options between India and Afghanistan and Central Asia to further facilitate trade and economic activity in the region.

ISRO TO LAUNCH SATELLITE TO HELP MHA IN SECURING BORDERS

GS 3: Internal Security | Role of external state & non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security

Why in news?

- A satellite will be launched by the ISRO exclusively for the Home Ministry to help it strengthen its frontiers with Pakistan and Bangladesh among others.

Securing Borders:

- The move is part of recommendations made by a task force on the use of space technology in improving border management which have been accepted by Home Minister.

- India shares land borders with Pakistan, China, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar.

- This project will strengthen island and border security and facilitate development of infrastructure in border/island areas.

- To execute the project in a time bound manner, a short, medium and long-term plan has been proposed for implementation in five years in close coordination with the ISRO and the Defence Ministry.

- Major recommendations of the report are to build capacity in border guarding forces to use space resources for security, operational planning and border infrastructure development.

- In short term, immediate needs of border guarding forces will be met by procurement of high resolution imagery and the hiring of bandwidth for communications.

- In mid-term, one satellite is being launched by the ISRO for exclusive use of the MHA.

Ground Network using space technology:

- The MHA will develop ground segment and network infrastructure to share satellite resources by user agencies, develop a central archival facility for storing various imagery resources and dissemination of the same to user agencies.

- Deployment of the CAPF in remote areas will be also coordinated by satellite communications.

- IRNSS-based GPS will provide navigation facilities for operational parties in high altitude, remote and difficult borders and LWE areas.

- The Border Security Force has been designated as lead agency for implementation of ground segment and network infrastructure, including the establishment of the archival facility.

- Island development, border security, communication and navigation, Geographic Information System (GIS) and operations planning system, and border infrastructure development are the areas identified for use of space technology.

A Special Task Force:

- The MHA has created a task force to identify areas for use of space technology in improving border management.

- The task force headed by Joint Secretary (Border Management), having members from the BSF, the Department of Space and BM division of the Home Ministry.

INTERNATIONAL SOLAR ALLIANCE BANK

GS 2: IR | Important International institutions, agencies & fora, their structure, mandate

Why in news?

- The International Solar Alliance (ISA) is going to propose a new bank exclusively for financing energy access to billions.

ISA Bank:

- The bank is still at the ideation stage.

- ISA has asked the Asian Development Bank to prepare a concept note. A public-private partnership is being thought of for the proposed, which will work for 1.2 billion people who lack access to energy as well as the 2.4 billion who lack access to clean energy.

- According to a recent World Bank report, 600 million people would continue to have no access to energy even in 2040.
- Those using kerosene and other fuels that are costlier than renewable options.
- The bank would need to prioritise these groups and develop a mechanism.
- Existing banks do not focus on universal energy access those still deprived are the poorest of the poor.
- Hence ISA needs special finance mechanism which can target these people.

INDIA AND JAPAN CONDUCTED DISASTER CONTROL EXERCISE

Why in News?

- The Coast Guards of India and Japan undertook disaster control, search and rescue exercises off the coast of Yokohama in Japan.

Highlights:

- India had hosted the Japanese ships for the exercise last year and this time Japan is hosting the exercise.
- ICGS Shaunak is the main Indian ship taking part in the drills.
- This exercise aims to share their expertise in disaster management as both the nations have huge experience in disaster management as Japan regularly faces earthquakes and sea storms while the Indian Coast Guard round the year manages the over 7,000-kilometre coastline of the country.

ICGS Shaunak:

- ICGS Shaunak is an Offshore Patrol Vessel of Indian Coast Guards.
- This 105-meter vessel is capable of carrying a twin-engine light helicopter and five high-speed boats including two quick reaction inflatable boats for swift boarding operations, search and rescue, law enforcement and maritime patrol.
- ICGS Shaunak is fitted with navigation and communication equipment, sensors and machinery including 30 mm CRN 91 naval gun, integrated bridge system, integrated machinery control system, power management system (PMS) and high power external fire fighting system.

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MOU BETWEEN INDIA AND KUWAIT ON RECRUITMENT OF DOMESTIC WORKERS

GS 2: IR | Bilateral relations

Why in news?

- The Union Cabinet headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and Kuwait for cooperation on the recruitment of domestic workers.

Highlights:

- The MoU will provide a structured framework for cooperation on domestic workers related matters.

- It provides for strengthened safeguards for Indian domestic workers including female workers deployed in Kuwait.

- Initially valid for five years, it has a provision for automatic renewal.

- The MoU also proposes setting up of a joint committee that will be set up to follow up the implementation.

- The MoU will benefit around 3 lakh Indian workers deployed in Kuwait, including about 90,000 female domestic workers and promotes bilateral cooperation in domestic workers-related matters between the two countries.