



AN INITIATIVE BY
VETRII IAS

VETRII IAS GATEWAY

www.iasgateway.com

MAINS **CURRENT AFFAIRS** APRIL - 2019

1.	EC CLEARS REVISED MGNREGA WAGE RATES FROM APRIL 1	- 14
2.	CENTRE SETS UP TRIBUNAL TO WEATHER ADJUDICATE TO BAN JAMAAT-E-ISLAMI	- 14
3.	VVPAT SLIPS: SC GRANTS WEEK TO OPPOSITION FOR FILING REPLY	- 15
4.	PRESIDENT RAM NATH KOVIND VISITS PABLO NERUDA MUSEUM IN CHILE	- 15
5.	US, SOUTH KOREA DEFENCE CHIEFS MEET ON DENUCLEARIZATION	- 16
6.	CHINA, U.S. LOCK HORNS OVER MASOOD AZHAR	- 17
7.	INDIA, CHILE AGREE TO WORK TOGETHER TO DEFEAT TERRORISM & ITS MANIFESTATIONS	- 17
8.	UAE TO ISSUE EQUIVALENCY TO ALL INDIAN DEGREES	- 18
9.	NMDC SURPASSES 30 MILLION TONNES PRODUCTION AND SALES FOR 3RD YEAR	- 19
10.	ISRO SUCCESSFULLY LAUNCHES INDIA'S LATEST EMISAT DEFENCE SATELLITE	- 20
11.	SPIDER RESEARCH YET TO PICK UP PACE IN INDIA, SAY EXPERTS	- 21
12.	INDIA NEEDS AT LEAST THREE MORE SPY SATELLITES	- 22
13.	DEEPENING INSECURITY	- 22
14.	DETENTION OF FOREIGNERS: SC DIRECTS ASSAM CHIEF SECT TO APPEAR BEFORE	- 24
15.	CHINA'S EU OVERTURES	- 24
16.	HOW TO ACHIEVE 24X7 POWER FOR ALL	- 30
17.	INDIA INKS AN AGREEMENT WITH A DEVELOPMENT BANK FOR SETTING UP INDIA-AFRICA INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURE & RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN MALAWI	- 32
18.	INDIA AND CHILE EXCHANGE THREE MOUs FOR COOPERATION	- 32
19.	US APPROVES SALE OF 24 MH 60 ROMEO SEAHAWK HELICOPTERS TO INDIA	- 33
20.	SRI LANKAN GOVT REJECTS CONCERNs RAISED OVER PROPOSED OIL REFINERY PROJECT IN HAMBANTOTA	- 33
21.	MORE THAN 113 MILLION PEOPLE SUFFER ACUTE HUNGER: UN	- 34
22.	INDIA URGES PAK. TO REPATRIATE FISHERMEN	- 35
23.	WWF SOUNDS ALARM AFTER 48 LBS OF PLASTIC FOUND IN DEAD WHALE	- 35
24.	GROUNDWATER SYSTEM STILL EXISTS ON MARS: STUDY	- 36
25.	THIRD EDITION OF BILATERAL MARITIME EXERCISE BETWEEN ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AND INDIAN NAVIES – AUSINDEX-19 SET TO BEGIN	- 37
26.	4 th SESSION OF INDIA-UKRAINE WORKING GROUP ON TRADE AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION HELD IN NEW DELHI	- 38
27.	OVER 1.2 M EARLY DEATHS IN INDIA DUE TO AIR POLLUTION	- 39
28.	TRAI ASKS TELCOS TO SUBMIT PLAN DETAILS OF SEGMENTED OFFERS EVERY MONTH	- 40
29.	SOUTH KOREA TO LAUNCH WORLD'S FIRST NATIONAL 5G NETWORKS	- 40
30.	NITI AAYOG CALLS FOR NEW REGULATIONS FOR BANK LOANS' REPAYMENT	- 41

31. BLEACHING HITS WORLD'S SOUTHERNMOST CORAL REEF	- 41
32. STUDY SHOWS TINY BLACK HOLES MAY NOT ACCOUNT FOR DARK MATTER AS STATED BY STEPHEN HAWKING	- 42
33. SAVING THE OLIVE RIDLEYES OF VISAKHAPATNAM COAST	- 43
34. SET UP EXPERT COMMITTEE TO PROBE CAUSE OF KERALA FLOOD: AMICUS CURIAE	- 44
35. NUGEN MOBILITY SUMMIT 2019	- 45
36. AIR MARSHAL D CHOWDHURY TAKES OVER AS SASO HQ WAC	- 46
37. ICC TO JOIN HANDS WITH INTERPOL TO FIGHT CORRUPTION IN SPORT	- 46
38. PAKISTAN COULD BE BLACKLISTED BY PARIS-BASED FATF	- 47
39. ELECTION CODE AND NEW AGE MEDIA	- 48
40. PROVING A POINT ON AUDIT TRAIL	- 49
41. UAE CONFERS PRESTIGIOUS ZAYED MEDAL ON PM MODI	- 51
42. NO SURPRISES: ON RBI REPO RATE CUT	- 52
43. NITI AAYOG CALLS FOR NEW REGULATIONS FOR BANK LOANS' REPAYMENT	- 56
44. BRUNEI INTRODUCES SHARIA LAWS; MAKES ADULTERY & HOMOSEXUALITY PUNISHABLE	- 56
45. MAITRI BRIDGE: LONGEST SUSPENSION BRIDGE	- 57
46. INDIA SAYS, PAKISTAN HAS NOT ADDRESSED CONCERN RAISED BY IT OVER KARTARPUR CORRIDOR	- 57
47. SKYMET SEES BELOW-NORMAL SOUTH-WEST MONSOON	- 58
48. PHILIPPINES' DUTERTE WARNS CHINA TO BACK OFF DISPUTED ISLAND	- 58
49. 15 th FINANCE COMMISSION HOLDS HIGH LEVEL DISCUSSIONS ON 'FISCAL RELATIONS ACROSS LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT'	- 59
50. HEALTH MINISTRY FORMED SOLIDARITY HUMAN CHAIN	- 61
51. OUTER CLARITY: ON 'WEAPONISATION' OF OUTER SPACE	- 62
52. TRADITIONAL NEW YEAR FESTIVITIES BEING HELD IN SEVERAL PARTS OF COUNTRY	- 63
53. EC REMOVES ANDHRA PRADESH CHIEF SECRETARY ANIL CHANDRA PUNETHA	- 63
54. YOGA GAINING POPULARITY ACROSS THE WORLD	- 64
55. US, CHINA CLOSE TO STRIKING A MONUMENTAL TRADE DEAL	- 64
56. DAVID MALPASS SELECTED AS PRESIDENT OF WORLD BANK	- 64
57. RBI TWEAKED LCR NORMS TO BOOST LIQUIDITY	- 65
58. AMBITIONS BEYOND GROWTH	- 65
59. CO2 LEVELS HIGHEST IN 3 MILLION YEARS	- 66
60. VACUUM ASSISTED AIRPLANE TOILET INVENTED	- 66
61. CHINA DEPLOYED NEW MISSILE DESTROYER	- 66
62. NEW CHIEF JUSTICE OF CALCUTTA SAWN IN	- 66

63. NEW TUG BAHADUR IN NAVY FLEET	- 67
64. RINZIN DWAR INAUGURATED IN SHIMLA	- 67
65. KERALA FORESTS HOME TO NEW SPIDER SPECIES	- 68
66. US TO DESIGNATE IRAN'S REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS AS TERRORIST ORGANIZATION	- 68
67. G7 CALLS FOR GREATER ROLE FOR WOMEN IN PEACE PROCESSES	- 69
68. INDIAN NAVY SIGNS MOU WITH CSIR	- 69
69. INDIAN NAVY TO ACQUIRE 6 LETHAL SUBMARINES	- 70
70. JAPAN'S PROBE DROPS EXPLOSIVE ON ASTEROID	- 70
71. DISCOVERY OF 'DEATH SWITCH' MECHANISM IN PLANTS MAY YIELD STRONGER CROPS	- 71
72. ARMY COMMANDERS' CONFERENCE	- 72
73. AMAL CLOONEY APPOINTED U.K.'S MEDIA ENVOY	- 72
74. SHAH RUKH CONFERRED WITH HONORARY DOCTORATE	- 72
75. BOLIVIA JOINS INTERNATIONAL SOLAR ALLIANCE	- 73
76. CCMB SCIENTISTS MAKE MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH	- 73
77. FITCH AFFIRMS INDIA'S RATING AT BBB	- 74
78. INDIA'S FIRST A.I ENABLED MOTORCYCLE	- 74
79. GLOBAL COALITION FOR CLEAN COOLING LAUNCHED	- 75
80. A VILLAGE WITH CARBON-POSITIVE TAG	- 76
81. CAPITAL HIGH: FOREIGN INVESTMENT IN INDIA	- 76
82. WORLD HEALTH DAY: 7 APRIL	- 78
83. NATIONAL HANDLOOM WEEK: APRIL 7-14	- 79
84. SEBI GAVE NOD FOR AIRPORT FUND	- 79
85. JUSTICE NANDRAJOG SWORN IN AS CJ OF BHC	- 80
86. LIN DAN CLINCHED MALAYSIA OPEN	- 80
87. YELLOW WEATHER WARNING FOR HIMACHAL PRADESH	- 80
88. INS SHAKTI TO TAKE PART IN CHINESE CELEBRATION	- 81
89. COAL IMPORT ROSE TO 8% IN APR-FEB FY 2019	- 81
90. MELTING OF ARCTIC ICE IMPACTS INDIA	- 82
91. BATTLE OF KANGLA TONGBI: PLATINUM JUBILEE	- 82
92. OPEN UP THE SUPREME COURT	- 83
93. GUWAHATI RAILWAY STATION FIRST TO GET ISO CERTIFICATION IN INDIA	- 85
94. INDIA HIGHEST RECIPIENT OF REMITTANCES	- 85
95. US, IRAN DESIGNATE EACH OTHER'S ORGANIZATIONS AS SUPPORTERS OF TERRORISM	- 86
96. AVAADA ENERGY RAISED RS.1000 CRORE FROM ADB	- 86
97. ISAAK HAYIK SET NEW RECORD	- 86

98. NGT FORMED COMMITTEE	- 87
99. ARMY GETS MORE FIRE POWER WITH DHANUSH	- 87
100. INDIA, SRI LANKA AGREE TO INCREASE COOPERATION	- 88
101. BREXIT AND THE FRAGILITY OF THE U.K.	- 88
102. TRICKERIES OF THE MONEY BILL	- 90
103. DOGS CAN SNIFF OUT CANCER WITH 97% ACCURACY	- 93
104. YUTU TRAVELED 170 M ON MOON	- 93
105. BLACK HOLE PHOTOGRAPH RELEASED	- 93
106. ELEMENTS CAN BE SOLID AND LIQUID AT SAME TIME	- 94
107. INDIA'S GOLD RESERVES INCREASED	- 94
108. IMF FORECASTS DIPPED IN GLOBAL GROWTH	- 95
109. 17 th EDITION OF WEF HELD	- 95
110. LONDON: 1 st TO IMPLEMENT POLLUTION CHARGE ZONE	- 95
111. PFS PARTNERED WITH UNICEF	- 96
112. RAFALE REBUFF	- 96
113. JALLIANWALA BAGH MASSACRE: 'DEEP REGRET' IS SIMPLY NOT GOOD ENOUGH	- 98
114. APPOINTMENTS OF HIGHCOURT JUDGES	- 100
115. NGT SET CENTRAL MONITORING PANEL	- 100
116. PROCUREMENT OF 464 T-90 TANKS CLEARED	- 101
117. DOST EDUCATION BAGGED TECH PRIZE	- 101
118. UK INTRODUCED ONLINE SAFETY REGULATIONS	- 101
119. NAMAMI GANGE GOT GLOBAL RECOGNITION	- 102
120. INDIA'S POPULATION GREW AT 1.2% AVERAGE	- 102
121. CYCLONE IDAI'S DEATH TOLL ROSE TO 1000	- 103
122. INDIA BUILDS MATERNITY HOSPITAL IN NEPAL	- 103
123. VICE PRESIDENT CONFERRED AWARDS	- 103
124. RIVER PERIYAR WITNESSED DECOLORISATION	- 104
125. VARANASI: THIRD MOST POLLUTED CITY	- 104
126. INDIA TO BE GUEST OF HONOUR AT ADIBF 2019	- 105
127. SIVA REDDY SELECTED FOR SARASWATI SAMMAN 2018	- 105
128. INDIA, SWEDEN INKED PACT	- 105
129. INDIAN COMPANIES GREW 18%	- 106
130. NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM HELD IN DELHI	- 106
131. INDIA, NETHERLANDS TO STRENGTHEN TIES	- 107
132. SPACEX CARRIED OUT FIRST COMMERCIAL LAUNCH	- 108

133. INDIA STARES A PILE OF SOLAR E-WASTE	- 108
134. 2 BENGAL GOVERNMENT SCHEMES WON UN AWARDS	- 109
135. EU, UK AGREED TO DELAY BREXIT	- 109
136. AFC CONFERENCE INAUGURATED	- 110
137. A GRIM FUTURE IN ISRAEL	- 110
138. NOT HALF-DONE: ENSURING FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS	- 112
139. HONG KONG IS THIRD-LARGEST STOCK MARKET	- 115
140. US: LEGISLATION FOR US-INDIA PARTNERSHIP	- 115
141. INDIA, ASEAN TO BOOST MARITIME TIES	- 116
142. PM MODI TO RECEIVE ORDER OF ST ANDREW	- 116
143. RETAIL INFLATION UP TO 2.86% IN MARCH	- 117
144. RBI ISSUES NORMS FOR CURRENCY CHESTS	- 117
145. JALLIANWALA BAGH MASSACRE CENTENARY	- 118
146. OIL IMPORT FROM IRAN MAY BE REDUCED AS U.S. CMFRI AND ISRO INK MOU TO	- 118
147. CMFRI AND ISRO INK MOU TO PROTECT WETLANDS	- 120
148. IMO'S NEW RULE ON INFORMATION EXCHANGE	- 120
149. WORLD ALLERGY WEEK 2019: 7-13 APRIL	- 121
150. IMPACT OF SPACE TRAVEL ON ASTRONAUTS REVEALED	- 121
151. NEW SENSOR CAN DETECT DANGEROUS CHEMICALS	- 122
152. OIL CONSUMING BACTERIA FOUND AT SEA BOTTOM	- 122
153. GIANT BARRIERS TO KEEP WASTE OUT OF THE OCEANS	- 123
154. INDIA TO PARTNER WITH JAPAN AND UAE	- 123
155. MEDICAL DEVICES TO GET CDSCO CERTIFICATION	- 123
156. NEW UREA POLICY 2015 EXTENDED	- 124
157. ADDITIONAL POST OF DEPUTY CAG CLEARED	- 124
158. SOUTH WEST MONSOON SEASONAL RAINFALL OVER THE COUNTRY LIKELY TO BE NORMAL	- 125
159. RBI EMPLOYEES NOT GOVERNMENT SERVANTS	- 126
160. UAE TO HOST WORLD'S FOREMOST AI SUMMIT	- 126
161. UNESCO CANO PRESS FREEDOM PRIZE ANNOUNCED	- 127
162. LAST FEMALE RARE TURTLE SPECIES DIED	- 127
163. EGYPT UNVEILED 4300 YEARS OLD TOMB	- 128
164. ESEL WORLD LAUNCHED BIRD PARK	- 128
165. APOLLO HOSPITALS LAUNCHED ADVANCED CENTRE	- 128
166. LEWIS HAMILTON WON FORMULA ONE'S 1,000TH RACE	- 129
167. MEENA KUMARI CLINCHED GOLD IN BOXING WORLD CUP	- 129

168. HIGHWAY HURDLE – VERDICT ON THE CHENNAI-SALEM CORRIDOR	- 129
169. SC BANNED MINING ACTIVITIES IN KAZIRANGA PARK	- 130
170. SANITARY PAD MACHINES TO BE INSTALLED	- 130
171. GREENAM ENERGY SET UP POWER PLANT	- 131
172. 12 MONTHS TO SELL NON-CRORE ASSETS	- 131
173. INS MAGAR REACHED MOZAMBIQUE	- 132
174. EXPORTS OUTSPACE IMPORTS AT 11%	- 132
175. INDIA NARROWED TRADE DEFICIT WITH CHINA	- 132
176. BAMBOO RICE IN ODISHA AFTER FOUR DECADES	- 133
177. 300% INCREASE IN MEASLES GLOBALLY	- 133
178. NOTRE DAM IN PARIS CAUGHT FIRE	- 134
179. INS KOZHIKODE DECOMMISSIONED	- 134
180. DRDO SUCCESSFULLY TEST-FIRED NIRBHAY	- 134
181. IMPLICATIONS OF THE INDONESIAN VOTE	- 135
182. EARTH'S SURFACE HEATING UP: NASA STUDY	- 137
183. ELIGIBLE NBFCs TO GET LICENSE	- 138
184. MUJIBNAGAR DAY OBSERVED IN BANGLADESH	- 138
185. ADB PROVIDED LOAN TO INDIA	- 139
186. GOOGLE OPENED AI LAB IN GHANA	- 139
187. MITHALI RAJ: GOODWILL AMBASSADOR SCCWC 2019	- 139
188. NASA FOUND ALIEN WORLD	- 140
189. COAST GUARD SHIP VEERA COMMISSIONED	- 140
190. ICC PARTNERED WITH UNICEF	- 140
191. DURJANPUR TO BE RENAMED AS SHIVDHAM	- 140
192. WORLD HAEMOPHILIA DAY: APRIL 17	- 141
193. 3-MEMBER WOMEN TEAM SET OUT TO SUMMIT EVEREST	- 141
194. BBC INDIA LAUNCHED CHATBOT	- 142
195. GOVT GRANTED FINANCIAL POWERS TO BUY WEAPONS	- 142
196. ASTRONOMERS DISCOVERED 3RD PLANET	- 142
197. RBI PUT RS 50 NOTES INTO CIRCULATION	- 142
198. WORKSHOP ON LOSS & DAMAGE CONDUCTED	- 143
199. FMCG GROWTH TO SLOW DOWN IN 2019	- 143
200. GOVT BONDS ISSUANCE JUMPED TO RS. 64,192 CR.	- 144
201. GOVT TARGETES IRCTC, IRFC IPOS	- 144
202. MT EVEREST TO GET AN ECO-FRIENDLY TOILET	- 144

203. MARS BASED SIMULATOR UNVEILED IN GOBI DESERT	- 145
204. THUNDERSTORM LEAVES 50 DEAD IN 4 STATES	- 145
205. SPACEX TO FLY ITS DART MISSION	- 145
206. IDRBT SET UP 5G LAB FOR BANKING SECTOR	- 146
207. WORLD HERITAGE DAY: 18 APRIL	- 146
208. GOVERNMENT SUSPENDS LOC TRADE IN J&K	- 146
209. 2 nd EDITION OF IN – VPN BILAT EX CONCLUDED	- 147
210. TIME 100 MOST INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE REPORT	- 147
211. DEEPEST RADIO IMAGES OF SUN CREATED	- 147
212. TITAN HAS 100 M DEEP METHANE LAKES	- 148
213. BANKS MUST FLAG BAD LOANS	- 148
214. BEIJING SURPRISE: CHINA'S GROWTH	- 149
215. EITHER WAY, THE NEWS IS BAD	- 157
216. HUMANISE THE LAW: DRAFT INDIAN FOREST ACT	- 159
217. WORLD LIVER DAY OBSERVED ON 19 th APRIL	- 161
218. 220 MILLION YR OLD DINOSAUR FOSSILS FOUND	- 161
219. 14 PRODUCTS RECEIVED GI TAGS	- 162
220. SCIENTISTS IDENTIFIED GREEN MATERIAL	- 162
221. TERRA DRONE INKED PACT WITH IIT HYD	- 163
222. FINTECH STARTUPS TO TEST REGULATORY SANDBOX	- 163
223. EXIM BANK FUNDED PROJECTS IN RWANDA	- 164
224. 20 STATES JOINED HELPLINE NUMBER 112	- 164
225. WHO ISSUED GUIDELINES ON DIGITAL HEALTH TECH	- 164
226. I-T DEPT PROPOSES NEW NORMS FOR TAXING MNCS	- 165
227. UPI PAYMENTS NOW LIVE ON ETMONEY APP	- 165
228. NEPAL LAUNCHED ITS FIRST SATELLITE FROM USA	- 166
229. BANDHAN BANK TO MERGE WITH GRUH FINANCE	- 166
230. CANARA BANK: 1ST TO MEET RBIS EMV MANDATE	- 166
231. IMF AND WB LAUNCHED LEARNING COINS	- 167
232. FED UP WITH STATUS QUO, UKRAINIANS MAY ELECT COMEDIAN IN PRESIDENTIAL RUN-OFF - 167	
233. IN SEEK ACCESS TO FRENCH BASE IN DJIBOUTI	- 169
234. INDIA RANKED 140 IN WPFI 2019	- 169
235. INDIAN-AMERICAN SCIENTIST IN HALL OF FAME	- 170
236. UN REPORT ON MAJOR INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENTS	- 170
237. SAUDI INCREASED INDIA'S HAJ QUOTA TO 2 LAKH	- 171

238. INDIA REBUILD KUNDELING MONASTERY IN NEPAL	- 171
239. UN HONOURED INDIAN PEACEKEEPERS	- 172
240. HIGH PROPORTION OF ANTIBACTERIA AGENTS IN GANGA	- 172
241. GOLD IMPORTS DIPPED 3% IN FY19	- 173
242. ASIAN TEA ALLIANCE LAUNCHED IN CHINA	- 173
243. INT. HOCKEY FED IMPOSED FINE ON PAKISTAN	- 174
244. U.S. TO ANNOUNCE END TO SANCTIONS WAIVERS FOR IRAN OIL IMPORTS: SOURCE	- 174
245. LONGEST SPACEFLIGHT BY A WOMAN	- 176
246. PIO-LED TEAM'S CUBESAT TO BE LAUNCHED BY NASA	- 176
247. BOM JOINS M1XCHANGE TREDS PLATFORM	- 176
248. SAUDI ARABIA TO HOST G20 LEADERS' SUMMIT	- 177
249. SRI LANKA'S 1ST SATELLITE 'RAAVANA-1' LAUNCHED	- 177
250. UNIVERSE'S FIRST MOLECULE DETECTED IN SPACE	- 178
251. CRISIL TO TRANSFER RATING BUSINESS	- 178
252. ELECTION COMMISSION LAUNCHES VOTER TURNOUT APP	- 178
253. ANTARES LAUNCHES CYGNUS ON ISS CARGO MISSION	- 179
254. GUIDED MISSILE DESTROYER INS IMPHAL LAUNCHED	- 179
255. WORLD'S FIRST ARMED AMPHIBIOUS DRONE BOAT	- 180
256. WORLD EARTH DAY: 22 APRIL	- 180
257. US TO END SANCTION WAIVERS TO INDIA	- 181
258. ESIC DATA SHOWS A DROP IN JOB CREATION	- 181
259. JAN DHAN BANK DEPOSITS TO CROSS RS 1 LAKH CR	- 182
260. NEW LEVEL OF COMPLEXITY IN DOLPHINS: STUDY	- 182
261. INDIAN BATTLESHIPS ARRIVED IN CHINA	- 183
262. NAVAL COMMANDERS CONFERENCE TO BEGIN	- 183
263. HIMALAYAN EXPEDITION FLAGGED IN LEH	- 184
264. LINE OF CAUTION: ON SUSPENSION OF CROSS-LOC TRADE	- 184
265. THE PERMANENCE OF ARAB UPRISINGS	- 185
266. SRI LANKA DECLARED EMERGENCY	- 188
267. KAU IPR CELL WON NATIONAL IP AWARD 2019	- 188
268. IRAN, PAKISTAN DECLARE JOINT BORDER REACTION	- 188
269. INDIA RANKED 17 th IN GLOBAL STARTUP ECOSYSTEM	- 189
270. AWC: JHILI WON SILVER	- 189
271. BENNY ANTONY WON NATIONAL IP AWARD	- 189
272. WORLD BOOK DAY: 23 APRIL	- 189

273. INDIA RANKED 19 th IN ICP	- 190
274. ASIAN BADMINTON CHAMPIONSHIPS BEGAN	- 190
275. INDONESIA RELEASES SPECIAL STAMP ON THEME OF RAMAYANA	- 190
276. US NOT TO EXTEND EXEMPTIONS TO ANY COUNTRY BUYING IRANIAN OIL BEYOND MAY 2	- 191
277. MOU SIGNED BETWEEN AYUSH AND CSIR	- 191
278. 29TH ABU DHABI INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR: INDIA NOMINATED AS GUEST OF HONOUR	- 191
279. RUSSIAN PM SEES 'CHANCE' FOR BETTER TIES WITH NEW UKRAINE LEADER	- 192
280. BANGLADESH: ALL LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS TO BE HELD THROUGH EVMS	- 192
281. BAJRANG PUNIA WINS GOLD IN ASIAN WRESTLING C'SHIP	- 193
282. IMD ADVISORIES TO FARMERS RESULTED IN HIGH YIELD OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY	- 193
283. ONE MILLION SPECIES RISK EXTINCTION DUE TO HUMANS: DRAFT U.N. REPORT	- 194
284. IN A FIRST, EAST ASIAN BIRDS MAKE ANDAMAN STOPOVER	- 195
285. CHINA DRAWS UP TIGHTER RULES ON HUMAN GENE AND EMBRYO TRIALS	- 195
286. BEYOND THE FREE TRADE IDEALISM	- 196
287. INT. DAY OF MULTILATERALISM AND DIPLOMACY FOR PEACE	- 199
288. SC CONSTITUTES THREE-JUDGE PANEL TO PROBE CASE AGAINST CJI	- 199
289. PHARMA EXPORTS ROSE TO 11% IN 2018-19	- 200
290. FARMERS RECEIVED 1ST TRANCHE UNDER PM KISAN	- 200
291. INDIA WILL STOP IMPORTING CRUDE OIL FROM IRAN	- 201
292. AUTHORIZED CAPITAL OF ALLAHABAD BANK RAISED	- 201
293. GUJARAT GOVT TO PAY RS 50 LAKH TO BILKIS BANO	- 201
294. IMPORT OF MILK PRODUCTS FROM CHINA BANNED	- 202
295. PAK NAVY SUCCESSFULLY TEST FIRED MISSILE	- 202
296. UAE'S MARS PROBE 'HOPE' 85 PERCENT COMPLETE	- 202
297. WB GOVT'S SCHEME WON UN AWARD	- 203
298. JADHAV BAGGED BRONZE: AAC	- 203
299. J&K: CAMPAIGN SWEEP INAUGURATED	- 203
300. AIR RECEIVE SWACHTA PAKHWADA AWARD 2019	- 204
301. OPERATION NIGHT RIDERS BEGAN	- 204
302. IRAN BRANDS US MILITARY AS TERRORIST	- 204
303. RBI SWAP AUCTION GOT BID MORE THAN THRICE	- 204
304. LEATHER EXPORTS ROSE 8% IN FY19	- 205
305. SEBI TWEAKED NORMS FOR REITS, INVITS	- 205
306. ARMY TO BUILD TUNNELS TO STORE AMMUNITION	- 205

307. JAPAN CREATED 1ST ARTIFICIAL CRATER	- 206
308. 2.9 MILLION CHILDREN MISSED MEASLES VACCINE	- 206
309. ADVANI WON ASIAN SNOOKER TOUR TITLE	- 206
310. IIT-KGP, JINDAL STAINLESS TIE UP	- 207
311. US ENVOY LAUNCHED INITIATIVE	- 207
312. MEGHALAYA TO AUGMENT FISH PRODUCTION	- 207
313. ZOOLOGISTS DISCOVERED TWO NEW BIRD SPECIES IN INDONESIA	- 208
314. US LISTS GIRAFFES AS THREATENED SPECIES	- 208
315. ARCHAEOLOGISTS UNCOVERED AN ANCIENT TOMB	- 209
316. UN, EU SIGNED JOINT FRAMEWORK	- 209
317. ABU MEDIA SUMMIT UNDERWAY IN NEPAL	- 209
318. RANA DASGUPTA WON LITERARY PRIZE	- 209
319. DIVYA, MANJU WON BRONZE MEDALS IN AWC	- 210
320. CENTRE INVESTED IN CELL BASED MUTTON PROJECT	- 210
321. ARMY TO INDUCT WOMEN AS MILITARY POLICE	- 210
322. COMPLAINTS TO RBI OMBUDS INCREASED 25% IN FY18	- 211
323. INDIA BAGGED 2 GOLD AT ISSF WORLD CUP	- 211
324. INTERNATIONAL HOCKEY TOURNAMENT 2019 HELD	- 211
325. NATIONAL PANCHAYATI RAJ DAY: 24 APRIL	- 211
326. WORLD MALARIA DAY: 25 APRIL	- 212
327. ALL PUBLIC PAYMENTS DIGITAL: RBI PANEL	- 212
328. JALAN PANEL REPORT IN JUNE	- 213
329. DARK MATTER SEARCH: XENON UNSTABLE	- 213
330. AGRICULTURE PRICES TO FALL 2.6%	- 213
331. RBI SOLD ENTIRE STAKE IN NHB	- 214
332. US RECORDED 695 MEASLES CASES IN 2019	- 214
333. MALAWI TO UNDERTAKE THE RTS	- 214
334. ARAB LEAGUE PLEDGED \$100 MN TO PA	- 214
335. RBI HAS RS.3 LAKH CR IN EXCESS RESERVE	- 215
336. INDONESIA'S MOUNT AGUNG ERUPTED AGAIN	- 215
337. FIEO JOINED HANDS WITH WELINGKAR INSTITUTE	- 215
338. NEW COMMUNITY IN GOLAN BE NAMED AFTER TRUMP	- 215
339. INDIAN COAST GUARD VESSEL COMMISSIONED	- 216
340. ICRA ESTIMATED 7-7.5 GW SOLAR POWER ADDITION	- 216
341. MONEY LOJI LAUNCHED APP TO OFFER LOANS	- 216

342. MERCURY HAS SOLID INNER CORE	- 216
343. AN ILLUSTRATIVE CASE	- 217
344. BACKSTOP OPTION: ON BREXIT MODALITIES	- 218
345. NEW RS. 20 NOTES TO BE ISSUED SOON	- 221
346. 15 th FC MET MINISTRY OF PANCHAYATI RAJ	- 221
347. BEPICOLOMBO MISSION COMPLETED TESTS	- 221
348. ETIHAD: 1ST TO OPERATE PLASTIC-FREE FLIGHT	- 222
349. SBI LAUNCHED GREEN CAR LOAN	- 222
350. WHO ISSUED SCREENTIME GUIDELINES FOR CHILDREN	- 222
351. CYRIL ALMEIDA WON IPI'S AWARD 2019	- 222
352. AEGON LIFE INS. COLLABORATED WITH MOBIKLIK	- 223
353. WORLD INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY DAY: 26 APRIL	- 223
354. REGIONAL LANGUAGE ON THE MEDICINE LABELS	- 223
355. RUSSIA AND NORTH KOREA HELD FIRST SUMMIT	- 223
356. SRI LANKA BANNED DRONES AFTER EASTER BOMBINGS	- 224
357. SKYROOT TO TEST VIKRAM SERIES OF ROCKETS	- 224
358. UAE'S SEWAGE PLANT INAUGURATED	- 224
359. DPIIT PROPOSED STARTUP INDIA VISION 2024	- 224
360. SC ASKED RBI TO DISCLOSE INFORMATION	- 225
361. ANTARCTIC PENGUINS SUFFER HUGE BREEDING FAILURE	- 225
362. FLOATING NUCLEAR POWER PLANT LAUNCHED	- 225
363. HELEN GET DEENANATH MANGESHKAR AWARD	- 226
364. INDIAN SUBCONTINENT'S COLLISION WITH ASIA BOOSTED OXYGEN IN WORLD'S OCEANS	- 226
365. SOCIAL MEDIA FRAUD ROSE 43% IN 2018: REPORT	- 227
366. SCIENTISTS PRINT FLEXIBLE ELECTRONICS	- 227
367. AS TEMPERATURES RISE, PRE-MONSOON RAINFALL RECORDS 27% DIP: IMD	- 227
368. 500-YEAR-OLD WELL FOUND IN KARTARPUR	- 228
369. XI JINPING MEETS IMRAN KHAN, CALLS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF INDO-PAK RELATIONS	- 229
370. SC: FILTHY LANGUAGE NOT CRIMINAL INTIMIDATION	- 229
371. DELHI HC LIFTS CENTRE'S CURBS ON GI TAG FOR BASMATI RICE	- 230
372. COMFORT FOOD LEADS TO MORE WEIGHT GAIN DURING STRESS: STUDY	- 230
373. DAYS AND EVENTS	- 231
374. NATIONAL FIRE SERVICE DAY OBSERVED	- 231
375. KONKANI VERSION OF CONSTITUTION RELEASED	- 231
376. USA SECURE ODI STATUS FOR FIRST TIME	- 231

377. INDUSIND BANK & BFI MERGER APPROVED	- 232
378. PLATFORM FOR CRYPTOCURRENCY TRADING LAUNCHED	- 232
379. RBI FIRST TO BEGIN INTEREST RATE EASING CYCLE	- 232
380. KOTAK BANK LAUNCHES DEBIT CARD-BASED E-MANDATE	- 232
381. GLOBAL WARMING SHRANK ECONOMY BY 31%	- 233
382. ANTI-HIJACK PANEL REVAMPED	- 233
383. FABIO FOGNINI WON ROLEX MONTECARLO MASTERS	- 233
384. CAUTION, FMPS TOO CAN GO ASTRAY	- 233
385. BANGLADESH-CHINA-INDIA-MYANMAR (BCIM) ECONOMIC CORRIDOR NO LONGER LISTED UNDER BRI UMBRELLA	- 235
386. WORLD DAY FOR SAFETY AND HEALTH: 28 APRIL	- 236
387. WORLD VETERINARY DAY: 28 APRIL	- 236
388. INTERNATIONAL DANCE DAY: 29 APRIL	- 236
389. CPWD SET UP COMMITTEE	- 236
390. DENTISTS CAN PRACTICE AS GEN. PHYSICIANS	- 236
391. US PRESIDENT TRUMP ANNOUNCES TO WITHDRAW FROM UN ARMS TRADE TREATY	- 237
392. ICMR LAUNCHED MERA INDIA	- 237
393. NEW SPECIES OF CRAB FOUND	- 238
394. PEPSICO SUES INDIAN FARMERS OVER THE FC5 POTATO ROW	- 238
395. OLDEST HUMAN FOOTPRINT FOUND IN CHILE	- 238
396. HIMA DAS INCLUDED IN WORLD RELAYS TEAM	- 239
397. ISSF WORLD CUP: INDIA WON 3 GOLDS, 1 SILVER	- 239
398. SUMATRA FLOODS KILLED 17: INDONESIA	- 239
399. DEFENCE MINISTER VISITED BISHKEK	- 239
400. INDONESIA PLANS TO RELOCATE ITS CAPITAL FROM JAKARTA	- 240
401. CYCLONE FANI LIKELY TO INTENSIFY	- 240
402. INDIA ENDED WITH 16 MEDALS AT AWC	- 240
403. INDIA ENDS WITH 13 MEDALS AT ABC	- 241
404. INDIAN ARMY SIGNED MOU WITH NHPC	- 241
405. NO GOOD OPTIONS IN AFGHANISTAN	- 241

EC CLEARS REVISED MGNREGA WAGE RATES FROM APRIL 1

Prelims:

- » Central Govt Schemes

Mains:

- » How MGNREGS enhance Rural Development? Evaluate.

Context:

- » Election Commission has approved a request of the Rural Development Ministry to revise the wages under the MGNREGA scheme from April 1.
- » The wages paid under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) are linked with the Consumer Price Index for agricultural laborers (CPI-AL) and new wage rates are notified on April 1, the beginning of the new financial year.
- » The ministry had approached the EC for approval as the model code for the coming Lok Sabha polls is in force.
- » Different states have different wage rates so the increase in wages will also be different. The increase could be up to 5 per cent over and above the current wage.

CENTRE SETS UP TRIBUNAL TO WEATHER ADJUDICATE TO BAN JAMAAT-E-ISLAMI J&K, JKLF

Prelims:

- » Various Tribunals in India.

Mains:

- » The Nature of Unlawful Prevention Act, 1967 (UAPA), Examine.
- » How Article 51 is Getting Executed?
- » Enumurate Preventive Detention Laws in India?
- » Why Article 22 is necessary evil?

Context:

- » The Centre has set up a tribunal to adjudicate if there exists sufficient cause to ban the Jamaat-e-Islami Jammu and Kashmir (JeL) and the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front-Yasin Malik (JKLF-Y) faction.
- » The tribunal will be headed by Justice Chander Shekhar of the Delhi High Court.
- » The decision to constitute a tribunal has been taken by the Ministry exercising the powers conferred under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.
- » Both the organisations were declared as unlawful associations by the centre.

VVPAT SLIPS: SC GRANTS WEEK TO OPPOSITION FOR FILING REPLY

Prelims: Polity/Governance.

Mains: Important Aspects of Governance, Transparency and Accountability, E-Governance-Applications.

Context:

- » The Supreme Court today asked 21 Opposition leaders to file within a week their reply on the Election Commission's affidavit on their plea regarding VVPAT slips in Lok Sabha polls.
- » The Opposition leaders led by Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu had sought that VVPAT slips of at least 50 per cent of voting machines in each assembly constituency be checked randomly during the polls.
- » A bench headed by Chief Justice of India, Ranjan Gogoi asked senior advocate A M Singhvi, appearing for Opposition leaders, to file the reply by next Monday. The poll panel had on Friday last sought dismissal of the petition.
- » In its affidavit, the Election Commission had asserted in the apex court that the Opposition leaders have been unable to raise any ground for altering the existing system of random counting of VVPAT slips from one polling booth per assembly segment.

PRESIDENT RAM NATH KOVIND VISITS PABLO NERUDA MUSEUM IN CHILE

Prelims:

- » Geography location of Chile
- » Border Sharing Countries
- » Important Lakes, Rivers, Mountains

Mains:

- » Bilateral relations b/w india and chile. Explain.

Context:



- » President Ram Nath Kovind visited Pablo Neruda Museum at Santiago in Chile today. The President will meet Indian business community and interact with Indian community later today. During his three day visit to Chile, the President will hold talks with his Chile Counterpart and discuss issues of mutual interest. Mr. Kovind will also interact with young scientist at University of Chile.
- » Mr. Kovind is on a three-nation visit to Croatia, Bolivia and Chile from March 25th to April 4th.

US, SOUTH KOREA DEFENCE CHIEFS MEET ON DENUCLEARIZATION.

Prelims: Geographical Features of US and Korean Peninsula.

MAINS:

1. Why Rivalry b/w South Korea and North Korea.
2. How are the Defence Relation b/w South Korea and USA

Context:

- » US Acting Secretary of Defence Patrick Shanahan met South Korean Minister of National Defence Jeong Kyeong-doo here over the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.
- » The two defence chiefs vowed to remain “an unwavering combined readiness posture,”
- » They also pledged to enhance coordination and cooperation in various areas including information sharing on issues regarding North Korea.
- » Mr. Jeong’s visit came one month after the second summit between top North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and US President Donald Trump in late February in the Vietnamese capital of Hanoi that ended without an agreement.
- » Mr. Moon vowed to make efforts to help resume denuclearization negotiations between North Korea and the US.
- » The Korean Peninsula’s peace process would become a journey, taken jointly by the two Koreas and the US that would not be easy.
- » No one should expect the Korean Peninsula issue to be resolved in just one day, and the key is to take into account the legitimate concerns of all parties in a balanced way and consolidate mutual trust and gradually gather consensus.



CHINA, U.S. LOCK HORNS OVER MASOOD AZHAR

Prelims:

- » UN Member Countries, its organs.

Mains:

- » Global Counter-Terrorism strategies.

Context:

- » China on Monday said it was making “some positive progress” to resolve differences on listing Masood Azhar as a global terrorist, and rejected Washington’s alternative move to ban the head of the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) through a resolution at the UN Security Council.
- » The UN 1267 committee should be the sole forum where Azhar’s listing should be discussed.
- » The friction between China and the U.S. sharpened after Washington, along with France and the United Kingdom, piloted a resolution in the 1267 committee for listing Azhar, following the February attack in Pulwama in which more than 40 CRPF personnel were killed.
- » China placed a “technical hold” on the listing despite Pakistan-based JeM, which Azhar heads, taking responsibility for the attack.
- » Following China’s move in the 1267 committee, the U.S. sponsored a resolution in the Security Council seeking Azhar’s ban. The Chinese foreign ministry pointed out that the U.S. was failing in its bid to muster majority support in the UNSC, and urged Washington to return to the 1267 committee to resolve the issue. China has emphasised that the purpose of its “technical hold” is to allow more discussion on the issue in order to achieve a consensus-based settlement.
- » Last week, China had slammed remarks by U.S. Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, who had accused the country of “shameful hypocrisy.”

INDIA, CHILE AGREE TO WORK TOGETHER TO DEFEAT TERRORISM & ITS MANIFESTATIONS

Prelims:

- » Geography location of Chile
- » Border Sharing Countries
- » Important Lakes, Rivers, Mountains

Mains:

1. Bilateral relations b/w India and Chile. Explain.
2. What are the possibilities of exploring India-Chile trade relations.

Context:

- » India and Chile have agreed to work together to strengthen the global response to defeat and destroy terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

- » President Ram Nath Kovind who was on an official visit to Chile said this after a brief Tete-a-Tete with his Chilean counterpart. President said that both countries committed themselves to further strengthen the economic partnership.
- » India and Chile signed three MOUs for cooperation in the fields of mining, culture and Empowerment of persons with disabilities. The agreements would further enhance engagement in economic, social and cultural fields between the two countries. Chile is the sixth largest trading partner of India in the Latin American region. Later President participated in India-Chile Business Forum and interacted with young scientists at the University of Chile. Mr Kovind was on a three-day visit to Chile on the third leg of his three-nation tour including Croatia and Bolivia.

UAE TO ISSUE EQUIVALENCY TO ALL INDIAN DEGREES

Prelims:

1. International relations
2. Geography location of UAE
3. Border Sharing Countries
4. Important Lakes, Rivers, Mountains

Mains:

- » How UAE move on giving equivalency to Indian degrees affect the Indian economy?

Context:

- » The UAE government will issue equivalency to all Indian degrees that match the set criteria, a move that comes as a huge relief for expats having difficulty in getting jobs in the Gulf country.
- » Indian Ambassador Navdeep Singh Suri called on UAE Education Minister Hussain Bin Ibrahim last week to discuss problems faced by Indian nationals following rejection of equivalency of some Indian degrees due to lack of clarity over internal/external marks.
- » The Ministry of Education of the United Arab Emirates notified that it has no objection to equivalency of those degrees that meets all other certificate equivalency criteria.
- » The UAE education ministry reviewed the information provided to it through the 'Action Plan for Academic and Administrative Reforms' issued by the University Grant Commission which clarified that the word "external" in some of the Indian mark sheets reflect the method of evaluation and not place of study.
- » Those applications that have been rejected previously will be reviewed and equivalency letters would be issued after meeting all other certificate equivalency conditions.



NMDC SURPASSES 30 MILLION TONNES PRODUCTION AND SALES FOR 3rd YEAR

Prelims:

1. Indian Economy - Industry
2. Iron ore Mines in India
3. Navaratna Companies

Mains:

1. National mineral policy 2019
2. Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act 1957.

Context:

- » National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC), the largest producer of iron ore in the country, has once again surpassed the 30 million tonnes figure of production and sales for the year 2018-19 for the 3rd year consecutively.
- » In spite of suspension of Donimalai Mine operations for 5 months, no exports upto August 2018, highest rainfall in Bailadila Sector and poor off take in Karnataka in Q1, NMDC has produced 32.44 MT and sales of 32.38 MT iron ore during FY-19.

NMDC SURPASSES 30 MILLION TONNES PRODUCTION AND SALES FOR 3rd YEAR

Prelims:

- » Geographical Location.
- » Important seas, Rivers, Mountains In that region.

Mains:

- » Timeline of India and Ecuador Relationship?

Context:

- » A strong 6.2 magnitude earthquake struck off the coast of Ecuador today. According to the US Geological Survey there were no immediate reports of damage or tsunami warning.
- » The quake occurred at a depth of 18.5 kilometres in the Pacific Ocean west of Guayaquil and 27 kilometres north of Santa Elena.



ISRO SUCCESSFULLY LAUNCHES INDIA'S LATEST EMISAT DEFENCE SATELLITE

Prelims:

1. Science & Tech
2. Space Technology

Mains:

1. Different Types of Satellites and their functions?
2. How it supports development of mankind?
3. What are the various types of orbits present?

Context:

- » The Indian Space Research Organization, ISRO, launched India's latest satellite EMISAT and 28 other smaller satellites of international customers this morning with textbook precision.
- » The ISRO Telemetry Tracking and Command Network at Bengaluru has assumed control of EMISAT satellite after its successful launch.
- » The national space agency's workhorse launch vehicle PSLV-C45, carrying the payloads on board, lifted off from its spaceport, Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota at 09:27 am.
- » In a little over 17 minutes, the primary payload EMISAT was set by the rocket at an altitude of 754 km, as planned.
- » In the coming days, the satellite will be brought to its final operational configuration.
- » EMISAT is capable of gathering information of strategic value, in the electromagnetic spectrum.
- » The foreign satellites include 24 from the US, two from Lithuania and one each from Spain and Switzerland.
- » ISRO has started reusing PS4 as an innovated, low-cost, space-friendly test bed for its own microgravity experiments and those of others. It has been gradually putting additional support systems also on every new PS4; the power generating solar panels are new this time.
- » This is the third such mission and carries an ISRO test on Automatic Identification System (AIS) related to tracking ships on sea.
- » AMSAT or the Radio Amateur Satellite Corporation, India, has sent a payload called the Automatic Packet Repeating System.
- » This is expected to help amateur radio operators to get improved locational accuracy in their tracking and monitoring.
- » The third one, the Advanced Retarding Potential Analyser for Ionospheric Studies has been sent up by ISRO's university, the Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology.

SPIDER RESEARCH YET TO PICK UP PACE IN INDIA, SAY EXPERTS

Prelims:

- » Location of species
- » Belongs to which family.

Mains:

1. How Spiders Balances Food chain in ecosystem?
2. Status in IUCN Redlist.

Context:

- » Less encouragement to study the nitty-gritty and poor awareness are hurdles; last major research conducted between 1990s, 2000s
- » The recent discovery of a new species of jumping spiders in Aarey Colony has had arachnologists — specialists in spiders and related animals — and wildlife experts call for a greater focus on studying spiders in India.
- » While the last major research was conducted between the 1990s and 2000s by Dr. Manju Siliwal, a senior arachnologist who specialises in mygalomorphs, experts believe a lot of diversities of spiders are yet to be discovered in the country.
- » They discovered a new species of jumping spiders in the city's Aarey Milk Colony.
- » In the research that spanned over the next three years, researchers were able to understand the natural history of this species and explore interesting aspects that were not documented before.
- » Several males and females of various life stages were observed throughout the years, specifically in the monsoon, when the females were observed guarding their egg sacs, while males were seen wandering under the rocks.
- » While other species of jumping spiders such as the Langelurillus Onyx, Langelurillus Lacteus — both described in 2017 — and Piranthus decorus — recorded for the first time in 122 years in the area — have inhabited the Aarey Colony, more studies pertaining to their complete biology, habits and interactions with other species are yet to be carried out. While there are 4,800 species of spiders in the world, India alone accounts for 1,800 spider species.
- » While the research in other parts of the world such as Thailand, Germany, Canada and the United States has been steady, experts said it is yet to pick up pace in India.
- » Spiders are important creatures as they are pest-controllers. They are like the tigers of the microhabitat world. Pulling them out could cause ecological imbalance.
- » According to Dr. John Caleb, species of spiders other than wolf, crab, orb-weaver and ground spiders have not received enough attention in India.

Considered Dangerous:

- » People consider crawling beings as dangerous and some have phobias too. There are also certain baseless myths attached to spiders.
- » One needs to understand that while studying any arthropod, animal or other being, one needs to respect their space.

INDIA NEEDS AT LEAST THREE MORE SPY SATELLITES

Prelims:

1. Science & Tech
2. Space Technology

Mains:

1. Different Types of Satellites and their functions?
2. How it supports development of mankind?

Context:

- » Nobody who has it talks about it and no one else is sure about its actual numbers. But space-based electronic intelligence, the realm that India just forayed into with the launch of Monday's defence satellite EMISAT, is said to have been around since the early 1960s.
- » At least three other space powers are said to be past masters at it – the U.S. as the leader is said to be having fifth-generation ELINT satellites; Russia is not far behind. And of late, China as the new space force to reckon with is believed to have two special constellations, according to the web and a few informed sources. An estimated 150 military satellites may be hovering all over Earth right now.
- » These satellites can locate where radars are; figure out what signals they send out in order to enable right actions; eavesdrop on radar communication; and much more.
- » A well-equipped satellite perched high up is an asset that can generate vast information vital for the country's defence against attacks from outside.
- » Coincidentally EMISAT has been flown days after DRDO achieved another publicly broadcast feat on March 27 — that of the launch of the anti-satellite missile, the ASAT.

DEEPENING INSECURITY

Context:

- » After 'Mission Shakti' — India's anti-satellite test — there is a feeling that India needs this form of deterrence for its security. To be visibly strong in order to deter any enemy from attacking is a concern that goes back to pre-historic times. But when this ancient urge is exerted by nations with nuclear weapons, it must be an occasion to revisit the arms race, the Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) doctrine and their long-term implications.

Why it is in News?

- » India has shot down a low-earth orbit satellite in space, propelling itself into an elite club of nations, which has mastered this anti-satellite (ASAT) missile technology
- » "Mission Shakti" is to defend India's space assets and not to start any arms race in space.
- » Since there are no treaties governing the use of ASAT, India is not in violation of any international conventions.

What is a-sat used for?

- » Anti-satellite technology is any weapon or tool that is developed to shoot down satellites in space. While multiple nations possess working technology and even more possess design and theoretical plans, A-SAT has never been used in an actual conflict.
- » The development of A-SAT weapons for militaristic purposes started during the Cold War.
- » **Early plans took several forms:** Energy weapons such as regular intense lasers or X-ray lasers that could damage satellites, nuclear explosions in space, and more. But no country could actually demonstrate or realise these plans fully until August 1970.
- » A-SAT technology has been consistently touted as being used to bring down defunct, malfunctioning or dangerous satellites if needed. Satellites can also start to de-orbit, slowly losing altitude and threatening to break up in space or hit other orbiting craft. Sometimes, a large satellite can pass through the atmosphere, breaking up into very large chunks that can potentially kill and damage on land.
- » These require to be broken up in orbit — at a safe altitude — before entering the atmosphere to ensure they disintegrate completely and safely. This continues to remain the primary practical use for A-SAT technology.

Timeline:

- » The US and Russia have both tested similar technology in the 1980s, though the former ceased its anti-satellite tests in 1985, citing concerns over the creation of more space debris.
- » Meanwhile, China conducted its own first successful anti-satellite test in 2007, which led to condemnation from other world powers, especially after NASA claimed that the Chinese experiment had created a record 3000 pieces of space debris.

Mission shakti:

- » India has been in the business of testing long-range missiles for years, although public attention on the space programme has been mostly on its civilian and scientific aspects.
- » The military dimension, though always latent, had not seen a verifiable demonstration as in the case of Mission Shakti, the Anti-Satellite (ASAT) missile test. An anti-satellite missile test, the one that was fired by the scientists of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), can target an LEO satellite.

- » The missile can incapacitate or completely destroy the satellite in the LEO range.
- » India is only the 4th country to acquire such a specialised and modern capability, and Entire effort is indigenous and is staking a forward claim as a space weapons power.

Conclusion:

- » In a world where access to the Earth's orbit is becoming easier and building satellites is getting cheaper, for now.
- » Above all, they constantly draw attention to the fact that the only true security lies in dissolving enmity by going to the roots of any conflict.
- » Once the joy about India's technological achievements, in the realm of missiles, has settled down, perhaps attention can shift to the much bigger challenge of seeking answers to a key question: what really makes us, the world a whole, more secure?

DETENTION OF FOREIGNERS: SC DIRECTS ASSAM CHIEF SECT TO APPEAR BEFORE IT ON APRIL 8

Mains:

- » What are the various methods of acquiring citizenship in India? Explain.

Context:

- » The Supreme Court today voiced unhappiness over the inaction in a case relating to detention of foreigners in Assam and directed the state Chief Secretary to appear before it on 8th of this month.
- » A bench headed by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi termed the affidavit filed by the Assam government as an "exercise in futility" and wanted to know as to how many persons, who have been declared foreigners by the tribunal, have amalgamated with the local population.
- » The bench was hearing a plea on the condition of detention centres in Assam and the prolonged detention of foreigners in the state.

CHINA'S EU OVERTURES

Prelims:

1. India – China Relation, Major rivers and Geographical features of China.
2. Geographical features of Silk road.

Mains:

1. Explain the India – China Project in Afghanistan.
2. Discuss in detail about India – China bilateral ties.
3. Elaborate about China's Silk Road initiative, what are the countries tied in it and why? How India is going to counter it?

Context:

- » Italy's participation in China's Silk Road Infrastructure project sparked an strong expression in Germany recently, including a call from the European Union to block such deals with a veto.
- » Europe has been struggling to find a coherent strategy to deal with China. While the continent desperately needs to keep China on its side as a trade ally, it is also wary of the Chinese state's ambitions and growing global clout.
- » Italy recently became the first G7 country to sign up for Beijing's new "Silk Road" project of road, rail and sea transport and trade links stretching from Asia to Europe.

Discussion Questions:

1. Italy's deal participating in China's Silk Road Initiative has raised quite a few eyebrows in the U.S. as well as in the European capitals as well. Why is this so?
 - » The first point to make is that Italy is the first G7 country to have broken rank in signing up with the BRI (Belt and Road Initiative).
 - » The second aspect is that Italy was in financial trouble.
 - » As a matter of fact, Italy has a very high debt burden. Also, last year (2018), Italy faced recession. Furthermore, Italy wanted to spend a lot of money in order to come out of the recession.
 - » Even though the EU persuaded the Italians not to do it because it would have had far deeper implications. Thus, the Italians were looking for investments. The Italians found their options restricted to a great extent.
 - » Also, one of the things that attracted them was the Chinese investments in Italy and the offer of Chinese market access for Italian products, especially luxury goods and fashion goods, for which Italy is very well known.
 - » It was quite attractive for Italy to have broken ranks. However, having said that, there is a division among the ruling coalition.
 - » This move by the Italians has implications for Europe. It has implications for the U.S., and one of the things which have been mentioned is that this deal would also include telecom at some stage.
 - » The U.S. has already expressed grave reservations about one of the Chinese companies, namely Huawei, coming in with their 5 G network and then creating problems of a strategic nature. Thus, this seems to be a wedge that has been driven into the unity of the European Union.
1. All is not well in the European Union? Is this the message that is coming out of all of this? As a matter of fact, Germany has called for such kind of deals to be negated or blocked through the use of a veto in the EU. What do you make of that as well?

- » The European Union is a divided house. Brexit was the first signal.
- » Secondly, several of the southern European countries are in a very weak economic position, and these countries are trying to attract Chinese investments. As a matter of fact, Germany itself is trying to attract investments from Russia.
- » As Germany is under pressure from President Trump to not go for the gas pipeline.
- » Unfortunately, the Italian Government seems to be a non-functioning government. The Chinese are hard bargainers.
- » China settled all their boundary problems with all their Central Asian states because they were able to give them a lot of good money and setup infrastructure linkages, gas pipelines, etc. and in return, the Chinese were able to settle all their problems to their benefit.
- » Currently, what is happening is that the Chinese are trying to become the number one power in the world by 2050.
- » The Europeans have now lost their clout in world affairs. America is not willing to pay more for NATO's security any longer, But the European countries are now being made to pay more for their own security. In this kind of a situation, if some of the countries are individually giving all kinds of concessions to China, to put investments in their country, there is only one extra step left. The Americans and the Germans are very worried now, about the Huawei 5G network. Technology up-gradation is very important. England wants to go for the 5G network, and so does India. One would like the Chinese to be more responsible. The Chinese are a permanent member of the UNSC. One would like to particularly like them to control the behaviour of the Pakistani state and make them work against the terrorist elements that are operating from Pakistani soil.

Is China trying to break the EU unity and what are the implications for Europe?

- » They are trying to break the EU unity. By 2050, China aims to be the number one superpower in the world. For this, the Chinese would need political and geostrategic influence. As far as influence is concerned, through the BRI, the Chinese have made inroads in Asia, especially in ASEAN.
- » They have made inroads in Pakistan as well to a very great deal through the CPEC. They have also made significant inroads into Africa, and what they are trying to do now is to get into Europe. Once they get into these three continents, into a big way, they have gained geopolitical and strategic influence. After this, they are in a position to challenge the United States. This is the larger game plan that they are looking for, and these are the steps that they are taking to reach that particular point. Earlier, we had the U.S. led western bloc, the Soviet bloc, and a handful of countries who were non-aligned. We are seeing a re-emergence of such a trend. What the Chinese are trying to do now is to get Europe on to its side.

- » Europe is not unaware of what is happening. But the larger concern is really of the United States. Here the idea of 5G assumes importance. 5G is something that everyone is concerned about
- » because 5G gives one access to artificial intelligence which is unimaginable as compared to what we are seeing today.
- » Now, what would happen if the Chinese get there first and they capture this market? The EU is working on it, including Italy. India is also working on it, but we are nowhere near where the Chinese are currently. The Americans, the Japanese and Israel are also all on to it. The American's have concerns over Huawei's 5G technology. The fact that Huawei is also a major player in many countries, including India and it is through their equipment that the Chinese get a backdoor. So, there is a feeling that the Chinese would be able to spy on the rest of the world.
- » Currently, the Chinese are also buying Italian bonds. The Chinese have bought 2.8 Billion USD worth of Italian bonds. When China buys up huge currencies like this, and if the Italians are not in a position to repay back, then we really don't know what the Chinese would be going to do. The Chinese can then apply pressure. When they start applying pressure, they can break one country; after which they break the second and the third, and then they break the EU. Further, the Chinese are not really concerned about time.

Of what economic importance is China to the EU?

- » China is the second largest trading partner of the EU after the U.S. for the EU. China is also perhaps the largest investor in the EU.
- » The third aspect is that it is not Italy which has fallen the first; however, Italy is the first among the G7 group of nations. The Greek port of Piraeus has already been taken over by a Chinese company called Cosco which has sent approximately 4 million containers from the port this year. Next year, the target has been raised to about 7.5 million containers.
- » The Chinese have taken over a steel plant in Serbia and the Serbs have been very welcoming of the investment because it has provided employment, it has provided a strategic advantage to Serbia in terms of its exports and other related issues.
- » The European Union faces a big dilemma because it has termed China as a systemic rival and it has raised similar concerns as to what the U.S. has raised in moving against China last year.

The concerns are:

- » Intellectual property theft
- » Not playing fairly by the rules of the game (China keeps on subsidizing and most of its subsidies are not very well publicized- they are hidden subsidies, which makes it very difficult for one to put his/her finger on)

- » The state-owned enterprises which often back financial deals where the front is a Chinese company and in terms of the Make in China initiative of 2025, of which the U.S. is particularly concerned, because it would catapult the Chinese to technological dominance over the global trading arena- this is funded mainly by the State. And one of the concerns by the U.S. is that technological excellence should come from private enterprises and private endeavour and that this should not be state funded. These are some of the positions which are shared by the U.S. and the EU.
- » This is a major threat because if the rules of the game are not being followed then India, who is a much smaller player on the trading arena is also bound to get affected.
- » If there is a default in paying back the loans which China provides for building infrastructure, then there would most certainly be consequences. With other projects across the globe, there are problems with the repayment of Chinese loans irrespective of however long the tenures of these loans are.
- » This is in fact a major source of worry as well- because if loans are going to suck a country into indebtedness, and then, the only way out is to sign-off on some strategic asset like a port or a telecom network, or a pipeline, then that could have very grave implications for the rest of the world.

Why is it that the European Union hasn't been able to come out with a coherent strategy to keep China at bay?

- » There are a couple of reasons.
- » The first being that Europe would still like to become the Europe of the past, i.e. a very important player in the world on trade matters.
- » Under NATO, they are totally in partnership with the Americans. Further, on intelligence sharing and the networks on which they have common knowledge of, the European viewpoints are in alignment with that of the Americans.
- » After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia became a very weak power and the Americans and the EU were able to deal with China well in the backdrop of the Soviet collapse. The Americans and the EU were hoping that China wouldn't grow that fast. However, China did grow rapidly. On the other hand, we have found that the Islamic states have more or less collapsed and give rise to non-state actors.
- » Also, it is important to note that some countries like Pakistan have nuclear weapons and nuclear programmes. The Europeans have a peculiar problem that they would need to address. On one hand, they would like China to help them.
- » The Americans are also dependent on the Chinese. The Americans are dependant greatly with China to help in their negotiations and deliberations with the North Koreans.

- » The Chinese became the number 3 economy of the world. The Chinese were able to very carefully play their partnership with the United States and with Europe. The current situation is that the kind of relationship which Europe and America built with China is now being attempted to be built with India. However, it is important to note that the curve which China followed and the curve which India is currently taking is different.
- » India must ensure that her interests are taken care of first and then in addition India would like China to show more responsible behaviour.

That having been said, what are Chinese ambitions and goals in Europe?

- » I believe that the Chinese would attempt at playing a very steady game. The Chinese would not want to move things in jerks. In my view, they have got a plan set out as to how they would wish to go about things in the next 10 years.
- » They have got a plan laid out for a long period of time. The focus now is really on money-power and trade. The Chinese look into the weaknesses in leadership of nation states, and then they attempt at buying people out.
- » From an Indian point of view, our areas of concerns stem from having to deal with hostile non-state actors, like for example, Pakistan's state-sponsored terrorism.
- » I really don't think that China is going to take too much of effort in terms of putting a stop towards any of these activities, although the Americans and the European Union would try to put a curb on these activities. The Chinese would control the Pakistani's to the extent that the spread of terrorism doesn't spread to the Xinjiang province.
- » China is willing to take the risk of being called a supporter of a terrorist state rather than actually come out openly against Pakistan because their own stakes are also pretty high in this particular game. Regardless of all other considerations, India needs to do two things- these two things are also very simple:
- » We need to look after our economy and ensure that our growth rate gets into double digits and remains there for about two decades. Indian diplomacy has a very important role to play to ensure that we reach higher on the world stage.
- » We also have to be militarily strong. This is because a weak military cannot guarantee a strong foreign policy. The final point is that on all strategic issues, all political parties must be on one common platform. These three things should be in order.
- » Concluding Remarks:
- » One of the things which Macron and Merkel have been mentioning was on the possible merger between Siemens and Allstrom. This would have produced a European champion in the railways, which could have taken on the Chinese giant railway companies. This has unfortunately been turned down by the European Commission.

- » India would also need to put a lot of money and effort into research. This research spans across the board.
- » India needs to work in a very decisive manner to ensure that her growth rate remains above 10 percent. Secondly, the political parties need to be more mindful of a very focussed foreign policy as well as a defence policy with regards to the neighbours and with regard to the world. Thus, we need to continue in that direction.
- » India should also nominate a few industries as strategic industries- for example, 5G, Artificial Intelligence, and the Aerospace sector. These have to be given priority over and above what we do normally. That means, that they need to be run in a manner that ISRO is being run- not essentially as a normal government concern; but as an organization with a different structure, access to finances, and ensure that we become world leaders, the way that we have become world leaders in space.

HOW TO ACHIEVE 24X7 POWER FOR ALL

Context:

- » Almost every willing household in India now has a legitimate electricity connection.
- » The household electrification scheme, Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana, or Saubhagya, has been implemented at an unprecedented pace.

Saubhagya Scheme:

- » Under Saubhagya scheme have come upon decades of hard work preceding it.
- » The enactment of the Electricity Act, in 2003, and the introduction of the Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana, in 2005, expanded electrification infrastructure to most villages in the following decade.
- » At the time rollout of the Saubhagya scheme, in 2017, gave the required impetus to electrify each willing household in the country.

Effects of the Scheme:

- » By tracking more than 9,000 rural households, since 2015, across six major States (Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal), the Access to Clean Cooking Energy and Electricity Survey of States (ACCESS) report by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), has highlighted the gap between a connection and reliable power supply.
- » While the median hours of supply increased from 12 hours in 2015 to 16 hours a day in 2018, it is still far from the goal of 24x7.
- » Similarly, while instances of low voltage and voltage surges have reduced in the last three years, about a quarter of rural households still report low voltage issues for at least five days in a month.

Major 3 Steps to be Followed:

Real-time monitoring of supply at the end-user level:

- » Only granular monitoring can help track the evolving reality of electricity supply on the ground and guide discoms to act in areas with sub-optimal performance.
- » Eventually, smart meters (that the government plans to roll out) should help enable such monitoring. However, in the interim, we could rely on interactive voice response systems (IVRS) and SMS-based reporting by end-users.

Need to focus on improving the quality of supply as well as maintenance services:

- » Adequate demand estimation and respective power procurement will go a long way in reducing load shedding. Odisha has outsourced infrastructure maintenance in some of its rural areas to franchisees, while Maharashtra has introduced village-level coordinators to address local-level challenges.

The improvement in supply should be complemented with a significant improvement in customer service, which includes billing, metering and collection.

- » Rural renewable energy enterprises could especially be interesting contenders for such franchisees, considering the social capital they already possess in parts of rural India.

Draw backs and Measures to Be Taken:

- » While the government is bringing all feeders in the country online, we currently have no provision to monitor supply as experienced by households. About half the rural population across the six States reported at least two days of 24-hour-long unpredictable blackouts in a month. This incident are indicative of poor maintenance, as opposed to intentional load-shedding. Discoms need to identify novel cost-effective approaches to maintain infrastructure in these far-flung areas. Around 27% of the electrified rural households in the six States were not paying anything for their electricity. Despite the subsidies, constant loss of revenue would make it unviable for discoms to continue servicing these households in the long run.
- » Low consumer density along with difficult accessibility mean that conventional approaches involving meter readers and payment collection centres will be unviable for many rural areas.
- » We need radically innovative approaches such as the proposed prepaid smart meters and last-mile rural franchisees to improve customer service and revenue collection.

Conclusion:

- » Electricity is the driver for India's development. The way we focus on granular monitoring, high-quality supply, better customer service and greater revenue realisation at the household level, we also need to prioritise electricity access for livelihoods and community services such as education and health care. Only such a comprehensive effort will ensure that rural India reaps the socio-economic benefits of electricity.

INDIA INKS AN AGREEMENT WITH A DEVELOPMENT BANK FOR SETTING UP INDIA-AFRICA INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURE & RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN MALAWI

Prelims:

1. Geography location of Africa
2. Important Lakes, Rivers, Mountains

Mains:

- » Enumerate global initiatives for enhancing Indian agriculture

Context:

- » India signed an agreement with a development bank for setting up India-Africa Institute of Agriculture and Rural Development (IAIARD) in Malawi.
- » It has signed an MoU with National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development Consultancy Service, NABCONS for setting up the Institute. The agreement is a part of India's efforts to enhance capacity in the areas of agro-financing and entrepreneurship development for African countries. IAIARD will be a Pan-African Institute wherein trainees not only from Malawi but also from other African countries, will receive training to develop their human resources and build their capacity. The entire expenditure on faculty from India, the travel, logistics and training course expenses for students from other African countries will be borne by the Government of India for an initial period of three years
- » This institute will be the first of its kind developed in an African country by India. This will further strengthen the bilateral relations with Malawi and India's relations with African Union.

INDIA AND CHILE EXCHANGE THREE MOUS FOR COOPERATION

Prelims:

1. Geography location of Chile
2. Border Sharing Countries
3. Important Lakes, Rivers, Mountains

Mains:

- » Bilateral relations b/w India and Chile.? Explain.
- » What are the possibilities of exploring India-Chile trade relations

Context:

- » India and Chile have signed three MoUs for cooperation in the fields of mining, culture and empowerment of persons with disabilities. The agreements, which were signed during President Ram Nath Kovind's visit to Chile, will further enhance engagement in economic, social and cultural fields between the two countries.

- » Chile is the sixth largest trading partner of India in the Latin American region.
- » India and Chile have also agreed to work together to strengthen the global response to defeat and destroy terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

US APPROVES SALE OF 24 MH 60 ROMEO SEAHAWK HELICOPTERS TO INDIA

Prelims:

- » Romeo Sea Hawk helicopters

Context:

- » The Trump administration has approved the sale of 24 multi-role MH-60 Romeo Seahawk helicopters to India at an estimated cost of 2.4 billion US dollars, the State Department has said.
- » It is considered the world's most advanced maritime helicopter.
- » The choppers will provide the Indian defence forces with the capability to perform anti-surface and anti-submarine warfare missions.
- » The US government yesterday notified the Congress that it has approved the sale of the helicopters.
- » In its notification, the State Department told the Congress that this proposed sale will support the foreign policy of the US by helping to strengthen the US-Indian strategic relationship.
- » The proposed sale of the helicopters will not alter the basic military balance in the region, the statement added.

SRI LANKAN GOVT REJECTS CONCERNS RAISED OVER PROPOSED OIL REFINERY PROJECT IN HAMBANTOTA

Prelims:

- » Hambantota port geographical location.

Mains:

- » India-Srilanka Relations
- » How China is trying to influence through Hambantota port?

Context:

- » Sri Lankan government on Tuesday rejected concerns raised over the proposed oil refinery project in Hambantota.
- » Minister of Development strategies and International trade Malik Samarawickrema told Parliament that the Oman company is going ahead with the project and the lease agreement for the land will be signed on Thursday.

- » He urged the opposition to be patient without making misleading comments.
- » Sri Lankan prime minister had laid the foundation stone for the investment project worth 3.85 billion dollars last month in which a company owned by Tamil Nadu politician and former Indian Union Minister Dr. S. Jagathrakshakan is the leading investor.
- » However, contradictory reports have surfaced in media about the company's worth with Transparency International Sri Lanka (TISL) saying the deal could have a negative impact on Sri Lanka's efforts to remove itself from the grey list of countries vulnerable to money laundering.
- » Opposition parties have also questioned the viability of the project and company's experience.

MORE THAN 113 MILLION PEOPLE SUFFER ACUTE HUNGER: UN

Prelims:

- » What is the rank of India in Global Hunger Index
- » UNO Function

Mains:

- » What are the initiatives taken by govt of India to reduce malnutrition?

Context:

- » More than 113 million people across 53 countries experienced acute hunger last year because of wars and climate disasters.
- » United Nations body, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in its 2019 global report, today said Africa was the worst-hit region.
- » It said Yemen, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Afghanistan and Syria were among the eight nations accounting for two-thirds of the total number of people worldwide exposed to the risk of famine.
- » Launched three years ago, the annual study takes stock of the countries facing the greatest difficulties.
- » FAO's emergencies director Dominique Bourgeon said African states were disproportionately affected as close to 72 million people on the continent suffered acute hunger.
- » Conflict and insecurity remained key factors, along with economic turbulence and climate-related shocks like drought and floods, the report found.
- » Bourgeon said up to 80 per cent of the population depend on agriculture in the affected regions.

INDIA URGES PAK. TO REPATRIATE FISHERMEN

PRELIMS

- » India-pak relations
- » Border sharing areas and rivers

Context:

- » India urged Pakistan to provide consular access to fishermen and prisoners who require consular and medical supportThe Ministry of External Affairs said India had assisted Pakistan in such cases but Islamabad had not reciprocated.
- » There are 385 Indian fishermen whose nationality has been conveyed to Pakistan and who have been languishing in Pakistan jails.
- » It is requested that urgent and concrete steps be taken to repatriate them to India at the earliest, along with their boats.
- » India also gave a list of ten civilian prisoners lodged in Pakistan jails who have completed their sentence and whose nationality has been confirmed for immediate release.
- » India also asked for grant of Pakistan visas to medical teams to enable them visit its nationals in Pakistan jails and urged Islamabad to return fishing boats in its custody.

WWF SOUNDS ALARM AFTER 48 LBS OF PLASTIC FOUND IN DEAD WHALE

Prelims:

- » IUCN RedList of Oceanic Species.



Mains:

- » What is NMLP? Its functions? What is the Agenda for Marine Pollution

Context:

- » The garbage recovered in the sperm whale's stomach included a corrugated tube for electrical works, plastic plates, shopping bags, tangled fishing lines and a washing detergent package with the brand and bar code still legible. The garbage recovered in the sperm whale's stomach included a corrugated tube for electrical works, plastic plates, shopping bags, tangled fishing lines and a washing detergent package with the brand and bar code still legible.
- » An 8-meter (26-foot) sperm whale was found dead off Sardinia with 22 kilograms (48.5 pounds) of plastic in its belly, prompting the World Wildlife Foundation to sound an alarm Monday over the dangers of plastic waste in the Mediterranean Sea.
- » The environmental group said the garbage recovered from the sperm whale's stomach included a corrugated tube for electrical works, plastic plates, shopping bags, tangled fishing lines and a washing detergent package with its bar code still legible.

- » The female whale beached off the northern coast of Sardinia last week, within the vast Pelagos marine sanctuary that was created as a haven for dolphins, whales and other sea life.
- » The exam also determined that the whale was carrying a fetus that had died and was in an advance state of decomposition. Experts said the mother whale had been unable to digest calamari due to the huge amount of plastic it had ingested, filling two-thirds of its stomach.
- » WWF said plastic is one of the greatest threats to marine life and has killed at least five other whales that had ingested large amounts of it over the last two years from Europe to Asia.
- » Another sperm whale died off the Italian island of Ischia, near Naples, last December with plastic bags and a thick nylon thread in its stomach, but plastic was not the cause of death.
- » The World Wildlife Foundation said between 150,000 and 500,000 tons of plastic objects and 70,000 to 130,000 tons of micro-plastics wind up in Europe's seas each year.
- » To combat the phenomenon, the European Parliament last week approved a new law banning a wide range of single-use plastic products, including plates and straws, starting in 2021.
- » Italy's environment minister, Sergio Costa, lamented the whale's death and said he planned to propose a new law this week to limit the use of plastics.
- » The law will permit fishermen to bring plastics recovered at sea to land for proper disposal, which they currently are barred from doing. Costa also pledged Italy would be one of the first countries to enact the European single-use plastics ban and appealed to the mayors of Italian cities and coastal towns to adopt the ordinances in advance of the 2021 law.

GROUNDWATER SYSTEM STILL EXISTS ON MARS: STUDY

Prelims:

1. Missions on Mars
2. India's Achievements on Mars

MAINS:

1. "India, a country faced with plethora of socio-economic problems, should not involve in space race with developed countries." Do you agree? Explain.
2. Discuss the importance of ISRO's MoM Mission as a milestone event in the space exploration programs of India.

Context:

- » Mars may still have an active groundwater system deep below the surface, and could be feeding surface streams in some areas on the Red Planet, a study has found.
- » Last year, researchers detected the presence of a deep-water lake on Mars under its south polar ice caps. Researchers at the University of Southern California (USC) in the US determined that groundwater likely exists in a broader geographical area than just the poles of Mars.

- » They found that there is an active system, as deep as 750 metres, from which groundwater comes to the surface through cracks in the specific craters they analysed.
- » Researchers studied the characteristics of Mars Recurrent Slope Linea, which are akin to dried, short streams of water that appear on some crater walls on Mars.
- » The scientists concluded that fractures within some of Mars' craters, enabled water springs to rise up to the surface as a result of pressure deep below.
- » These springs leaked onto the surface, generating the sharp and distinct linear features found on the walls of these craters. The scientists also provide an explanation on how these water features fluctuate with seasonality on Mars.
- » The study, published in the journal Nature Geoscience, suggests that groundwater might be deeper than previously thought in areas where such streams are observed on Mars.
- » The findings suggest that the exposed part of these ground fractures associated with these springs as the primary location candidates to explore Mars' habitability.
- » Previous research to explore groundwater on Mars relied on interpreting the returned electromagnetic echoes sent from the radar-probing experiments from orbit onboard Mars Express and Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter.
- » These experiments measured the reflection of the waves from both the surface and the subsurface whenever penetration was possible.
- » However, this earlier method did not yet provide evidence of groundwater occurrence beyond the 2018 South Pole detection.

THIRD EDITION OF BILATERAL MARITIME EXERCISE BETWEEN ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AND INDIAN NAVIES – AUSINDEX-19 SET TO BEGIN

Prelims:

- » Earlier exercises between India and Australia

Mains:

- » India-Australia defense relations
- » How does Indo-Australia ties help for India's energy needs.

CONTEXT:

- » The third edition of AUSINDEX, an acronym for Australia India Exercise is scheduled to commence with the arrival of HMAS Canberra (L02), a Landing Helicopter Dock, HMAS New Castle(o6) and HMAS Paramatta(154), both frigates; HMAS Collins, a conventional submarine and HMAS Success(OR 304), a Durance-class multi-product replenishment oiler at Visakhapatnam.

- » The aim of the exercise is, “To strengthen and enhance mutual cooperation and interoperability between the IN and RAN, providing opportunities for interaction and exchange of professional views between the personnel of the two navies”.
- » A sign of strengthening of bilateral and defence cooperation between the two countries as envisaged in the Framework for Security Cooperation (FSC) announced by the Australian and Indian Prime Ministers in 2014. The maiden edition of the exercise was held in September 2015 at Visakhapatnam. Australia hosted the second edition of the exercise off Fremantle in June 2017, wherein ships of the Eastern Fleet of the Indian Navy (IN) exercised with Royal Australian Navy (RAN) ships and submarines. Building on a long history of cooperation – including the shared experiences in the trenches of World War I in Gallipoli and along the Western Front – Australia and India have a positive defence relationship, underpinned by the 2006 Memorandum of Defence Cooperation and 2009 Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation. However, post the 2014 bilateral FSC the cooperation on defence and security matters between the two countries has gained significant momentum thus, witnessing conscious and focussed enhancements.
- » The complexity of the biennial maritime exercise over the past four years has steadily increased. The third edition would involve exercises in all three dimensions with focus on ASW. The number of units being fielded by both navies in the bilateral exercise is the highest till date. The increased scale of participation signifies the importance attached to the exercise by both countries while the enhanced complexity is indicative of the interoperability between the two navies. Overall, the exercise underscores India’s vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and shared objectives of the two countries towards ensuring good order in the maritime domain and solidarity with friendly and harmonious countries.

4th SESSION OF INDIA-UKRAINE WORKING GROUP ON TRADE AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION HELD IN NEW DELHI

Prelims:

- » List of MOU’s between India-Ukraine

MAINS:

1. Ukraine –Russia crisis
2. Chernobyl incident or Chernobyl Disaster.

Context:

- » The 4th Meeting of India-Ukraine Working Group on Trade and Economic Cooperation (IU-WGTEC), under the India-Ukraine Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technical, Industrial and Cultural Cooperation was held today in New Delhi.

- » Indian delegation was led by Bidyut Behari Swain, Additional Secretary, Foreign Trade (CIS), Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India.
- » Ukrainian Side was led by Mr. Oleksiy Rozhkov, Director of Directorate for International Trade and Economic Cooperation and European Integration of the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of Ukraine.
- » A protocol was signed at the end of the meeting. The protocol deals with review of trade, cooperation in the field of small and medium entrepreneurship, cooperation in the field of technical regulation (standardization, metrology, certification, conformity assessment), public-private partnership (PPP) and investment, agriculture, facilitating the access of Ukrainian food products to the market of India, energy sector, finance, granting Ukraine market economy status within the framework of anti-dumping investigations, and banking and cooperation in tourism.

OVER 1.2 M EARLY DEATHS IN INDIA DUE TO AIR POLLUTION

Prelims:

- » Types of pollutions
- » Laws for controlling air pollution

Mains:

- » Technology advancements in controlling air pollution.

Context:

- » A global report has found that life expectancy of children born today will be shortened by 20 months on average, growing up in current high levels of air pollution.
- » According to a study, conducted by the Boston-headquartered Health Effects Institute, the situation in South Asia is much worse with the life expectancy shortened by two years and six months.
- » The institute's State of Global Air Report 2019, released today, said that overall long-term exposure to outdoor and indoor air pollution contributed to nearly 5 million deaths across the world from stroke, diabetes, heart attack, lung cancer, and chronic lung disease in 2017.
- » This means that air pollution contributed to nearly one in every 10 deaths in 2017, making it a bigger killer than malaria, malnutrition, and road accidents.
- » The report said that out of the 5 million, 3 million deaths are directly attributed to PM2.5, half of which is from India and China together. The analysis found that China and India together were responsible for over half of the total global attributable deaths, with each country facing over 1.2 million deaths from all air pollution in 2017.

◆ TRAI ASKS TELCOS TO SUBMIT PLAN DETAILS OF SEGMENTED OFFERS EVERY MONTH ◆

Prelims & mains:

- Roles and responsibilities of TRAI

Context:

- The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has directed operators to submit before it all tariff plans that they offer to select segments of customers at the end of every month.
- Telecom regulator issued the new direction to telecom operators directing them to submit before it details of rates, terms and conditions of scheme, quantum of service that customers will get, name of the plan, validity period of subion and benefits available to the subscriber under the plan in which segment offer has been given. TRAI also directed service providers to share with it the number of subscribers at the end of each month who have availed the segmented offer. Trai had issued a similar order in October 2018 but the same was set aside by the Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT). The new order for segmented tariff disclosures comes after the Supreme Court on January 21 held that "there will be no stay on the impugned judgment (of TDSAT) except to the extent of remand".

◆ S KOREA TO LAUNCH WORLDS FIRST NATIONAL 5G NETWORKS ◆

Prelims:

1. Features of 5G Network
2. Difference B/W **3G, 4G, 5G**
3. Korea Peninsula Geography

Mains:

- How Inclusive development can be achieved by 5G Networks

Context:

- South Korea will launch the world's first fully-fledged 5G mobile networks on Friday.
- The transformational leap already has superpowers sparring for control of innovation that could potentially change the day-to-day lives of billions of people. Hyper-wired South Korea has a reputation for technical prowess, and Seoul has made the 5G rollout a priority as it seeks to stimulate stuttering economic growth. The superfast communications heralded by fifth-generation wireless technology will bring smartphones near-instantaneous connectivity - 20 times faster than the existing 4G. It is crucial for the future development of devices ranging from self-driving vehicles that send data traffic to one another in real time, industrial robots, drones and other elements of the Internet of Things. 5G's hyper speed can connect one million devices within a one square kilometre zone simultaneously.

- » Until now, no mobile networks have offered nationwide 5G access. Japan is expected to roll out a limited deployment in 2019 before full services start in time for next year's Tokyo Olympics.

NITI AAYOG CALLS FOR NEW REGULATIONS FOR BANK LOANS' REPAYMENT

Prelims:

- » Niti Aayog- objectives and functions.

Mains:

- » Need for reforms and challenges associated.

Context:

- » The government and the Reserve Bank will have to bring in a new set of regulations to ensure that borrowers repay their debt in time following the Supreme Court order.
- » The apex court had struck down the February 12 circular of the RBI on Non-Performing Assets. This move ensuring timely repayment and resolution of stressed assets is essential for long-term growth.

BLEACHING HITS WORLD'S SOUTHERNMOST CORAL REEF

Prelims:

- » Important coral reefs around the world and their location

Mains:

- » How coral reefs are formed?
- » How climate change effects the existence of coral reefs

Context:

- » Phenomenon indicates that climate change is affecting even remote spots, says scientist
- » The world's southernmost coral reef has been hit by bleaching this summer, Australian scientists said on Wednesday, as they warned rising sea temperatures from climate change were affecting even the most isolated ecosystems.
- » The corals off Lord Howe Island — some 600 km offshore from Sydney — were affected by elevated temperatures this summer, despite escaping severe bleaching that damaged the Great Barrier Reef in 2016 and 2017.
- » It's a canary in the coal mine that bleaching at this very isolated southernmost reef.
- » It's just another indicator that climate change is affecting everywhere around the world. Here is a reef that is 600 km from the mainland and we are seeing bleaching there in a lovely, beautiful ecosystem.

Shallow lagoons:

- » Australian universities and the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration found severe bleaching of up to 90% at Lord Howe's inshore, shallow lagoon reefs.
- » Deeper-water corals in the marine park, which contains species not found anywhere else and like the Barrier Reef is a World Heritage site, were still "looking quite healthy" having mostly escaped the bleaching.
- » Increasing baseline temperatures caused by climate change, and local factors such as elevated temperatures in the area this summer, caused the bleaching to occur.
- » The scientists are set to return to Lord Howe in the next few months to find out if some corals have been so severely bleached, they can't recover.
- » Bleaching occurs when abnormal environmental conditions, such as warmer sea temperatures, cause corals to expel tiny photosynthetic algae, draining them of their colour.

STUDY SHOWS TINY BLACK HOLES MAY NOT ACCOUNT FOR DARK MATTER AS STATED BY STEPHEN HAWKING

Prelims & mains:

1. Types of blackholes
2. How blackholes are formed?

Context:

- » For a whole night, the research team took 190 consecutive images of Andromeda galaxy
- » Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA), Pune has ruled out the possibility of primordial black holes being a major constituent of dark matter. This finding disproves a theoretical claim of Prof Stephen Hawking.

Dark Matter:

- » In the solar system, Mercury, the planet closest to the Sun, takes just 88 days to make one revolution around the sun, while Neptune, the farthest one, takes 165 years to make one round.
- » In like manner, laws of gravity expect us to see stars closer to the centre of galaxies rotating faster than the stars on the edge.
- » However, in most galaxies, the stars closer to the centre and the stars at the edge of the galaxies take almost same time to make one revolution.
- » This entity has remained as one of the central unresolved puzzles in cosmology since 1930s. It is, no wonder, named 'Dark Matter'.
- » The material is considered to be a 'matter' since it appears to have gravitational attraction and it is 'dark' because it does not seem to interact with light (or for that matter any part of the electromagnetic spectrum).

- » Detailed surveys of the cosmos indicate that almost 85% of the total mass of the Universe is composed of dark matter.
- » Thus, stars, galaxies, and atoms that we see all around are just the tip of the iceberg and the elusive dark matter makes up the bulk of the Universe.

Primordial Black Holes:

- » Cosmologists have come up with various hypothesis and theories to explain the dark matter.
- » Some postulate it to be composed of neutrinos, which are particles that have no charge but have tiny mass and, therefore, do not have interact with electromagnetic spectrum, but are gravitationally interacting.
- » Some others have postulated they may be some new kind of elementary particles - 'weakly-interacting massive particles (WIMPs)', or 'gravitationally-interacting massive particles' (GIMPs), which are yet to be detected.

Gravitational Lensing:

- » Black holes are not radiant and will not be visible through any telescope.
- » However, as first suggested by Albert Einstein, if by chance, a tiny primordial black hole eclipses a distant star, light rays of the star will bend around the black hole due to gravitational effect, resulting in the star appearing to be brighter than it originally is for a short while.
- » Called 'gravitational lensing', this rare phenomenon can occur only when the star, the black hole and the observer on the Earth are aligned in a straight line.
- » When the black hole is in alignment with a distant star, due to gravitational attraction, light rays are bent inwards like a lens, making the star appear brighter.

SAVING THE OLIVE RIDLEYS OF VISAKHAPATNAM COAST

Prelims:

- » Olive Turtles family classification
- » Status of Olive Ridleys in IUCN RedList

Mains:

1. What are the measure taking for the conservation of olive ridleys
2. Role of turtles in marine ecosystem.

Context:

- » Visakhapatnam is one of the important sporadic nesting zones for the Olive Ridley Sea Turtles on the East Coast.
- » Every winter, thousands of them come ashore to lay their eggs. The coast of Odisha still remains a site of mass nesting, places like Visakhapatnam, Srikakulam and Vizianagaram in Andhra Pradesh are also seeing an increase in the number of nests Divisinal Forest Officer.

- » This year in Visakhapatnam over 80,000 eggs were collected of which 10,000 hatchlings have been released so far.
- » The turtles that predominately come to Visakhapatnam from the Mexican coast, mate at sea and then come ashore to lay clusters of eggs on the beaches.
- » Females dig holes in the sand to lay the eggs, cover them and return to the sea. The eggs hatch in a span of 45 to 60 days depending upon the temperature.
- » Tiny turtle hatchlings make their way from the nest to the sea, using the light from the horizon as their guide. However, due to rapid urbanisation of coastal areas, lights from hotels and buildings near the coast confuse the hatchlings and they go astray. That is why releasing the hatchlings has become an important part of the conservation process.
- » In an attempt to conserve the eggs, and prevent the death of hatchlings due to human interference and stray dog menace, the Forest Department built hatcheries.
- » National Thermal Power Corporation Limited Simhadri as a part of its CSR activity is funding the Forest Department for the turtle conservation project that was launched in the fiscal year 2015/2016. ₹4.6 crore was granted for this. NTPC has so far released ₹4 crore in four instalments and the remaining ₹60 lakh will be released shortly.

What can you do to help in conservation?

- » Keep the beaches clean, Keep away from the nesting zones
- » Volunteer for the conservation for collecting eggs and releasing the hatchlings.
- » The eggs that are laid along the coast are brought and buried in these hatcheries. At present, there are five hatcheries across the city at RK Beach, Appu Ghar, Jodugulla Palem, Pedda Nagamayya Palem and Tantadi. Among the five hatcheries, the survival rate of hatchlings at the RK Beach is one of the lowest thanks to pollution, littering and human interference.

SET UP EXPERT COMMITTEE TO PROBE CAUSE OF KERALA FLOOD:

AMICUS CURIAE

Prelims:

- » Rivers, bordering states, river tribunals and Dams.

Mains:

- » Write about emergency management cycle for floods.

Context:

- » The amicus curiae appointed by the High Court of Kerala to assist it in a slew of flood related cases, has recommended appointment of an independent expert committee headed by a superior court judge to ascertain what caused the floods of August 2018 and to come up with recommendations for strengthening dam management.

- » The formation of an expert committee consisting of hydrologists, dam management experts and engineers was essential in view of the severe magnitude of the flood.
- » It is to find out whether a sudden release of water from the dams during heavy rainfall had worsened the situation and whether flood control zones of each dam were maintained as per the National Water Policy norms and guidelines of the National Disaster Management Authority.
- » It could also look into whether timely alert had been issued about the release of water from dams.

NUGEN MOBILITY SUMMIT 2019

Prelims & mains:

- » What is NuGen Mobility Summit
- » What are the objectives of NuGen Mobility Summit

Context:

- » The International Centre for Automotive Technology (ICAT) is organizing a NuGen Mobility Summit, 2019, at Manesar, NCR, from 27th to 29th November 2019.
- » The objective of the Summit is to share new ideas, learnings, global experiences, innovations and future technology trends for faster adoption, assimilation and development of advanced automotive technologies for a smarter and greener future.
- » This event will help in building a platform for bringing together all stakeholders in the automotive industry to understand global advancements in technologies.
- » The Summit is being organized in association with SAENIS, SAE INDIA, SAE International, NATRIP, DIMTS, Department of Heavy Industry, Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, SIAM and ACMA.
- » Experts working with leading international scientific and research organizations and testing laboratories from various countries like USA, Europe, Japan and other Asian countries will also participate in the event and share their experiences and knowledge on development of smart and green technologies and the challenges that the industry needs to overcome.
- » The event aims to bring together the automotive OEMs, professionals, researchers, academic experts, vehicle system suppliers, test equipment supplier, quality managers, product planners, component developers, SAE members and students from all over the world.

AIR MARSHAL D CHOUDHURY TAKES OVER AS SASO HQ WAC

Prelims:

- » Headquarters
- » Air chief commanders

Context:

- » Air Mshl D Choudhury has taken over as Senior Air Staff Officer, Western Air Command.
- » He is an alumnus of National Defence Academy and was commissioned on 22 Dec 1983. The Air Officer is a Fighter Combat Leader and an Instrument Rating Instructor and Examiner.
- » He is an alumnus of Royal College of Defence Studies UK, a Post Graduate in Strategy and International Security from King's College London and Master of Philosophy on Defence and Strategic Studies.
- » He has over 5000 sorties of flying on operational fighter ac and is Fully Ops and MG on MiG-21(all variants), MiG-27, MiG-29 and Su-30 aircraft.
- » He has commanded 15 Sqn, Tactics and Air Combat Development Establishment (TACDE) and two frontline bases as the AOC.
- » He has served two tenures at TACDE – first as an Instructor and then as Commandant. He has held staff appointments in Air HQ as Director Air Staff Inspection, Director Operations Joint Planning and Director Operational Planning and Assessment Group.
- » He has served as Air-I of HQ WAC, Air Defence Commander of HQ CAC and HQ SWAC, AOC of COBRA Group and Assistant Chief of Air Staff (Insp) at Air HQ (RKP). He has vast experience in fighter operations and planning at the field, operational and strategic levels.
- » He has led three International exercises – Red Flag, Desert Eagle and Garuda. He has also authored a large number of service papers on operational matters, Air Power and Leadership, many of which have been implemented / published.
- » The Air Marshal was awarded the CAS commendation in Aug 1992, VishishtSeva Medal in Jan 2007, Vayu Sena Medal in Jan 2011 and AtiVishishtSeva Medal in Jan 2018.

ICC TO JOIN HANDS WITH INTERPOL TO FIGHT CORRUPTION IN SPORT

Prelims:

- » What is ICC and its HQ

Mains:

- » Is BCCI covered as state under Art 12?
- » International measures for combating corruption

Context:

- » The International Cricket Council (ICC) has sought closer working relations with the Interpol to widen the scope of its fight against corruption in the sport.
- » The cooperation was discussed during ICC Anti-Corruption Unit General Manager, Alex Marshall's visit to the Interpol headquarters in Lyon, France.
- » In a media release, Marshall said the ICC and Interpol are keen on working together and the meetings in Lyon last week were productive.
- » Marshall said the idea is to ensure that players are better educated about the corruptors and Interpol's vast network would be helpful in this.
- » Interpol's Criminal Networks unit Assistant Director Jose de Gracia said the organization will be glad to assist the ICC.

PAKISTAN COULD BE BLACKLISTED BY PARIS-BASED FATF

Prelims:

- » FATF and its functions

Mains:

- » What do you mean by Grey list of countries?
- » What are the global initiatives to combat terror financing?

Context:

- » Pakistan could be blacklisted by Paris-based FATF
- » Pakistan could be blacklisted by the Financial Action Task Force, FATF due to insufficient physical actions on the ground against banned terror groups to block the flow of funds and activities.
- » In June last year, the Paris-based FATF had placed Pakistan on the 'grey list' of countries whose domestic laws are considered weak to tackle the challenges of money laundering and terror financing.
- » A group of experts from the FATF recently visited Pakistan to review the progress made by Islamabad on global standards against financial crimes to warrant its exclusion from the watchdog's grey list.
- » The FATF noted that Pakistan had revised its terror financing risk assessment but did not demonstrate a proper understanding of the terror financing risks posed by the Islamic State group, Al-Qaeda, Jamaat-ud-Dawah, Falah-i-Insaniat, LeT, JeM, Haqqani Network and persons affiliated with the Taliban.
- » Pakistan's foreign minister has acknowledged that the country could lose up to 10 billion dollars annually if it remains on that list.

ELECTION CODE AND NEW AGE MEDIA

Prelims questions:

1. Governance issues.

Mains questions:

1. Explain the role of Social networking and media in election, Discuss about the government policies and intervention for development in various sectors and also explain the issues in implementation and design.

Context:

- » Social media platforms Facebook, Google, WhatsApp, ShareChat, TikTok and the IAMAI have agreed to a voluntary code of ethics to abide by during the Lok Sabha Elections 2019, which are set to begin on April 11.
- » The code came into effect on March 20, and will remain in force throughout the elections.

Why Social Media Platform plays a Important Role?

- » Now a day's maximum number of citizens who are eligible to vote are active in social media, so it need to create awareness based on Fake news and messages circulated on social media have led to more than 30 deaths since last year, data portal IndiaSpend says, mostly rumours about child kidnapping gangs. When many Indians in the run-up to the elections say they are concerned about what is real and what is fake on the Internet, this is clearly in part about social media and digital platforms.
- » But unfortunately, it is also about some news media and some politicians who people see as part of the disinformation problems that India faces.
- » It is only a few years ago that the Press Council of India said that “the phenomenon of ‘paid news’ has acquired serious dimensions”, “goes beyond the corruption of individual journalists and media companies and has become pervasive, structured and highly organised.”
- » The Press Council concluded: “It is undermining democracy in India.” Cobrapost’s sting operation last summer, which exposed large media houses willing to peddle propaganda as news, demonstrates that some of these problems persist.

Responsibility of social media:

- » New media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp, have become political battlegrounds. These spaces of electioneering have, however, remained unregulated because the Representation of People Act (RPA), 1951, does not cover social media.
- » Section 126 of the RPA prohibits political parties and candidates from campaigning in the two days before voting. In January, an EC panel suggested bringing social media platforms under the Act’s ambit so that voters are “afforded a period of reflection”.

- » The Code asks social media firms to train the EC's nodal officers on how their "platforms work and on mechanisms for sending requests on dealing with offensive material". These companies will also develop a "reporting mechanism" through which the poll watchdog can inform the platforms about "potential violations of Section 126".

Conclusion:

- » Media should act as a mirror that reflects the reality, neither magnifying nor diminishing, neither distorting nor mystifying facts, and should "shun this tendency lest 'money power' is used to influence voters through 'manufactured' views and opinions of paid news".
- » If the media can present report card and the people can demand accountability from political party's vis-a-vis their promises, raising resources and how they intend to spend them, our country. Can boast of not only being the largest democracy in the world but also one of the most vibrant, cleanest democracies in the world.

PROVING A POINT ON AUDIT TRAIL

Context:

- » As the campaign for the 2019 general election builds up, so too with the debate on electronic voting machines (EVMs) and Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs).

Difference Between Ballot Paper and Evm (Electronic Voting Machine)

- » EVM (Electronic voting machine) which is used to record votes in modern way by pressing the favour candidate button
- » Example: -India
- » Ballot paper were filled by candidate with respective information including his personal Identity and His Favour Candidate For Vote
- » Example: - America

WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

- » A new development in the Nizamabad parliamentary constituency in Telangana, the Election Commission (EC) would have been forced to conduct elections using ballot papers — there are 185 candidates in the fray. This exceeds the capacity of an EVM, which can cater to 64 candidates (63 candidates and the none of the Above, or NOTA, option).
- » The EC is now considering using special machines which can accommodate up to 384 candidates.
- » These will use 24 ballot units connected in series.

Election commission of India:

- » The Election Commission of India under Art 324 is an autonomous constitutional authority responsible for administering election processes in India.

- » The body administers elections to the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha and state Legislative Assemblies and Legislative Council in India, and the offices of the President and Vice President in the country. It subsequently enacted Representation of the People Act.
- » The commission has the powers under the Constitution, to act in an appropriate manner when the enacted laws make insufficient provisions to deal with a given situation in the conduct of an election. Being a constitutional authority, Election Commission is amongst the few institutions which function with both autonomy and freedom, along with the country's higher judiciary, the Union Public Service Commission and the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.
- » Election Commission organised an open hackathon on 3 June at 10 am, to attempt hacking of Electronic Voting Machine used by the commission in various Indian elections.

India International Institute of Democracy And Election Management (IIIDEM)

- » In June 2011, the Election Commission of India (ECI), established the India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM) to advance its professional competence in election management, promote peoples participation, contribute to developing stronger democratic institutions and support the efforts of ECI in carrying out its mandate and functions.

IIIDEM is headed by a Director General and has the following centers of excellence:

- » Centre for Training and Capacity Development
- » Centre for International Cooperation and Capacity Building
- » Centre for IT and E- Learning
- » Centre for Voter Education
- » Centre for Electoral Law
- » Centre for Innovation, Research and Documentation

Types of election:

- » Elections in the Republic of India include elections for;

 1. Members of the Parliament in Lok Sabha,
 2. Members of State Legislative Assemblies,
 3. Members of the Parliament in Rajya Sabha, and for
 4. Members in local panchayat or city corporation council.

Electing President and Prime Minister:

- » The President of India is the ceremonial head of state, who is elected indirectly for a five-year term by an electoral college comprising members of national and state legislatures.
Election of President comes under article 54.
- » The Prime Minister of India is the head of government and exercises most executive power.

- » Electing of PM comes under article 74
- » Appointed by the president, the prime minister is by convention supported by the party or political alliance having a majority of seats in the Lok Sabha or lower house of parliament.

Electoral Procedure:

- » Candidates are required to file their nomination papers with the Electoral Commission. Then, a list of candidates is published. No party is allowed to use government resources for campaigning. No party is allowed to bribe the candidates before elections.
- » The government cannot start a project during the election period. Campaigning ends by 6:00 pm two days before the polling day.
- » The polling is held between 7:00 am and 6:00 pm.
- » The Collector of each district is in charge of polling. Government employees are employed as poll officers at the polling stations. Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) are being used instead of ballot boxes to prevent election fraud. After the citizen votes his or her left index finger is marked with an indelible ink. This practice was instituted in 1962.

Conclusion:

- » EVMs have made India a proud global leader in elections.
- » After incorporating Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPATs), the system is now foolproof.
- » After the expert panel report, the EC's initiatives in this regard stand vindicated.
- » It should now clinch the EVM debate and utilise the opportunity in the Nizamabad constituency to demonstrate the relative superiority of the EVM as the wonder machine of Indian democracy.

UAE CONFERS PRESTIGIOUS ZAYED MEDAL ON PM MODI

Prelims:

- » Zayed Medal, Geography of UAE

Mains:

- » Timeline of India-UAE relations
- » How ties with UAE will be a game changer to India?

Context:

- » The United Arab Emirates has conferred the prestigious Zayed Medal on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the highest decoration awarded to kings, presidents and heads of states.
- » The award comes in appreciation of Prime Minister Modi's role in consolidating the long-standing friendship and joint strategic cooperation between the two countries.
- » Prime Minister Narendra Modi has thanked the UAE President Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan for conferring the prestigious Zayed Medal on him.

- » In a tweet, Mr Modi said he accepts the honour with utmost humility. He said, under his visionary leadership, India-UAE strategic ties have reached new heights. The Prime Minister said, this friendship is contributing to the peace and prosperity of our people and the Planet.

NO SURPRISES: ON RBI REPO RATE CUT

Context:

- » 25 basis points cut in benchmark interest rates by the Reserve Bank of India in its first bi-monthly policy statement of the financial year.
- » The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) decided to hold the change and settle for a conservative approach given the varying sets of data that it was faced with.

Reason for basic points cut:

- » On the one hand, inflation, despite the mild spike in February, is well under control at 2.6% and is projected to average 3.2% to 3.4% in the first half of 2019-20.
- » This is below the 4% target set for the MPC.
- » It is one of the vital money control mechanisms used by the central bank of the country.

What Is Repo Rate of RBI?

- » Repo rate is the rate at which the central bank of a country (Reserve Bank of India in case of India) lends money to commercial banks in the event of any shortfall of funds. Repo rate is used by monetary authorities to control inflation.

What is Repo Rate in India?

- » The Reserve Bank of India increased the Repo Rate again on the quarter2/Q2 (1st of August 2018) from 6.25% to 6.50%.
- » Even the reverse repo rate was increased to 6.25% from 6%, and the Marginal Standing Facility Rate went up by 25 basis points to 6.75% from 6.50%.

Reverse Repo Rate:

- » Reverse Repo rate is the rate at which Reserve Bank of India borrows funds from all the other commercial banks in the country.
- » In other words, it is the rate at which commercial banks in India park their excess money with Reserve Bank of India for a short-term period.
- » Current reverse repo rate is calculated at 6%.

Importance of Repo Rate and Reverse Repo Rate:

- » It deals with the deficiency of funds and liquidity in the market.
- » Bank lending and investment rates are decided based on the repo rate and reverse repo rate.
- » It's the most effective and efficient tools used by the Reserve Bank of India to achieve price stability and to boost economic development.

- » This is the most crucial monetary policy instruments available to the RBI.
- » There is considerable rise in borrowing by commercial banks through repo route which makes it an important element of India's monetary policy framework. The constant nature of the balance between Repo and Reverse-Repo makes it more powerful in the Indian banking system.

Significance of repo rate and reverse repo rate:

- » **Liquidity Regulator:** Under the liquidity framework designed by Reserve Bank of India, many facilities are offered to commercial banks to meet their requirement of immediate liquidity or deficiency of funds.
- » The main motive of the liquidity framework is to avoid any liquidity crisis in the Indian banking system. This popular system of liquidity framework is generally known as repo.
- » In the similar way, Reserve Bank of India has a framework for surplus funds/cash in the banking system which ensures there is no excess liquidity in the system. And this framework is referred to as reverse repo.
- » Basically, repo transactions inject liquidity into the Indian banking system. On the other hand, reverse repo absorbs liquidity from the Indian banking system.
- » **Price Stability:** Reserve Bank of India has to control the rate of inflation and stimulate the economic growth and strike a balance between both inflation and economic growth by revising the repo rate on a half yearly or quarterly basis.
- » It is important for the country's economic growth. And it's equally important to avoid the higher rate of inflation in the country.
- » This is where repo rate and reverse repo plays a crucial role by helping Reserve Bank of India strike a balance between both inflation and economic growth.

Effect of Repo Rate:

- » **Increase in Repo Rate:** Lending rates and deposits offered by banks are impacted by a rise or fall of repo rate. However, it may not have an immediate effect.
- » Banks may analyse their liquidity position and cost of funds before increasing the deposit rates and the lending rates.
- » After analysing the cost of funds and liquidity position, banks may begin to pass on their interest rate burden to its end customer in the form of elevated lending rates. That means higher equated monthly instalment for existing borrowers and higher rate of credit for new borrowers.
- » Home loans and other floating rate loans get majorly affected due to rate change. Higher lending rates may lead to a slowdown of the lending business for the banking sector, which will have an impact on their profitability.

- » Post analysis of liquidity position, banks may also hike the rate of bank deposit offered to customers to attract more inflow of funds into the banking system.
- » **Reduction in Repo Rate:** Banking is the first sector to get affected by any change in monetary policies. It's a big relief to bank when Reserve Bank of India decides to reduce the repo rate. With the dip in repo rate, banks can borrow from Reserve Bank of India at a cheaper rate. With the accessibility of low-cost credit, banks may even reduce the lending rates to its customer after analysing the liquidity condition and the deposit inflows. Banks may offer credit to its end customer at a reduced rate.
- » As bank loans get cheaper, consumers can spend and borrow more while spending a lot less in borrowing. Increased lending business will boost the profitability of the overall banking system. However, lending rate cut and deposit rate hikes are purely dependant on the bank's liquidity position and deposit demand from customers.

Impact on The Economy:

- » **Increase in Repo Rate:** When Reserve Bank of India hikes repo rates, it becomes costlier for banks to borrow. In other words, banks will have to pay more interest on their short-term borrowings from the Reserve Bank of India.
- » Costlier credit option for banks prompts them to hike the lending rate which they offer to their end customers. Expensive bank loans discourage the borrower from availing credit.
- » This reduces the money supply in the market and thereby stabilizes the liquidity in the system. Consumption, Expansion and production also take a downfall with the lesser money supply. Expensive credit hinders economic development and GDP growth even though inflation rate comes under control.
- » Hence, Reserve Bank of India revises repo rate on a regular basis to keep the inflation rate under control and also to strike a balance between both economic growth and rising inflation.

Here are some of the vital impacts of increase in repo rate on economy:

- » Borrowing becomes costlier for banks as they avail short-term credit from Reserve Bank of India at relatively higher rate. - With the costlier credit for banks, they will ultimately lend the consumers at relatively increased rate.
- » This may lead to costlier bank loans for customers. As the lending get expensive, borrower gets discouraged and demand for bank loan reduces. - Reduced borrowing results in lower consumption demand which will lead to economic slowdown that hinders the growth of GDP for the short term.
- » As the consumption demand reduces, profitability of every sector in the economic system takes a hit. - Corporate loan buyers get discouraged to avail credit with the hike in repo rate also discourages the. As the availability of business capital becomes expensive, production and

- » expansion plans of corporate take a backstop. - Increase in repo rate reduces the money supply in the economic system and thereby reduces the rate of inflation.
- » **Reduction in Repo Rate:** When Reserve Bank of India decides to cut the repo rate, the short-term loans for commercial banks become cheaper. This prompts them to offer consumer loans at a relatively cheaper rate. Many a times, base lending rate gets reduced with the reduction in repo rate. Base lending rate is the rate below which banks cannot lend to its customers. Reduced base rate increases the consumption as people will have more money at their disposal. Increased consumption positively impacts the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth. Cheaper availability of credit encourages businesses to grow and expand. Prices of products get lower with the availability of low cost capital. New investments lead to better employment opportunity in the economy.

Here are some of the key impacts of repo rate cut on economy:

- » Consumption Demand: Demand for auto, housing and every sector will rise due to availability of cheaper bank loans to customer. Economic growth will take a upward trend with its every sector growing due to increased consumption demand. - Economic activities picks up: With the falling prices, economy grows at a slower rate. Repo rate cut boosts the economic activities and prompts healthy growth with adequate supply of money in the market.
- » Boost to foreign investments: Bank lending rates get reduced with the cut in repo rate.
- » Lower borrowing rates will encourage the foreign players to investment in Indian financial market. It's crucial to note that the repo rate cut is not the only monetary measure for economic growth.

Difference Between GDP and GVA:

- » While GVA gives a picture of the state of economic activity from the producers' side or supply side, the GDP gives the picture from the consumers' side or demand perspective.
- » Both measures need not match because of the difference in treatment of net taxes.
- » A sector-wise breakdown provided by the GVA measure helps policymakers decide which sectors need incentives or stimulus and accordingly formulate sectorspecific policies.
- » But GDP is a key measure when it comes to making cross-country analysis and comparing the incomes of different economies.

Conclusion:

- » The 25 basis points cut is, therefore, an acknowledgement by the MPC of the slowdown in growth. The MPC's neutral policy stance is prudent given the uncertainties ahead as it gives the central bank the flexibility to tailor policy to emerging data sets.

NITI AAYOG CALLS FOR NEW REGULATIONS FOR BANK LOANS' REPAYMENT

Prelims:

1. NPA's
2. Classification of NPA's
3. February 12 circular

Mains:

- » How Feb 12 circular affects the banking credit line.

Context:

- » Niti Aayog's Chief Executive Officer Amitabh Kant has said that the government and the Reserve Bank will have to bring in a new set of regulations to ensure that borrowers repay their debt in time following the Supreme Court order.
- » On Tuesday, the apex court had struck down the February 12 circular of the RBI on Non-Performing Assets.
- » Speaking on the sidelines of a conference in Mumbai, Mr. Kant said such a move ensuring timely repayment and resolution of stressed assets is essential for long-term growth.

BRUNEI INTRODUCES SHARIA LAWS; MAKES ADULTERY & HOMSEXUALITY PUNISHABLE

Prelims:

- » Location of Brunei

IAS
GATEWAYY

Context:

- » Brunei today introduced harsh new sharia laws that make adultery and homosexuality punishable by stoning to death.
- » The new measures also cover a range of other crimes, including punishment for theft by amputation, making Brunei the first place in Southeast Asia to have a sharia penal code at the national level.
- » The new law mostly applies to Muslims, though some aspects will also apply to non-Muslims. It stipulates the death penalty for a number of offences, including rape, adultery, sodomy, robbery and insulting or defaming the Prophet Muhammad. It also introduces public flogging as punishment for abortion and criminalises exposing Muslim children to the beliefs and practices of any religion other than Islam.
- » Brunei's gay community has expressed shock and fear at the 'medieval punishments'. The decision to push ahead with the punishments has sparked alarm around the world too, with the United Nations labelling them cruel and inhumane.

- » The European Union has also condemned the new laws, saying that some of the punishments now permitted under a sharia penal code amount to torture and breach international human rights agreements.

MAITRI BRIDGE: LONGEST SUSPENSION BRIDGE

Prelims:

- » Location of Maitri bridge

Suggest Some Measures for Protecting:

- » Indian Army built the longest suspension bridge over Indus river in Leh in just 40 days and the bridge is named as Maitri Bridge....
- » Maitri Bridge The bridge was constructed by the combat engineers of ‘Sahas aur Yogyata’ regiment of ‘Fire and Fury Corps’ of the Indian Army. The bridge is 260-feet long.
- » This cable suspension bridge is expected to give a major boost to connectivity in remote areas in Ladakh....
- » The bridge is constructed using around 500 tonnes of bridge equipment and construction material. Maitri Bridge has been dedicated to the people of India to commemorate the 20th year of Kargil Vijay Divas. The bridge is part of the central government plans to all-weather road connectivity in the region.

INDIA SAYS, PAKISTAN HAS NOT ADDRESSED CONCERN RAISED BY IT OVER KARTARPUR CORRIDOR

Context:

- » India today said Pakistan has not addressed the concerns raised by it over the Kartarpur corridor.
- » Briefing media in New Delhi, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Raveesh Kumar said India has sought clarification from Pakistan on certain issues but these concerns have not been addressed by Islamabad.
- » He stressed that India remains committed to realise the aspirations of people which flow out of pending demand of Indian pilgrims to visit Kartarpur Sahib using the corridor.
- » He added that New Delhi had also shared concerns on reports that controversial elements have been appointed by Pakistan to a committee which was to be associated with Kartarpur corridor.
- » He said this is the reason that India decided to postpone the meeting between the two countries, which had been scheduled for 2nd of April to discuss the Kartarpur Corridor.

SKYMET SEES BELOW-NORMAL SOUTH-WEST MONSOON

Prelims:

1. Monsoon formation.
2. El Nino , La Nino

Mains:

- » Effects of weak monsoons on Indian Economy.

Context:

- » This year's South-West Monsoon (June-September) is likely to be 'below normal', at around 93 per cent of the long-period average (LPA), private forecaster Skymet Weather said on Wednesday.
- » This is the first early forecast for the 2019 season. The India Met Department (IMD) is expected to come out with its own forecast by mid-April.
- » A preliminary monsoon forecast guidance by Skymet on February 25 had predicted normal rains. It kept the probability of normal monsoon at about 50 per cent, but also alluded to a 'significant chance' of rainfall ending below normal. This was based on January projections, which indicated that chances of El Nino were fading rapidly.
- » But the scenario changed completely in February, with moderate El Nino conditions emerging over the Pacific Ocean. The Pacific is now strongly warmer than average. Model projections indicate 80 per cent chance of El Nino conditions during March-May, dropping to 60 per cent for June-August. It is going to be a devolving El Nino year, though retaining threshold values all through the season. Thus, monsoon 2019 is likely to be below normal.
- » The onset month of June may prove to be sluggish and the resultant rain deficit may spill into July. The second half of the season would, however, see better rainfall.

PHILIPPINES' DUTERTE WARNS CHINA TO BACK OFF DISPUTED ISLAND

Prelims:

- » South China sea Island location and countries surrounding it.

Mains:

- » Time line of South China Sea issue.

Context:

- » Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has warned Beijing to back off from a disputed island in the South China Sea, warning of possible military action if China "touches" it amid rising tensions over the key waterway.

- » Mr. Duterte, aiming to attract trade and investment from the Asian superpower, has mostly withheld his early criticism of Beijing's expansive claims to the sea -- a point of regional contention because trillions of dollars of goods pass through it.
- » But as the Philippine military warned this week that hundreds of Chinese coast guard and fishing vessels had "swarmed" the Manila-held Pag-asa island.
- » Department of Foreign Affairs issued a statement calling the Chinese ships' presence an "illegal" violation of Philippine sovereignty.
- » China, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam have all staked claims to various islands and reefs as well as waterways in the sea, with rich petroleum reserves thought to sit deep beneath the waters.
- » In a major victory for Manila, an international maritime tribunal ruled early in Mr. Duterte's presidency in 2016 that China's claims to the area have no legal basis.
- » However, he has largely set aside that ruling and backed off on their once tense territorial dispute over the sea. The United States, long-time Philippines ally and former colonial master, has moved to oppose any Chinese expansion in the sea.
- » For the first time, the U.S. said in March that it would come to Manila's aid in case of an "armed attack" in the South China Sea. The US navy has also forcefully asserted its right to freedom of navigation in the area, repeatedly sailing close to the man-made islands and drawing Chinese protests.

15th FINANCE COMMISSION HOLDS HIGH LEVEL DISCUSSIONS ON 'FISCAL RELATIONS ACROSS LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT'

Prelims:

- » Finance Commission – constitutional status-functions
- » Parameters used by 14th and 15th Finance commission recommendations.

Mains:

- » What are the recommendations of 14th Finance Commission?
- » 14th Finance commission recommendations on Local governance.

Context:

- » This is the culmination of significant works that all the three organizations have undertaken for the FC.
- » Addressing the gathering the Chairman set the tone of the discussions by briefly elaborating on the four technical sessions of the meeting:
- » Sub-national debt
- » Transfer design incentives and fiscal equalization.

- » Sub-national budget and Public financial management system, and Finances of third-tier of Government.
- » Earlier, the Commission had held separate meet with the OECD in April, 2018 and the World Bank in July, 2018 to discuss the initial thoughts and country experiences on the issues related to fiscal federalism and inter-governmental transfers.
- » The discussions were about Sub-national debt, fiscal rules and sustainability
- » One of the Terms of Reference made to this Finance Commission is to review the current level of debt of the Union and the States and recommend a fiscal consolidation roadmap for sound fiscal management.
- » As per the amended FRBM Act, the Central Government shall take appropriate steps to ensure that:
 - » The general government debt does not exceed 60%;
 - » The Central Government debt does not exceed 40% of GDP by the end of FY 2024-25.
 - » The Central Government debt is estimated at 48.9 per cent as a percentage of GDP for 2018-19. It is expected that Central Government liabilities will come down to 47.3 per cent of GDP in 2019-20 (As per Budget 2019-2020).
- » The outstanding liabilities of the State Governments stands at 23.4 per cent of GSDP at end-March 2017, with a range of 46.3 per cent in Punjab and 15.1 per cent in Chhattisgarh (as the RBI Study on State Budgets).
- » These developments have posed an important and challenging task for the Commission to arrive at a roadmap for Commission's award period from 2020 to 2025.

What should the distribution of this 60% be between centre and states, given the current trends in their debts. How to arrive at the inter se distribution of aggregate state debt between states.

- » Intergovernmental transfer design, incentives and fiscal equalization
- » Addressing vertical and horizontal imbalance in the fiscal resources between Union and States is one of the major tasks of the Commission.
- » While designing formula-based transfers to sub-national governments, equalization is one of the important considerations. Important points to be noted: the options available to design an equalization scheme for the Indian federation, given the constraints of data on unit cost of service delivery and on the taxable potential of the Centre States and
- » The Commission's Terms of Reference requires it to recommend performance-based incentives to states. Some of the items in this indicative list are efforts on GST, population control, increasing capital expenditure, implementation of flagship programs, etc. The meeting discussed –

- » Whether it should be incentive for prospective performance or rewards for past accomplishments
- » The need for balance between equity and efficiency, considering that the better-off States will generally score better in efficiency consideration.
- » International experiences of related cases were also discussed.

Public Financial Management:

- » Reforms in PFM systems are a continuous process. Previous Finance Commissions recommended on various aspects of PFM systems of both Union and States with focus on budgetary and accounting processes, financial reporting, etc.
- » Pace of implementation of such reforms have been slow. Possible causes may be lack of institutional framework to operationalize and implement these recommendations either at Union level or State level, and others likely reasons were discussed.
- » Revenue generation in third-tier of government
- » The discussions centered around how to make the 3rd tier self-sufficient specially now when the GST has subsumed many taxes which earlier used to generate revenue for them.
- » Raising own revenue by the third tier of the government is a serious concern of India's decentralised administrative structure.
- » One of the major sources of raising revenue is property taxation by local bodies.
- » Some local bodies have attempted different models to streamline and systematize property collection within their jurisdiction. However, very few have been successful in improving revenue collection through property taxes.
- » The reforms required in this field, global practices, ways to help local governments to raise their own revenue through the scheme of devolution, grants, and others were discussed.

HEALTH MINISTRY FORMED SOLIDARITY HUMAN CHAIN

Prelims:

- » Schemes under Ministry of Health and family Welfare
- » Concept of Human Chain

Context:

- » Ministry of health and Family Welfare and WHO formed a Solidarity Human Chain on 4th April 2019.
- » This was done as part of the world health Day Celebrations to reaffirm their commitment to working collaboratively towards Universal Health Coverage.
- » 7th April every year as the World Health Day and the theme for 2019 is Universal Health Coverage: Everyone, Everywhere

OUTER CLARITY: ON 'WEAPONISATION' OF OUTER SPACE

Context:

- » The Indian Space Research Organisation's successful April 1 launch of the PSLV-C45 rocket that placed 29 satellites in three different orbits is remarkable both for the complex set of multi-tasking the mission accomplished and for the timing.
- » Coming three days after ISRO and the Defence Research and Development Organisation knocked out a satellite in a Low Earth Orbit with a direct hit, it would appear that the Indian space programme stands galvanised and poised for a giant leap.

PSLV-C45:

- » The PSLV-C45 was launched from the Second launch pad of the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh, India.
- » The PSLV C45 rocket carried primary payloads like EMISAT and secondary payloads like M6P, Bluewalker1, four Lemur-2 out of a total of thirty satellites.
- » EMISAT is developed by DRDO.
- » The EMISAT satellite is based on the IMS-2 bus inherited from SARAL.
- » The nature of the payload has not been officially confirmed.

PSLV-C37:

- » In February 2017, the PSLV-C37 placed 104 satellites, 96 of them from the U.S., in one go, a testimony to ISRO's ability to launch satellites at a fraction of the cost that other countries incur. Equally important, just as the February 2017 launch also placed the fifth of the Cartosat 2 series in orbit, an earth observation satellite with cameras that have a resolution of less than a metre, the PSLV-C45 placed EMISAT, which can, among other things, aid in electronic intelligence.

Reason for space programme:

- » India must communicate its peaceful intentions just as it showcases its capabilities, so as to contribute to a better understanding among countries it hopes to deter and thereby reduce the chances of wrong inferences being drawn in crisis situations.
- » After all, missiles are but one aspect of space warfare.
- » There are other, less visible but equally effective methods to incapacitate satellites that are being developed and are of equally serious concern.
- » There is no global regulatory regime to address the growing militarisation in space.
- » Last year, at the UN Disarmament Commission, India expressed concern about the "weaponization" of outer space, and sought collective action to secure space-based assets.
- » In this regulatory vacuum, India has legitimate reasons to develop deterrence for the security of its space-based assets.

Way forward:

- » New Delhi must take a bigger lead in forging a global and legally binding instrument to prevent militarisation of space. It is encouraging that after the ASAT test, India said it “expects to play a role in the future in the drafting of international law on prevention of an arms race in space”.

Conclusion:

- » This is morally and pragmatically in keeping with India’s power projection.
- » Given the prohibitively expensive nature of space projects, India and other countries must utilise the increased presence in space to legitimately advance the well-being of their people.

TRADITIONAL NEW YEAR FESTIVITIES BEING HELD IN SEVERAL PARTS OF COUNTRY TODAY

Prelims:

- » New year Festivals in various locations.

Mains:

- » How Govt festivals bonanza’s are effecting public Exchequer?
- » How festivals are boosting private investments & Monetary cuts in India? Give an illustration.

Context:

- » Traditional new year festivities are being celebrated in several parts of the country today.
- » Festivals of Chaitra Sukladi, Ugadi, Gudi Padava, Cheti Chand, Navreh and Sajibu Cheiraoba are being celebrated with traditional fervour and gaiety.
- » people are celebrating Ugaadi across two Telugu states, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh to mark the beginning of the Hindu Lunar calendar. In Maharashtra, Gudi Padwa signifies the welcoming of spring. The day marks the beginning of Chaitra Navratri, that lead up to Ram Navami. All these festivals celebrated across the country with different names and customs, reflect the composite culture and rich heritage of India.

EC REMOVES ANDHRA PRADESH CHIEF SECRETARY ANIL CHANDRA PUNETHA

Prelims & mains:

- » EC functions

Context:

- » Election Commission has removed Andhra Pradesh Chief Secretary Anil Chandra Punetha and appointed LV Subrahmanyam in his place. The Commission stated this in a communication to the Andhra Pradesh government yesterday. The poll body has also directed that Mr Punetha be posted to a non-election position.

- » Election Commission has also removed Kolkata Police Commissioner Anuj Sharma ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. In an order issued last night, the commission has appointed Additional Director General of State Pollution Control Board Dr Rajesh Kumar as the new police commissioner of Kolkata.
- » The Commission has also transferred Commissioner of Bidhannagar Gyanbant Singh. Natarajan Kumar Babu will be the new Commissioner of Police of Bidhannagar. Besides, the Election Commission has also removed Police Superintendents of Birbhum and Diamond Harbour.

YOGA GAINING POPULARITY ACROSS THE WORLD

Context:

- » The yoga is gaining popularity across the world as it helps in reducing mental stress and in the treatment of several serious ailments.
- » Non-communicable diseases are a deeply disturbing trend and called upon the medical fraternity to educate the people on the dangers of sedentary lifestyles.

US, CHINA CLOSE TO STRIKING A MONUMENTAL TRADE DEAL

Prelims:

- » Timeline of US, China Relations

Mains:

- » How china us agreement effect the global trade.

CONTEXT:

- » US and China are close to striking a monumental trade deal in the next four weeks.
- » The progress has been made on the China-US economic agreement.
- » Negotiators from both the countries had met in Beijing last week to resolve the nine-month-long trade war.

DAVID MALPASS SELECTED AS PRESIDENT OF WORLD BANK

Prelims:

1. WB functions, Head Quarters

Mains:

- » How the new president of world bank can effect the policy matters of world bank lending.

Context:

- » Senior US Treasury official David Malpass has been selected as President of the World Bank. The World Bank's executive board unanimously selected 63-year-old Malpass as the bank's 13th President for a five-year term last night.

- » The World Bank President is Chair of Boards of Directors of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and International Development Association.
- » Malpass has served on the boards of the Council of the Americas, Economic Club of New York, and the National Committee on US-China Relations.

RBI TWEAKED LCR NORMS TO BOOST LIQUIDITY

Prelims:

- » What is LCR?

Mains:

- » What are the other alternatives available for banks to meet their short-term liquidity adjustments?

Context:

- » RBI provided additional 2% liquidity window to the lenders by tweaking liquidity coverage ratio (LCR) norms. The LCR indicates the proportion of highly liquid assets held by banks to ensure their ability to meet short-term obligations. NBFCs-NDSI in the category of Investment and Credit Companies (ICCs) will be made eligible to apply for Authorised Dealer Category II licence.

AMBITIONS BEYOND GROWTH

Prelims:

- » UN and its other organs
- » UNESCAP

Mains:

- » What are SDG goals?
- » What can be done by India to attain SDG goals?

Context:

- » An additional annual investment of USD 1.5 trillion, equivalent to a dollar per person per day, would allow countries to achieve the SDG by 2030, as per a United Nations survey.
- » The survey, titled 'Survey 2019: Ambitions Beyond Growth', was launched by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), a regional arm of the UN.

CO₂ LEVELS HIGHEST IN 3 MILLION YEARS

Prelims:

- » Causes for co₂ emissions?
- » Co₂ cycle

Mains:

- » What are the challenges in Combating co₂ emissions? Critically Evaluate?

Context:

- » The levels of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide in the atmosphere were higher on 4 April 2019 than ever before in the past three million years. A study found that ice age onset, and the start of the glacial cycles from cold to warm and back, was mainly triggered by a decrease of CO₂-levels. Global mean temperatures never exceeded by more than 2 degree Celsius in the past 3 million years.

VACUUM ASSISTED AIRPLANE TOILET INVENTED

Context:

- » Scientists have invented a vacuum-assisted toilet that is about half as loud as the regular airplane commode. It took researchers at the Brigham Young University (BYU) in the US two years of trial and error, three academic publications and thousands of flushes to figure out how to make toilets quieter. An air-water mix in vacuum-assisted toilets travels more than 483 kilometres per hour.

CHINA DEPLOYED NEW MISSILE DESTROYER

Prelims:

- » Guided missiles and their characteristics

Context:

- » China deployed its latest guided missile destroyer and frigate in the fleet of naval ships participating in anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and Somalian coast in the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. China's 32nd convoy fleet to the Gulf of Aden and Somali waters set sail from a military port in Zhoushan, East China's Zhejiang Province on 4 April 2019.

NEW CHIEF JUSTICE OF CALCUTTA SWEORN IN

Prelims:

- » Appointment and qualifications of High court Chief Justice, Judges

Mains:

- » Suggest some measures to be taken by State judiciary in ensuring Right to Speedy Trial.

Context:

- » Justice T B N Radhakrishnan was sworn-in as the new Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court on 4 April 2019.
- » West Bengal Governor K N Tripathi administered the oath of office to Justice Radhakrishnan in a solemn ceremony at the high court.
- » He was earlier the Chief Justice of the High Court of Hyderabad for the states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh from July 7, 2018.

NEW TUG BAHADUR IN NAVY FLEET

Context:

- » To meet the growing needs of Indian Naval ships, a new 10-tonne bollardpull tug 'Bahadur' was inducted into service at the naval ship repair yard
- » The vessel has been designed and built at Hindustan Shipyard Ltd, Visakhapatnam, and has steerable rudder propulsion (SRP) with advanced remote control.
- » The NSRY provides technical and services support to all the ships.

RINZIN DWAR INAUGURATED IN SHIMLA

Context:

- » Army's Western Command chief inaugurated Rinzin Dwar, the entrance to NPirthi Military station, named after a slain Army officer, in Shimla district.
- » It is situated at Averipatti in Rampur and is named after late Sub Rinzin Dorje of Dogra Scouts.
- » He was an accomplished mountaineer who summited Mt Everest and several other prominent peaks.

INDIAN FOOTBALL TEAM ROSE TO 101 FIFA RANKING

Prelims:

- » Relevant trophies and terms of Football

Mains:

- » What are the reasons for low popularity of other sport except Cricket? Suggest some measure.

CONTEXT:

- » The Indian men's football team gained two places to rise to 101 in the FIFA rankings released on 4 April 2019.
- » With 1219 total ranking points, the Indian team lies 18th among the Asian countries.
- » Belgium holds on to the top spot, while Iran topped the Asian rankings at 21 followed by Japan (26), South Korea (37), Australia (41) and Qatar (55).

KERALA FORESTS HOME TO NEW SPIDER SPECIES

Prelims:

- » Western Ghats and its significance

Mains:

- » Gadgil Committee report on Western Ghats

Context:

- » They were found in Eurasia, Africa
- » The spider belonging to the genus a taxonomic classification above species, Habrocestum is a species new to science. The spider also has a single long spine on the underside of both its first legs, and this gave it its scientific name Habrocestum longispinum after Latin 'longe' meaning long and 'spinae' for spine. It measures just around 2 mm and seems to prefer dry habitats, dwelling in forest litter. Threats could include unregulated tourism activities and even climate change which could affect the small insects by altering the specific micro-climates that they prefer. The discovery also lends support to the continental drift theory that suggests that the world's continents were one large, contiguous landmass where these creatures thrived many millions of years ago.

US TO DESIGNATE IRAN'S REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS AS TERRORIST ORGANIZATION

Prelims:

- » Iran Geographical conditions
- » Resources, Border Sharing Countries

Mains:

- » How US, Iran Conflicts affect our Oil Exports? Critically Evaluate.
- » What is Islamic Revolution? How it affected the Middle East?

Context:

- » The US will designate Iran's Revolutionary Guards as a terrorist organization, an unprecedented move that would ramp up pressure on the elite force.

Background:

- » The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp was formed after the 1979 Islamic revolution with a mission to defend the clerical regime. US already imposed sweeping sanctions on Iran after withdrawing last year from an international agreement under which Tehran drastically scaled back its nuclear programme. A foreign terrorist designation would make any activities of the group toxic for the United States, with any transactions involving US institutions or individuals subject to punishment.

G7 CALLS FOR GREATER ROLE FOR WOMEN IN PEACE PROCESSES

Prelims:

- » G7 countries, headquarters

Mains:

- » How India is Gaining Momentum among G7 Nations?
- » Define women empowerment? What are the legislations that ensure women empowerment in India.

Context:

- » Foreign ministers from Group of Seven (G7) countries have called for a greater role for women in solving conflicts, saying that peace settlements with female involvement were more likely to endure.

Background:

- » The world's seven most developed nations, G7 ministers, at their meeting in the northern French resort of Dinard to prepare a summit meeting under French presidency in August, also called on greater mobilisation worldwide to prevent sexual and gender-based violence in conflict.
- » According to the UN Women's agency, between 1990 and 2017, women constituted only two per cent of mediators, eight per cent of negotiators, and five per cent of witnesses and signatories in all major peace process.
- » France has placed gender inequality at the heart of its presidency of the G7, though a plan to create a new mechanism to warn about sexual violence being used as a weapon during the war was not included in a final joint statement.

INDIAN NAVY SIGNS MOU WITH CSIR

Prelims:

- » Make in India
- » CSIR functions

Mains:

- » Do you really think, India sufficient enough to promote R&D under “Make in India” initiative? Opinion.

Context:

- » The Indian Navy and Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) inked an MoU on 5 April 2019. The MoU provides undertake joint research and development of advanced technologies for the Indian Navy.
- It would facilitate joint R&D activities in diverse fields of Mechanical, Electronics, Communication, Computer Science, Propulsion systems, Metallurgy and Nanotechnology.

Background:

CSIR:

- » The Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR), known for its cutting-edge R&D knowledgebase in diverse S&T areas, is a contemporary R&D organization.
- » CSIR covers a wide spectrum of science and technology – from radio and space physics, oceanography, geophysics, chemicals, drugs, genomics, biotechnology and nanotechnology to mining, aeronautics, instrumentation, environmental engineering and information technology.

INDIAN NAVY TO ACQUIRE 6 LETHAL SUBMARINES

Prelims:

- » Types of submarines

Mains:

- » What is the role of Submarines in protecting marine & mineral wealth

Context:

- » Indian Navy will acquire 6 lethal submarines under Project-75.
- » Under Project 75-India, the Navy wants to build six conventional dieselelectric submarines.

Background:

- » The submarines should have the ability to carry and launch 18 heavyweight torpedoes in the sea. For the Indian Navy, the Project 75I-class submarine is a follow-on of the Project 75 Kalvari-class submarines. The submarines will be equipped with heavy-duty firepower as it wants the boats to have at least 12 Land Attack Cruise Missiles (LACM) along with Anti-Ship cruise missiles (ASCM).

JAPAN'S PROBE DROPS EXPLOSIVE ON ASTEROID

Prelims:

- » Definition of Asteroid and where do you find them?

Mains:

- » “It is high time for the world to work as the grid on space management”? Evaluate.

Context:

- » Japan's space agency has said its Hayabusa2 spacecraft released an explosive onto an asteroid to make a crater on its surface.
- » It will also collect underground samples to find possible clues to the origin of the solar system.
- » The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency said that Hayabusa2 dropped a "small carry-on impactor" made of copper onto the asteroid and safely evacuated and remained intact.

Background:

Hayabusa2:

- » It is an asteroid sample-return mission operated by the Japanese space agency, JAXA.
- » It was launched on 3 December 2014 and rendezvoused with near-Earth asteroid 162173 Ryugu on 27 June 2018.
- » It is in the process of surveying the asteroid for a year and a half, departing in December 2019, and returning to Earth in December 2020.
- » Hayabusa2 carries multiple science payloads for remote sensing, sampling, and four small rovers that will investigate the asteroid surface to inform the environmental and geological context of the samples collected.

DISCOVERY OF 'DEATH SWITCH' MECHANISM IN PLANTS MAY YIELD STRONGER CROPS

Prelims:

- » What is protein?
- » Different Types of Revolutions?

Mains:

- » What are the applications of biotechnology in agriculture?

Context:

- » Chinese scientists have discovered a possible "death switch" mechanism in plant's immune system that triggers infected cells to self-destruct, thus limiting the spread of the disease and keeping other parts of the plant healthy.

Background:

- » This is as per the findings published in the journal 'Science'.
- » Research can lead to a new generation of disease-resistant crops that use significantly less pesticide and are more environmentally friendly.
- » Plants also have a unique "lure and catch" immune response to deal with pathogens that have breached their cellular defence, but exactly how this worked remained unknown.
- » A protein called AvrAC, which is produced by a bacterial pathogen that causes black rot on cabbage. The bacterium injects AvrAC into plant cells, where it acts as a "biochemical weapon" weakening the plant's immune system.
- » This allows other scientists to examine its composition and functions more closely.
- » The 'death switch' is usually harmless to the plant because it only affects diseased cells, which are a tiny portion of the entire plant.

ARMY COMMANDERS' CONFERENCE

Prelims:

- » Commander in Chief's

Context:

- » The biannual Army Commanders' Conference shall commence on 8 April 2019.
- » Army Commanders' Conference, chaired by Chief of the Army Staff is held biannually for formulating important policy decisions through collegiate deliberations.

Background:

- » Important issues that are likely to be discussed are management of the extant security dynamics, mitigation of future security threats and enhancement of combat edge over potential adversaries. Other issues like infrastructure development for capacity enhancement along the Northern borders, review of strategic railway lines, optimization of limited budget to ensure making up of critical deficiency in ammunition. Issues related to Border Road Organization projects, ECHS, as also other matters relevant to operations, administration and welfare of troops will be discussed in detail for planning and execution. Army Commanders' Conference, chaired by Chief of the Army Staff is held biannually for formulating important policy decisions through collegiate deliberations. It is an important event for planning and execution process of the Indian Army.

AMAL CLOONEY APPOINTED U.K.'S MEDIA ENVOY

Mains:

- » India, UK bilateral relations.

Context:

- » Amal Clooney has been appointed the U.K.'s special envoy on media freedom.
- » The UK and Canada are hosting a ministerial conference in London in July to draw attention to attacks on journalists. Ms. Clooney will chair a panel of legal experts who will work to support countries to repeal outdated and draconian laws and strengthen legal mechanisms to protect journalists.

SHAH RUKH CONFERRED WITH HONORARY DOCTORATE

Mains:

- » Foreign Doctorates are not violated Article 18? Critically Examine.

CONTEXT:

- » Eminent Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan conferred with an honorary doctorate in Philanthropy by the University of Law, London. He was awarded this for his efforts to give back to society.

- » He has received the merit during a graduation ceremony which had more than 350 students in attendance. He is the First Indian Actor to get four Doctorates.

BOLIVIA JOINS INTERNATIONAL SOLAR ALLIANCE

PRELIMS:

- » What is ISA?
- » Bolivia geography

Mains:

- » How ISA can ensure our resources to future generations?

CONTEXT:

- Bolivia joined the International Solar Alliance (ISA).
- Bolivia's President Evo Morales signed the Solar Alliance Framework agreement during the visit of President Ram Nath Kovind to Bolivia.
- The International Solar Alliance (ISA), is an initiative by India and France, whose major aim is to fight climate change and global warming.

BACKGROUND

- The International Solar Alliance is to provide a dedicated platform for cooperation among solar resource rich countries where the global community.
- It including bilateral and multilateral organizations, corporates, industry, and other stakeholders, can make a positive contribution to assist and help achieve the common goals of increasing the use of solar energy
- in meeting energy needs of prospective ISA member countries in a safe, convenient, affordable, equitable and sustainable manner.
- 73 countries have signed the ISA Framework Agreement

CCMB SCIENTISTS MAKE MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH

PRELIMS:

- » CCMB objectives
- » Learn about structure of Cell Wall.

CONTEXT:

- » Researchers at the Center for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) proclaimed new discovery on new antimicrobial approaches.
- » They are studying the cell growth in bacteria and have discovered a new enzyme 'Murein EndopeptidaseK' which would cut the bacteria cell wall.
- » The researchers had identified a new enzyme which would act on the protein of cell wall in Escherichia coli (E. coli).

Background:

- » The CCMB is to conduct high quality basic research and training in frontier areas of modern biology.
- » To promote centralized national facilities for new and modern techniques in the interdisciplinary areas of biology.

FITCH AFFIRMS INDIA'S RATING AT BBB

Prelims:

- » Types of investments
- » Difference between FDI and FPI

Mains:

- » What is Sovereign Credit rating? Suggest some measures to improve its rating.

Context:

- » Fitch affirms India's rating at BBB Fitch Ratings kept India's sovereign rating unchanged at the lowest investment grade of BBB- with a stable outlook.
- » Fitch expects growth of 6.8% in the fiscal year ending March 2020 (FY 20) and 7.1% in FY 21.
- » Gross FDI inflows into India of 1.4% of GDP in the year through the third quarter of FY 18 were below 1.7% of GDP four years earlier.

Background:

- » Fitch Group is a global leader in financial information services with operations in more than 30 countries.
- » Fitch Group is comprised of: Fitch Ratings, a global leader in credit ratings and research; Fitch Solutions, a leading provider of credit market data, analytical tools and risk services
- » Fitch Learning, a preeminent training and professional development firm. With dual headquarters in London and New York, Fitch Group is owned by Hearst.

INDIA'S FIRST A.I ENABLED MOTORCYCLE

Prelims:

- » Applications of AI

Mains:

- » How “the rise of AI may be disastrous for mankind.” Critically Evaluate.

Context:

- » Revolt Intellicorp will manufacture India's first AI-enabled electric motorcycle in June 2019.
- » Revolt Intellicorp has been founded by Micromax's co-founder Rahul Sharma.
- » The headquarters of the company is at Gurgaon.
- » The manufacturing facility of the company is located in Manesar.

Background:

- » What is Artificial Intelligence (AI)?
- » Artificial Intelligence is intelligence exhibited by machines.
- » It is a branch of computer science which deals with creating computers or machines as intelligent as human beings.
- » The term was coined in 1956 by John McCarthy at the Dartmouth conference, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- » It is a simulation of human intelligence processes such as learning (the acquisition of information and rules for using the information), reasoning (using the rules to reach approximate or definite conclusions), and self-correction by machines, especially computer systems.
- » Recently it has become widely popular and gained prominence due to its multifaceted application ranging from healthcare to military devices.

GLOBAL COALITION FOR CLEAN COOLING LAUNCHED

Prelims:

- » Paris agreement

Mains:

- » Write about National Cooling action plan.

Context:

- » The first-ever global coalition on clean and efficient cooling was launched at the First Global Conference on Synergies between the 2030 Agenda and Paris Agreement, which concluded on April 3, 2019, in Copenhagen, Denmark.
- » The Global Coalition links action across the Kigali Amendment, Paris Agreement and Sustainable Development Goals.
- » India has developed its National Cooling Action Plan.

Background:

- » ICAP addresses cooling requirement across sectors and lists out actions which can help reduce cooling demand.
- » Its thrust is to look for synergies in actions for securing both environmental and socio-economic benefits.
- » ICAP's overarching goal is to provide sustainable cooling and thermal comfort for all while securing environmental and socio-economic benefits for the society.

A VILLAGE WITH CARBON-POSITIVE TAG

Prelims:

- » Green house effect
- » NAFCC

Mains:

- » What is carbon positive plan

Context:

- » Phayeng in Manipur has become India's first carbon-positive settlement.
- » A village is given the carbon-positive tag if it sequesters more carbon than it emits, slowing the accumulation of greenhouse gases and mitigating the effects of climate change.
- » As part of the carbon-positive village project, Phayeng will receive a grant of ₹10 crore in phases to facilitate afforestation.

Background:

- » National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change (NAFCC) is a Central Sector Scheme launched in 2015-16 to support concrete adaptation activities which mitigate the adverse effects of climate change.
- » It provides 100% funding to activities under it which are implemented in project mode.
- » National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) nodal implementation agency for these projects.

CAPITAL HIGH: FOREIGN INVESTMENT IN INDIA

Context:

- Foreign investors appear to have rediscovered India.
- The inflow of foreign capital into India's stock market in the month of March hit a high of \$4.89 billion, the biggest foreign inflow into Indian stocks since February 2012.
- As a result, the stock market rose a solid 8% in March.
- Foreign investment in Indian equities stood at \$2.42 billion in February, as against a net outflow of \$4.4 billion during the same month a year earlier, and is expected to be strong in April as well.
- Both cyclical and structural factors are behind this sudden uptick in foreign investment that has helped the rupee make an impressive comeback.

What are the Different kinds of foreign investment?

- » International investment or capital flows fall into four principal categories:
- » Commercial loans.
- » Official flows
- » Foreign direct investment (FDI).
- » Foreign portfolio investment (FPI).

- » **Commercial loans:** which primarily take the form of bank loans issued to foreign businesses or governments.
- » **Official flows:** which refer generally to the forms of development assistance that developed nations give to developing ones.
- » **Foreign direct investment (FDI):** pertains to international investment in which the investor obtains a lasting interest in an enterprise in another country.
- » Most concretely, it may take the form of buying or constructing a factory in a foreign country or adding improvements to such a facility, in the form of property, plants, or equipment.
- » FDI is calculated to include all kinds of capital contributions, such as the purchases of stocks, as well as the reinvestment of earnings by a wholly owned company incorporated abroad (subsidiary), and the lending of funds to a foreign subsidiary or branch.
- » The reinvestment of earnings and transfer of assets between a parent company and its subsidiary often constitutes a significant part of FDI calculations.
- » Foreign portfolio investment (FPI), on the otherhand is a category of investment instruments that is more easily traded, may be less permanent, and do not represent a controlling stake in an enterprise.
- » These include investments via equity instruments (stocks) or debt (bonds) of a foreign enterprise which does not necessarily represent a long-term interest.

Stocks:

- » Dividend payments
- » Holder owns a part of a company
- » Possible voting rights
- » Open-ended holding period

Bonds:

- » Interest payments
- » Ownership of bond rights only
- » No voting rights
- » Specific holding period

Calculating Investment:

- » Calculations of FDI and FPI are typically measured as either a “flow,” referring to the amount of investment made in one year, or as “stock,” measuring the total accumulated investment at the end of that year.

How can Indian company can receive foreign investment?

- » In India, foreign direct investment policy is regulated under the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 2000 governed by the Reserve Bank of India.

- » FIIs/FPIs are allowed to invest and trade in equity securities, with a maximum total investment of 24 percent of the issued and paid up capital of a company.

Is FDI Allowed in LLP?

- » Foreign investment is permitted under the automatic route in LLP operating in sectors/activities where 100% Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is allowed through the automatic route and there are no FDI-linked performance conditions.

What troubled India last year in Foreign Investment?

- » Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank, for instance, have promised to keep interest rates low for longer.
- » This has caused investors to turn towards relatively high-yielding emerging market debt.
- » Indian mid-cap stocks, which suffered a deep rout last year, are now too attractive to ignore for many foreign investors.
- » Long-pending reforms to the labour and land markets are the most pressing structural changes that will affect India's long-term growth trajectory.
- » The high fiscal deficit of both the Centre and the State governments and the disruptive outflow of foreign capital are the other macroeconomic challenges.

Way Forward:

- » The return of foreign capital is obviously a good sign for the Indian economy. But policymakers need to be careful not to take foreign investors for granted.
- » Other emerging Asian economies will be competing hard to attract foreign capital, which is extremely nimble. Any mistake by policymakers will affect India's image as an investment destination.

WORLD HEALTH DAY: 7 APRIL

Prelims:

- » WHO and its functions
- » Theme of World Health Day for 2017, 2018, 2019

Mains:

- » What are the challenges in ensuring Universal Health for all in India?
- » "Non-communicable diseases have become a threat under the blanket". What are Non-communicable diseases? What are the steps taken by Govt in combating them?

Context:

- » World Health Day is observed every year on 7 April under the sponsorship of WHO.
- » The theme for World Health Day 2019 is 'Universal Coverage: Everyone, Everywhere' to ensure that no human being will ever have to make a choice between the two.

Background:

- » The day celebrates the establishment of the WHO and this year it marks the end of the World Health Organization's 70th-anniversary celebrations.

NATIONAL HANDLOOM WEEK: APRIL 7-14

Prelims:

- » GI tags in Handloom sector

Mains:

- » What are the challenges for Indian Textile sector? Evaluate.

Context:

- » The National Handloom Week is being observed from April 7-14, 2019.

Background:

- » National Handloom Day is observed every year on 7 August.
- » It is to mark a 1905 movement that boycotted British products in favour of the revival of domestic ones.

SEBI GAVE NOD FOR AIRPORT FUND

Prelims:

- » SEBI and its setup
- » Airport names in India.
- » World's top 10 high Altitude Airports

Mains:

- » What are Quazi Judicial bodies? How are they different from Judicial and constitutional bodies? How can Good Governance can be ensured in Corporate sector?

Context:

- » SEBI has approved an 'Airport' specific fund of capital up to Rs 10,000 crore as a Category II AIF. Chennai-based 'Taking Off to The Future Investment Management LLP' is the sponsor and the investment manager of the fund. The management and operation of 'Sponsor/Investment Manager' is led by its designated partner Gigi George.

Background:

- » Securities and Exchange Board of India is a quasi-legislative, quasi-judicial and quasi-executive body. It can draft regulations, conduct inquiries, pass rulings and impose penalties.
- » By the Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act and the Depositories Act, SEBI will be able to regulate any money pooling scheme worth Rs. 100 crore or more and attach assets in cases of non-compliance.

JUSTICE NANDRAJOG SWORN IN AS CJ OF BHC

Prelims:

- » Appointment and removal of Judges
- » Different High courts, their location and their jurisdiction.
- » Judge's order of precedence

Mains:

- » The move of making Collegium decisions public strikes us as both necessary and important, as bringing transparency into a system that has been notorious for its opacity. Discuss.

Context:

- » Justice Pradeep Nandrajog was sworn in as Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court on 7 April 2019. He was earlier Chief Justice of the Rajasthan High Court. He now succeeds Justice Naresh Patil, who retired as Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court on 6 April 2019.
- » Maharashtra Governor Vidyasagar Rao administered the oath of office to Justice Nandrajog at the Raj Bhawan.

LIN DAN CLINCHED MALAYSIA OPEN

Prelims:

- » Malaysian Cup and other Global and Domestic cups in Badminton

Context:

- » Chinese badminton ace Lin Dan clinched the Malaysia Open in Kuala Lumpur on 7 April 2019.
- » After an electric performance, he beat countryman Chen Long 9-21, 21-7, 21-11.
- » The title is Lin's first win this year, and also his first major success since taking the Malaysia Open in 2017.

YELLOW WEATHER WARNING FOR HIMACHAL PRADESH

Prelims:

- » IMD
- » Yellow weather causes

Mains:

- » How Thunderstorms are formed?
- » What are the ecological reasons for yellow weather and its impact on others

Context:

- » The Meteorological Department issued a yellow weather warning for rain in Himachal Pradesh. The weather department forecast thunderstorm with hail in isolated places of mid hills, including Shimla, Mandi, Kullu, Chamba, Solan, and Sirmaur.

Background:

- » Colour coded weather warning system is used to alert the public to the predicted severity of weather: cyclones, floods, storms and winds.
- » The colour system ranges from green, which is low risk, to red, which is the highest risk of severe conditions.
- » Yellow is the least dangerous of the weather warnings - it indicates the possibility of severe weather over the next few days that could affect people.

INS SHAKTI TO TAKE PART IN CHINESE CELEBRATION

Context:

- » Two Indian naval ships INS 'Kolkata' and 'Shakti' would take part in the Chinese Navy's 70th anniversary of celebrations later in April 2019.
- » The two ships are scheduled to visit Chinese port of Qingdao from 21 to 26 April to participate in an International Fleet Review to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy.

Background:

- » INS Shakti (A57) is a Deepak-class fleet tanker in service with the Indian Navy.
- » She is the second and final ship of her class. Shakti, along with her predecessor Deepak, is one of the largest ships of the Indian Navy.

COAL IMPORT ROSE TO 8% IN APR-FEB FY 2019

Prelims:

- » Types of coals
- » Which type of coal is abundant in India?

Mains:

- » What are the causes and effects of increased coal imports economically and environmentally?

Context:

- » India's coal import increased by 7.8% to 212.11 million tonnes in the April-February period of FY19 as per a report.

Background:

- » The country produced 196.59 million tonnes (MT) of coal in the April-February period of fiscal 2017-18, according to the report by mjunction services.
- » Coal imports in the month of February was at 18.31 MT (provisional) as compared to 21.15 MT (revised) in January 2019.

MELTING OF ARCTIC ICE IMPACTS INDIA

Prelims:

- » ARCTIC location
- » Concept of Transpolar drift

Mains:

- » What could be after effects of Arctic melting on India? Suggest some measures.

Context:

- » Researchers found that rising temperatures in the region is causing the seaice to melt faster than expected. The study was conducted by Germany-based Alfred Wegener Institute (AWI), Helmholtz Centre for Polar and Marine Research.
- » The faltering of Transpolar Drift could lead to weather implications across countries, including India.

Background:

- » The polar Arctic Zone — which has been melting from the past two centuries — has started melting dramatically because of rising temperatures that could adversely impact the India's rain pattern and the seasonal monsoon.
- » Ocean currents helps to transport sea ice from one destination to another.
- » Given the current situation, Transpolar Drift — a major ocean current that transports sea ice from the Laptev Sea and East Siberian Sea towards Fram Strait — will suffer, leading to major consequences across the world including India.
- » It is also one of the dominant factors in determining weather patterns across the Northern Hemisphere.

BATTLE OF KANGLA TONGBI: PLATINUM JUBILEE

Prelims:

- » Battle of Kangla Tongbi

Context:

- » The Battle of Kangla Tongbi, considered one of the fiercest battles of World War II, was fought by Ordnance personnel of 221 Advance Ordnance Depot (AOD) on the night of 6/7 April 1944.
- » The Platinum Jubilee of the Battle of Kangla Tongbi War was commemorated on 7 April 2019 by Army Ordnance Corps at Kangla Tongbi War Memorial near Imphal.

Background:

- » It is considered one of the fiercest battles of World War II. It was fought by Ordnance personnel of 221 Advance Ordnance Depot (AOD) on the night of 6/7 April 1944 against Japanese forces.

- » Japanese forces had planned a three-pronged offensive to capture Imphal and the surrounding areas. In their attempt to extend their line of communication to Imphal, the 33rd Japanese Division cut in behind the 17th Indian Division at Tiddim (Mynmar) and establishing themselves firmly on the main Kohima – Manipur highway, started advancing towards Kangla Tongbi. However, combatant role of AOD personnel shook the enemy and forced the Japanese to withdraw.

OPEN UP THE SUPREME COURT

Context:

- » Almost 10 years ago, on September 2, 2009, the High Court of Delhi handed down a landmark judgment dealing with the fledgling Right to Information (RTI) Act.
- » It held that the Office of the Chief Justice of India (CJI) was a “public authority”, and therefore, subject to the provisions of the Act.

Previous review:

- » on September 2, 2009, the High Court of Delhi handed down a landmark judgment dealing with the fledgling Right to Information (RTI) Act.
- » It held that the Office of the Chief Justice of India (CJI) was a “public authority”, and therefore, subject to the provisions of the Act.
- » Information held by the CJI — including, in the context of the case, information about judges’ assets — could be requested by the public through an RTI application.
- » In ringing words, Justice Ravindra Bhat declared that the RTI was a “powerful beacon, which illuminates unlit corners of state activity, and those of public authorities which impact citizens’ daily lives, to which they previously had no access”.
- » The Supreme Court appealed against this judgment, and the case eventually wound its way to the Supreme Court, where a stay was granted, and matters remained in limbo for a few years.
- » Earlier in the month of April 2019, however, a five-judge Bench of the court finally heard the case on merits, and reserved judgment.
- » By this time, the issues under consideration involved not only Justice Bhat’s ruling on the status of the Chief Justice as a public authority and the disclosure of judges’ assets, but also the question of whether the correspondence of the Collegium (the body of judges that selects and makes appointments to the higher judiciary) was subject to the RTI.

Appointment of judges - Collegium System:

- » The Supreme Court Collegium is the panel of judges vested with the responsibility of appointments and elevations of Chief Justices and judges of the Supreme Court and high courts of the country.

- » The Collegium for the appointment of Judges of Supreme Court is headed by the Chief Justice of India and comprises of the four other senior-most judge of the Supreme Court.
- » The decisions of the collegium are made through voting and the majority view prevails in case of difference of opinion.

Congress system:

- » Over the course of the three cases, the principle of judicial independence evolved. The judicial independence ensures non-interference of any branch of the state inclusive of the executive and the legislature in the judges' appointments or transfer.
- » The collegium system was thus created. This system has been used since the issuance of judgement in the Second Judges Case in 1993. However, it is worth noting that the "Collegium System" has no mention in the Indian Constitution, originally or through successive amendments.

Criticism the collegium faced:

- » Through this time, however, the Collegium had come under increasing criticism.
- » A major point of critique was its opacity: it was increasingly being perceived that judicial appointments were too often made in an ad hoc and arbitrary manner.
- » Perhaps the most vivid example of this was when former Supreme Court Justice Markandey Katju admitted that, as the Chief Justice of the Allahabad High Court, he had refused to recommend a High Court lawyer for judgeship because that lawyer was in a live-in relationship without being married. One may wonder what connection there is between a lawyer's marital status and his ability to discharge judicial functions, but this was, at any rate, a stark example of what the critics had in mind. Indeed, the Supreme Court's own NJAC judgment acknowledged this critique, and vowed to evolve a system where concerns of transparency were addressed. A small step towards this was made during Dipak Misra's tenure as CJI, when the resolutions of the Collegium began to be published online.
- » It is in this context that we must examine the arguments of the Attorney-General of India, who represented the Supreme Court before the Constitution Bench.

Way Forward:

- » The Collegium's recent decisions to recommend a set of names for elevation, and then hastily backtrack on them without any publicly stated reasons, dealt a serious blow to its reputation for impartiality and independence. The only way to salvage this is to open up the court.
- » A judiciary that is confident of itself and of its place in the democratic republic should not be worried about subjecting judicial appointments to public scrutiny.
- » The occasional discomfort that might come from the harsh public glare is more than outweighed by the cleansing value of transparency.

GUWAHATI RAILWAY STATION FIRST TO GET ISO CERTIFICATION IN INDIA

Prelims:

- » ISO CERTIFICATION

Context:

- » The Guwahati Railway Station has become the first ever railway station in the Indian Railways to get an ISO certification from the National Green Tribunal (NGT) for “providing passenger amenities in a clean and green environment.”
- » The station also has amenities such as High-class reserve (VIP) lounge, waiting rooms, AC and non-AC retiring rooms, food courts and sanitation facilities.

Background:

- » ISO stands for “International Organisation for Standardisation” that is responsible for establishing the standard in different areas of activities.
- » Many types of ISO certification exist and the one received by Guwahati Railway Station is ISO-14001, which is for Environment Management System as per international norms which were upgraded in 2015. Thus, the station’s certificate reads ISO 14001: 2015.

INDIA HIGHEST RECIPIENT OF REMITTANCES

Prelims:

- » Definition of diaspora
- » Differences between Oci and Pio

Mains:

- » Significance of Remittances in Indian Economy.

Context:

- » According to World Bank India retained its position as the world's top recipient of remittances with its diaspora sending a whopping USD 79 billion back home in 2018.
- » India was followed by China.
- » India has registered a significant flow of remittances from USD 62.7 billion in 2016 to USD 65.3 billion in 2017.

Background:

- » The money transfer by an individual who is working in a foreign country to a person in his or her home country is called as remittance. In developing countries, remittances made by migrants compete as one among the largest financial inflows, with international aid.
- Workers' remittances form a notable chunk of capital flows from foreign countries, chiefly with respect to the countries exporting labour.

US, IRAN DESIGNATE EACH OTHER'S ORGANIZATIONS AS SUPPORTERS OF TERRORISM

Prelims:

- » Iran geography

Mains:

- » Initiatives taken by USA to counter Global terrorism

Context:

- » Iran has threatened to retaliate for the decision, and shortly after it was announced foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif called on President Hassan Rouhani to include Mideast-based US forces on Iran's own terrorist list.

Background:

- » The United States has designated Iran's Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) as a foreign terrorist organization. The designation will potentially open hundreds of foreign companies and business executives to US travel bans and possible prosecution.

AVAADA ENERGY RAISED RS.1000 CRORE FROM ADB

Prelims:

- » Sources of renewable energy in India.

Mains:

- » What is INDC (Intended Nationally determined contribution)? Issues and Challenges in achieving India's INDC

Context:

- » Avaada Energy Pvt Ltd raised ₹1,000 crore from investors such as the Asian Development Bank on 9 April 2019. The equity raised is for financing Avaada Energy's 2.4 gigawatt (GW) renewable energy portfolio. Avaada Group is targeting a 5 GW capacity and has executed 2 GW of renewable energy project in India.

Background:

- » India has been working on the largest clean energy programme and has an installed renewable energy capacity of 74.79GW. Of this solar and wind power accounts for 25.21GW and 35.14GW respectively.

ISAAK HAYIK SET NEW RECORD

Context:

- » Isaak Hayik became the world's oldest player to take part in a professional game at the age of 73. He set the record by playing as a goalkeeper for Israeli team Ironi Or Yehuda recently.

- » He received the Guinness World Records prize at a ceremony after the match, just days ahead of his 74th birthday.

NGT FORMED COMMITTEE

Prelims:

- » Environmental legislations in India
- » What is NGT

Mains:

- » The role of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in addressing the problem of environmental pollution and degradation in India.

Context:

- » The National Green Tribunal formed a committee to look into the alleged erosion of Yamuna floodplain in Haryana's Sonipat district. The joint report may be furnished within 1 month by e-mail so that matter can be taken up before monsoon.

Background:

- » The NGT was established in 2010 under the National Green Tribunal Act 2010, passed by the Central Government. The nodal agency for coordination and compliance will be the principal secretary of the Haryana Irrigation and Water Resources Department.
- » The stated objective of the Central Government was to provide a specialized forum for effective and speedy disposal of cases pertaining to environment protection, conservation of forests and for seeking compensation for damages caused to people or property due to violation of environmental laws or conditions specified while granting permissions.

ARMY GETS MORE FIRE POWER WITH DHANUSH

Prelims:

- » Significance of artillery guns

Context:

- » The Indian Army received the first batch of six 'Dhanush' artillery guns from the Ordnance Factory Board (OFB).
- » The guns were handed over by Saurabh Kumar, Director General, Ordnance Factories and the OFB chairman, at a ceremony organised in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh.
- » The 155mm x 45 calibre modern artillery gun system was developed by the Ordnance Factories jointly with the Army.

Background:

- » Dhanush is the first indigenously built 155 mm x 45 calibers long-range artillery gun with a strike range of 38 kilometers.

- » It is developed by the Ordnance Factories jointly with the Army.

Hitting Range:

- » Its hitting range is around 11 km more than the imported Bofors guns.

Key Features:

- » The artillery gun incorporates the latest features such as:
 1. An inertial navigation system
 2. An onboard ballistic computer
 3. Direct day and night firing system
 4. A modern target acquisition system
 5. A communication system
- » The gun is also fitted with an inertial navigation system with global positioning system- (GPS) based gun recording and auto-playing, an enhanced tactical computer for onboard ballistic computations, an onboard muzzle velocity recording, an automated gun sighting system equipped with the camera, thermal imaging and laser range finder.

INDIA, SRI LANKA AGREE TO INCREASE COOPERATION

Prelims:

- » India – Sri Lanka bilateral relations.

Context:

- » India and Sri Lanka have agreed to increase cooperation in security and defense spheres in several areas. The cooperation areas include regional security, curbing drug smuggling and human trafficking. The issues came up for discussion when Defence Secretary Sanjay Mitra called on Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirsena in Colombo during his official visit.

Background

- » India is the only neighbor of Sri Lanka, separated by the Palk Strait.
- » Both nations occupy a strategic position in South Asia and have sought to build a common security umbrella in the Indian Ocean. Both India and Sri Lanka are republics within the Commonwealth of Nations.

BREXIT AND THE FRAGILITY OF THE U.K.

Context:

- » Delay in UK exit from Brexit strained the entire continent and the mighty British empire.

Reason for Division Of Communities:

- » Highlighted divisions between the constituent nations of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, to use the formal name of the British state.
- » **The U.K. is not one nation but four:**

- » Wales was brought under English rule in the 13th century
- » Ireland was incorporated by a combination of military force.
- » Political persuasion in 1801 Scotland, though never militarily defeated, was persuaded to join the Union in 1707.

Reason for Scotland to join with union:

- » The kingdom had suffered heavy financial losses from a disastrous attempt to secure a trading base in the late 17th century. The failure of the Darien Scheme, as it was known, was caused in no small part by resistance from Scotland's southern neighbours who were protecting the trading rights of the East India Company. Once within the Union, the colonial enterprise and then Empire offered not just wealth but all the trappings of great power.
- » The end of the Empire signalled Britain's departure from the global stage. The Suez crisis of 1956 confirmed its diminished status. And Brexit, Britain's retreat from its own continent, has completed the project. Little England has withdrawn into itself to protect mythical ideas of Englishness against the supposed onslaught of waves of foreign immigration and EU rule.
- » Scottish nationalism has been simmering for years now, only partly placated by the devolution of some domestic powers to a Scottish Parliament under the Scotland Act of 1998.
- » A referendum on Scottish independence in 2014 ended up being a closer call than had been anticipated (55% vs 45%), though it was clear even then that part of the reason for remaining was that the U.K. offered membership of the EU (which was not automatically on offer for an independent Scotland). Now, with Brexit looming, Scottish demands for independence resurface regularly.

A Fragile Peace:

GATEWAYY

- » A fragile peace, comprising complex intertwined agreements between first, most of Northern Ireland's political parties. The British and Irish governments to manage the relationships between Britain and Ireland, and between Northern Ireland and the rest of Britain.
- » Underpinning all of this is the dismantling of the border infrastructure — watch-towers, fences, check posts — that had divided the island of Ireland. This was only possible because both countries belonged to the EU. If Britain leaves the customs union and single market of the EU, which guarantees the freedom of movement of people and goods between member states, then some sort of infrastructure will have to come up at the border between the EU and Britain in Ireland.

Conclusion:

- » Peace in Northern Ireland is still in its infancy. The EU will not imperil this process by allowing a border to come up between Northern Ireland and Ireland. The different status for Northern Ireland would effectively raise a border between the island of Ireland and the rest of Great Britain, something that is unacceptable to the Unionists and Ms. May.

TRICKERIES OF THE MONEY BILL

Context:

- » The Supreme Court has now heard oral arguments in Revenue Bar Association (RBA) v. Union of India, in which the validity of the Finance Act of 2017, insofar as it affects the structure and functioning of various judicial tribunals, is under challenge.

Expression of power:

- » The Finance Act, which is enacted at the beginning of every accounting year, seeks to give effect to the government's fiscal policies. In 2017, however, the state wielded the statute like a blunderbuss.
- » It not only set the fiscal agenda for the year ahead but it also toppled the existing regime governing the working of 26 different judicial bodies. Until recently, each of these panels was governed by a separate statute, and those laws individually contained a set of principles providing for, among other things, the criteria employed to select and remove members to and from these bodies, and for salaries, allowances and other such service conditions of the members.

ISSUE:

- » The petitioners argued that this move runs sharply athwart judicial independence. The new law, in their belief, deputed to the executive what was really an essential legislative function. Many of these tribunals, which included the National Green Tribunal (NGT), the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal, the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal, and the Industrial Disputes Tribunal, they pointed out, performed roles that were originally undertaken by the higher judiciary.
- » To assign to the executive's whims the task of establishing the criteria employed in selecting members to the panels and to provide for the members' service conditions was, therefore, pernicious to the basic principle of separation of powers. Consider one of the consequences.
- » The RBA's case, though, goes beyond questions concerning delegation of power. Of equal concern is the enactment of these stipulations through the wangled mechanism of the Finance Act. Substantive matters concerning the governing of tribunals, one would think, can scarcely be considered as a fiscal measure.

It Resulted In:

- » the Supreme Court's previous ruling that the chairperson of a judicial tribunal ought to be equivalent to the Chief Justice of the high courts, as a result of the rules now made in furtherance of the Finance Act, in 13 different tribunals, a person who is merely qualified to be appointed as a judge of a high court can be selected as the presiding officer.

- » The draft law which introduced these provisions was classified as a money bill, and the sanction of the Rajya Sabha was altogether dodged. Although this too might appear on first glimpse to be a quarrel over esoteric matters of procedure, the consequences are enormous, travelling, as they do, to the heart of India's democratic apparatus.

What is Money Bill?

- » Money Bill refers to a bill (draft law) introduced in the Lower Chamber of Indian Parliament (Lok Sabha) which generally covers the issue of receipt and spending of money, such as tax laws, laws governing borrowing and expenditure of the Government, prevention of black money etc.

Features of Money bill:

- » It can be introduced only in the Lok Sabha (lower chamber of the Parliament)
- » The bill is placed in Rajya Sabha (Upper chamber of the Parliament) thereafter and Rajya Sabha can return the Bill with or without its recommendations.
- » In any case, the Bill has to be returned within a period of 14 days from the date of its receipt by Rajya Sabha. Otherwise it is deemed to have been passed by both Houses at the expiration of the said period in the form in which it was passed by Lok Sabha.
- » If the bill is returned to Lok Sabha without recommendation, a message to that effect is reported by the Secretary-General to the Lok Sabha if in session, or published in the Bulletin for the information of the members of the Parliament, if it is not in session.
- » The Bill shall then be presented to the President for his assent.
- » If the bill is returned to the Lok Sabha with amendments it has to be laid on the Table of the House and taken up for consideration.
- » However, Lok Sabha is not bound to accept these amendments.
- » Lok Sabha, under Article 109 of the Constitution, has the option to accept or reject all or any of the recommendations made by Rajya Sabha.
- » In any case, Lok Sabha has to inform Rajya Sabha about the status of their recommendations, as to whether they have been accepted or not.
- » It is not that Lok Sabha does not accept any of the recommendations of Rajya Sabha. For instance, in the Income Tax Bill, 1961, Rajya Sabha did recommend a number of amendments of substantial character, all of which were agreed to by Lok Sabha.
- » If Lok Sabha accepts any amendments as recommended by the Rajya Sabha, the Bill shall be deemed to have been passed by both the Houses of the Parliament 'with the amendments recommended by the Rajya Sabha and accepted by the Lok Sabha' and a message to that effect has to be sent to the Rajya Sabha.

- » If Lok Sabha does not accept the recommendations of the Rajya Sabha, the Bill shall be deemed to have been passed by both the Houses in the form in which it ‘was passed by the Lok Sabha without any of the amendments recommended by the Rajya Sabha’.
- » In all other bills final passing of the bill happens at Rajya Sabha.
- » In case of money bills, final passing happens at Lok Sabha and then it is sent to the President for his assent.
- » Unlike other bills, the President cannot return the Money Bill with his recommendations to the Lok Sabha for reconsideration.
- » A defeat of Money bill in Lok Sabha is deemed political/parliamentary defeat of the government of the day. Speaker has unquestionable powers to decide if a Bill is a Money Bill or not.
- » It cannot be questioned in any court. Rajya Sabha (Upper chamber of the Parliament)’s dissent on a Money Bill is of no political significance, as the Lok Sabha has overriding powers on Money Bills.
- » Money bill cannot be referred to even joint Committees of the two Houses of the Parliament (to resolve differences between the two Houses), as is in the case of other bills. The Standing Committee of the Parliament also cannot scrutinize a Money Bill.
- » More about money bills may be seen in the Legislative Procedures of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.

Article 110(1) of the Constitution of India a money bill is defined as;

- a) 110(1) a Bill is deemed to be a Money Bill if it contains only provisions dealing with all or any of the following matters, namely:
- b) The imposition, abolition, remission, alteration or regulation of any tax;
- c) The regulation of the borrowing of money or the giving of any guarantee by the Government of India, or the amendment of the law with respect to any financial obligations undertaken or to be undertaken by the Government of India;
- d) The custody of the Consolidated Fund or the Contingency Fund of India, the payment of moneys into or the withdrawal of moneys from any such fund;
- e) The appropriation of moneys out of the Consolidated Fund of India;
- f) The declaring of any expenditure to be expenditure charged on the Consolidated Fund of India or the increasing of the amount of any such expenditure;
- g) The receipt of money on account of the Consolidated Fund of India or the public account of India or the custody or issue of such money or the audit of the accounts of the Union or of a State; any matter incidental to any of the matters specified in sub-clauses (a) to (f).

- » (2.) A Bill is not deemed to be Money Bill by reason only that it provides for the imposition of fines or other pecuniary penalties, or for the demand or payment of fees for licences or fees for services rendered, or by reason that it provides for the imposition, abolition, remission, alteration or regulation of any tax by any local authority or body for local purposes.

Conclusion:

- » The dispute over the Finance Act of 2017, therefore, assumes particular significance.
- » In deciding the case, the court will do well to pay heed to Ambedkar's warnings, by recognising that the niceties of constitutional form are not a matter of trifles.

DOGS CAN SNIFF OUT CANCER WITH 97% ACCURACY

Prelims:

- » Cancer, types of cancer and Causes of cancer

Context:

- » Dogs can pick out blood samples from people with cancer with 97% accuracy, as per a study.
- » Dogs have smell receptors 10,000 times more accurate than humans', making them highly sensitive to odors we cannot perceive. For the study, the team used a form of clicker training to teach four beagles to distinguish between normal blood serum and samples from patients with malignant lung cancer.

YUTU TRAVELED 170 M ON MOON

Prelims:

- » Lunar probes by many nations

Mains:

- » How the exploration of moon will help in knowing about earth's evolution?

Context:

- » China's lunar rover Yutu-2 traveled 170.92 meters on the far side of the Moon, as per the Lunar Exploration and Space Program Center of the China National Space Administration (CNSA). It has run a total of 163 meters during the previous three lunar daytime periods.
- » During the third one, the rover conducted scientific examination over stones and tracks on the Moon.

BLACK HOLE PHOTOGRAPH RELEASED

Prelims:

- » Concept of black hole
- » Stephen Hawking theory about Black hole

Mains:

- » Mention about the various telescopes that worked to record the black hole event

Context:

- » The first ever photograph of a black hole was released on 10 April 2019.
- » Scientists working in the Event Horizon Telescope (EHT)
- » Collaboration presented their observations at 6:30 PM IST
- » Sagittarius A, a supermassive black hole site is 26,000 light years away, while the second is at the centre of the supergiant elliptical M87 galaxy in the Virgo constellation.

ELEMENTS CAN BE SOLID AND LIQUID AT SAME TIME

Prelims:

- » Chain melted state
- » Characteristics and applications of solid cum liquid matters

Mains:

- » What is matter? What comprises matter? What are the various forms of matter?
- » What is Dark energy and Dark matter? Write about their characteristics

Context:

- » Scientists have discovered a new state of physical matter in which atoms can exist as both solid and liquid simultaneously. Until now, the atoms in physical material existed typically in one of three states – solid, liquid or gas. A team led by scientists from the University of Edinburgh used powerful computer simulations to study the existence of the state – known as the chain-melted state.

INDIA'S GOLD RESERVES INCREASED

Prelims:

- » Chemical names of Gold and its main ores

Mains:

- » What are the steps taken by GoI to reduce Gold imports? How do they impact the economy?

Context:

- » India has marginally increased its gold holding in February while maintaining the tenth position among countries in terms of yellow metal reserves, as per the World Gold Council.
- » India added 1.7 tonnes in February 2019 while most other countries, barring Russia and China, saw their reserves unchanged in the recent past.
- » As per WGC, India had total gold reserves of 608.7 tonnes in February.

IMF FORECASTS DIPPED IN GLOBAL GROWTH

Prelims:

- » IMF, Currency basket and various reports issued by IMF.

Mains:

- » What could be the possible reasons for low global growth projection? Suggest what can be done?

Context:

- » The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has projected that global growth will be 3.3% in 2019, down from 3.6% in 2018 and 4% in 2017. This lower projection is due to lower global expansion in the second half of 2018 caused because of factors like U.S.-China trade tensions.
- » India's growth is projected to pick up (from 7.1% in 2018) to 7.3% in 2019 and 7.5% in 2020.

17th EDITION OF WEF HELD

Prelims:

- » World Economic forum and its various reports

Context:

- » The World Economic Forum in the Middle East and North Africa took place at Jordan's Dead Sea on April 6 and 7, 2019. The forum assembled more than 1,000 government, business and civil society leaders from more than 50 countries. The forum was themed on three major visions: generating job opportunities, empowering Arab women and promoting the most intriguing startups.

LONDON: 1ST TO IMPLEMENT POLLU CHARGE ZONE

Prelims:

- » Ultra-Low emission zone

Mains:

- » What is ULEZ? What are ULEZ standards? Explain how it helps in ensuring public health?
- » What are the challenges of implementing ULEZ in India?

Context:

- » London became the first city in the world to implement a special Ultra Low Emission Zone that would charge an entry fee for older vehicles if they do not meet the emission standards.
- » In an attempt to reduce air pollution and protect public health, the ULEZ will be operational for 24 hours and 7 days a week. A vehicle that does not meet the new emission standard will have to pay daily charge.

PFS PARTNERED WITH USICEF

Mains:

What are the challenges in ensuring clean technologies globally? What are the initiatives taken by the global forums and India?

- » PFS joined hands with the US-India Clean Energy Finance (USICEF) to leverage funds for solar projects in India.
- » It is an innovative facility which can contribute in achieving India's distributed energy target of 40 GW by 2022. PTC India Financial Services (PFS) has processed and sanctioned 3 distributed solar power projects.

RAFALE REBUFF

Context:

- Supreme Court decided to reconsider the Rafel deal document, Central government's attempts to prevent judicial examination of these papers and to de-legitimise all investigative journalism on the subject.

How court will Reconsider?

- » The court's unanimous verdict, rendered in two concurring orders by a three-judge Bench, means that review petitions filed against earlier orders declining an investigation into the purchase of Rafale jets will now be taken up on merits and that the petitioners are free to rely on these documents, regardless of their provenance.

What is the Issue?

- » On 31 January 2012, the Indian Ministry of Defence announced that Dassault Rafale had won the MMRCA (Medium Multi role Combat Aircraft) competition to supply the Indian Air Force with 126 aircraft, along with an option for 63 additional aircraft.
- » The first 18 aircraft were to be supplied by Dassault Aviation fully built and the remaining 108 aircraft were to be manufactured under license by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) with transfer of technology from Dassault.
- » After the Indian general election in April–May 2014, the National Democratic Alliance led by Bharatiya Janata Party took control of the government from the United Progressive Alliance led by the Indian National Congress.
- » In February 2015, it was reported that the Rafale purchase was headed for cancellation as it had been misjudged to be the lowest bidder due to deficiencies in Dassault's bid.
- » On 25 March 2015, Dassault's CEO Éric Trappier said that although the deal was taking time, it was "95 percent completed"

- » In July 2015, defence minister Manohar Parrikar informed the Rajya Sabha that the tender for 126 aircraft had been withdrawn and negotiations for 36 aircraft had begun.
- » India and France signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for acquisition of 36 aircraft without finalising the financial terms of the acquisition.
- » The Indian team was able to bring down the price by virtue of asking their French counterparts that the price of the deal be calculated based on the actual cost.
- » On 3 October 2016, Reliance Group and Dassault Aviation issued a joint statement announcing the creation of a 51:49 joint venture named Dassault Reliance Aerospace Limited (DRAL) to focus on aero structures, electronics and engine components as well as to foster research and development projects under the "Indigenously Designed Developed and Manufactured" (IDDM) initiative.

Court 1st Verdict:

- » On October 10 The Supreme Court asked the Central government to provide details of the decision-making process in the Rafale deal with France in a sealed cover by October 29.
- » The court said "we find no reason for any intervention by this court on the sensitive issue of purchase of 36 defence aircrafts [sic] by the Indian government," adding that the "perception of individuals cannot be the basis of a fishing and roving enquiry by this court, especially in such matters."
- » Chief Justice of India Rajan Gogoi while writing the judgement for the three-member bench, ruled that, "Adequate military strength and capability to discourage and withstand external aggression and to protect the sovereignty and integrity of India, undoubtedly, is a matter of utmost concern for the nation.
- » The empowerment of defence forces with adequate technology and material support is, therefore, a matter of vital importance.
- » The government filed an eight-page application for corrections in the verdict by the Supreme Court stating "observations in the judgment have also resulted in a controversy in the public domain.
- » By proposing these corrections, the government tried to rectify that the CAG report had not yet submitted its report and the PAC has not examined it.
- » No redacted portion, has been placed either in the Parliament or in the public domain.
- » The ministry claimed that the note simply mentioned the procedures followed on CAG reports and the note was not specific to the Rafale deal CAG report.
- » The verdict had mentioned four steps related to the CAG report out of which 3 were incorrect. The court has not responded to the governments application as it is closed for winter.

Conclusion:

- » It is premature to conclude, based on this development, that the court's earlier decision to not order a criminal investigation into the purchase of 36 Rafale jets will be revisited.
- » However, it will certainly help provide clarity on several aspects of the murky deal.
- » Had the government agreed to a parliamentary probe early on, it would not be suffering the sort of setback it has now faced in the Supreme Court.

JALLIANWALA BAGH MASSACRE: 'DEEP REGRET' IS SIMPLY NOT GOOD ENOUGH

Context:

- » Remembering of Jallianwala Bagh incident after 100 years

Amritsar massacre:

- » The **Jallianwala Bagh massacre**, also known as the **Amritsar massacre**, took place on 13 April 1919 when troops of the British Indian Army under the command of Colonel Reginald Dyer fired rifles into a crowd of Indians, who had gathered in Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar, Punjab.
- » The Jallianwala Bagh is a public garden of 6 to 7 acres (2.8 ha), walled on all sides, with five entrances.

Why that gathering?

- » Since the beginning of the World War I, there had been an increasing resentment and civil unrest throughout the country especially in the states of West Bengal and Punjab.
- » It was due to the terrible repercussions of the war, like- inflation, heavy taxation, a huge number of dead and wounded soldiers that contributed immensely in uniting the nation against the British Rule. The worsening civil unrest led to the formation of Rowlatt Committee in 1919. The Rowlatt Act was a legislative act that allowed certain political cases to be tried without the presence of a jury and permitted internment of suspects without any trial. This is the time when Mahatma Gandhi came to light as a revolutionary. The Act resulted in furious protests throughout the country. The unrest became worst, especially in Punjab.
- » There were demonstrations held at the residence of Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar to demand the release of two popular leaders of the Indian Independence Movement- Satya Pal and Saifuddin Kitchlew. There were violent protests that resulted in the burning of the Town Hall and Railway station, disruption of telegraphs and communication system.
- » It resulted in many deaths including a few deaths of the European government officials as well as civilians. Due to all these activities, the city of Amritsar witnessed a few days of silence while other parts of Punjab suffered.

- » The British Government thus decided to place most of Punjab under Martial Law.
- » Restrictions were placed on the civil liberties that banned public gatherings and prohibited assembling of more people together.

On the Day of Jallianwala Bagh:

- » On 13 April 1919, thousands of people were gathered at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar, Punjab.
- » This day marks the beginning of New Year for the Sikhs and is also celebrated as Baisakhi festival all over Punjab.
- » On the morning of Baisakhi, Colonel Reginald Dyer had announced the implementation of a curfew throughout Amritsar and a ban on all processions that even prohibited a group of 4 or more people to meet publicly.
- » By mid-day, thousands of people were gathered at the Jallianwala Bagh including the devotees at Harmandir Sahib. Jallianwala Bagh was covered on all sides by walls reaching up to 10 feet.
- » It is equipped with narrow entrances, most of which were locked.
- » The place was flocked by the devotees, traders, farmers and merchants who visited Amritsar to enjoy the festival and witness the Baisakhi horse and cattle fair.
- » The main entrance was also guarded by the armed troops. There were armoured cars accompanying the troops that were supposedly carrying machine guns and explosives. On Dyer's orders, there was ruthless firing done on the uninformed crowd.
- » There were about 25,000 people present there at the time of firing. Some tried to escape while some choose to jump in the solitude well built in the premises of Jallianwala Bagh.
- » The troops were ordered to start shooting from the most densely crowded spot to harm the maximum number of people. The firing continued for about 10 minutes, and it only ceased when the ammunition supplies were almost exhausted. The scattered dead bodies could not even be moved due to the implemented curfew. Colonel Dyer reportedly carried out this firing not just to disperse the meeting, but to punish the Indians for disobeying their orders. In a telegram sent by British Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, Colonel Dyer's actions were supposed to be correct and approved by him. Further, the British Lieutenant even asked the Viceroy to implement martial law in Punjab.

Udham Singh:

- » He the man who also got affected in walah bagh incident, he wanted to take revenge on O'Dwyer. On March 13, 1940, O'Dwyer spoke at a meeting of the East India Association and the Royal Central Asian Society. This was Singh's chance for revenge.
- » O'Dwyer was casually speaking to Lord Zetland, the man in charge of Indian affairs for the British government, Singh withdrew a hidden pistol from his suit and fired two shots into O'Dwyer's heart at point-blank range.

- » O'Dwyer died instantly. Singh surrendered and didn't put up a fight.
- » During his trial, Singh said he waited 21 years to kill O'Dwyer.
- » The revolutionary blamed the former governor for the massacre, saying: "He wanted to crush the spirit of my people, so I crushed him." The British government hanged Singh four months later for his crime. The martyr's remains returned to India in 1974 where they were cremated in the village of his birth.

Conclusion:

- » The fact remains that there are many ways to heal a festering wound between nations, as Canada's apology for the Komagata Maru shows; clever drafting is not one of them.

APPOINTMENTS OF HIGHCOURT JUDGES.

Prelims:

- » Appointments of Highcourt Judges. Justice Vikram Nath, seniormost judge of the Allahabad High Court, has been appointed Chief Justice of the Andhra Pradesh High Court. He succeeds acting CJ Justice C. Praveen Kumar.
- » In a bureaucratic reshuffle, the Centre has appointed Gargi Kaul, a 1984-batch officer of the Indian Audit and Accounts Service (IA&AS), as Secretary, Defence Finance.

NGT SET CENTRAL MONITORING PANEL

Prelims:

- » Constitutionality of pollution control

Mains:

- » Legislations for pollution control.

Context:

- » The National Green Tribunal (NGT) constituted a Central Monitoring Committee to ensure the implementation of action plan meant for reducing pollution stretches across the country.
- » It will undertake a national initiative by way of preparation and enforcement of a national plan to make river stretches pollution free. The panel will coordinate with States to oversee the action plans.

Background:

- » The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has constituted a Central Monitoring Committee.
- » NGT has entrusted the committee with the task of undertaking and executing a national plan to make river stretches across India pollution-free. The National Green Tribunal was established in 2010 under the National Green Tribunal Act 2010. The responsibility of the tribunal is to work on the disposal of cases related to environmental protection, conservation of forests and other natural resources.

PROCUREMENT OF 464 T-90 TANKS CLEARED

Prelims:

- » What is T-90 tank, features

Context:

- » The government has cleared the procurement of 464 T-90 tanks from Russia in a deal worth over Rs 13,500 crore, despite the tensions with Pakistan. Under the new deal, the tanks would be provided to the Armoured Corps of the force which will use them for deployment along the border with Pakistan. The new deal would increase the number of T-90s in the Army to close to 2,000.

DOST EDUCATION BAGGED TECH PRIZE

- » India's education tech startup 'Dost Education' bagged a \$25,000 tech prize along with 2 other winners from Tanzania and Egypt.
- » The Next Billion Edtech Prize 2019 recognises the most innovative technology destined to have a radical impact on education in low income.
- » Dost was awarded for its ability to empower parents to take charge of their child's early education.

UK INTRODUCED ONLINE SAFETY REGULATIONS

Prelims:

- » India, UK bilateral relations.

Mains:

- » What are the recent measures for online safety regulations taken in india

CONTEXT:

- The UK government introduced the world's first framework designed to hold internet companies accountable for the safety of those using their services.
- The Online Harms whitepaper is a joint proposal from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Home Office.
- Various technology companies will be subject to the laws, including social media platforms.

BACKGROUND:

- » Sensitive information such as personal information and identity, passwords are often associated with personal property (for example, bank accounts) and privacy and may present security concerns if leaked.
- » Unauthorized access and usage of private information may result in consequence such as identity theft, as well as theft of property.

Accountability software

- » Accountability software, or Internet accountability software, is software which monitors and reports Internet usage, in order to incentivize the avoidance of any content deemed objectionable. Accountability software may monitor Internet use on a personal computer, or Internet use by a specific user on a computer. These software applications then generate reports of Internet use viewable by a third party, sometimes called an accountability partner.
- » It sometimes also doubles as content-control software.

NAMAMI GANGE GOT GLOBAL RECOGNITION

Prelims:

- » Ganga Tributaries
- » NMGC

Mains:

- » Interlinking of rivers in India.

CONTEXT:

- » The National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) was awarded the distinction of 'Public Water Agency of the Year'. It was awarded by the Global Water Intelligence at the Global Water Summit in London on April 9, 2019. The Global Water Awards are presented at the Global Water Summit, the major business conference for the water industry worldwide.

BACKGROUND:

Global Water Awards

- » These are presented by global water intelligence at global water summit, the major business conference for the water industry worldwide. These award recognise excellence across entire international water industry and reward those initiatives in the water , wastewater and desalination sector.

INDIA'S POPULATION GREW AT 1.2% AVERAGE

Prelims:

- » Statistics of Population Census.

Context:

- » India's population grew at an average annual rate of 1.2% between 2010-2019 to 1.36 billion, according to a report by the United Nations Population Fund.
- » India's population in 2019 stood at 1.36 billion, growing from 942.2 million in 1994 and 541.5 million in 1969.
- » The data was given by the UN sexual and reproductive health agency in the State of World Population 2019 report.

CYCLONE IDAI'S DEATH TOLL ROSE TO 1000

Prelims:

- » Where do cyclones form
- » How are Cyclones Named

Context:

- » The death toll from the cyclone Idai is now above 1,000. Mozambique has reported 602 deaths while 59 people have died in Malawi. Cyclone Idai smashed into the coast of central Mozambique in March 2019. It unleashed hurricane-force winds and rains that flooded the hinterland and drenched eastern Zimbabwe.
- » Around 2 million people have been affected in Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Malawi.

INDIA BUILDS MATERNITY HOSPITAL IN NEPAL

Prelims:

- » Bordering states

Mains:

- » Role of china in indo- Nepal relations.

Context:

- » India has built a 25-bed maternity hospital in Nepal. It has been built under the Government of India's Small Development Projects Scheme. The Hospital will provide quality maternity and health care services to the people of 50 Village Development Committees in and around Siraha district. The Hospital will be run by the Chandra Narayan Yadav Memorial Trust on no profit-no loss basis.

Background:

- » Development assistance is a key instrument in India's foreign policy.
- » The focus of development assistance has been the countries in India's neighbourhood and in Africa. Though India is focussing South East Asia, East and Central Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, Pacific Island Countries, etc.

VICE PRESIDENT CONFERRED AWARDS

- » Vice President Venkaiah Naidu conferred President's Certificate of Honour and Maharshi Badrayan Vyas Samman Awards at New Delhi.

Background:

- » The award of the Certificate of Honour was introduced in the year 1958 to honour the scholars of Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian Languages.
- » Maharshi Badrayan Vyas Samman was introduced in the year 2002.

RIVER PERIYAR WITNESSED DECOLORISATION

Prelims:

- » River Periyar and its tributaries
- » Unique characteristics of Kerala river System.

Mains:

- » What are the reasons for decolorisation
- » What is the legislative procedures to solve the interstate water disputes

Context:

- » The River Periyar in Kerala is witnessing decolorization.
- » The water turned pitch black in one stream, it was milky near the Pathalam regulator-cum-bridge. The Pollution Control Board (PCB) has attributed the change in colour to the poor quality of water as a result of eutrophication.

Background:

- » River Periyar flows in the state of Kerala. It originates in the Western Ghats and flows north for a short distance to Periyar Lake.
- » Periyar Lake is an artificial reservoir created by Mullaperiyar Dam across the river.
- » From the Periyar Lake, tunnel carries water through mountains to the Vaigai River in Tamil Nadu, where it is used for irrigation. Further downstream Idukki dam is constructed across the river. The river descending out of the mountains into the coastal plain and empties into the Arabian Sea.

VARANASI: THIRD MOST POLLUTED CITY

Prelims:

- » Air quality report 2018

Mains:

1. Ever increasing pollution in India
2. Pollution and environmental impact assesmet.

Context:

- » According to the 'Political Leaders Position and Action on Air Quality in India 2014-2019' report, the air quality in Varanasi is ranked third on the WHO's list of 15 most polluted cities in the world.

Background:

- » Fourteen of the 15 most polluted cities in the world, listed by World Health Organisation (WHO) are in India, of which four are in Uttar Pradesh.
- » Kanpur is the most polluted city in the world.

INDIA TO BE GUEST OF HONOUR AT ADIBF 2019

Prelims:

- » India, UAE Bilateral Relations.

Context:

- » India will be the Guest of Honour country at the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair, ADIBF 2019, to be held from 24th to 30th of this month.

Background:

- » The fair aims to highlight the UAE's rich heritage, showcasing its authenticity and modernity, as well as its cultural and literary output.
- » The book fair will celebrate India, with its authentic culture, arts, heritage, and knowledge-based traditions. India's participation in the fair is expected to attract significant increase in the number of visitors with various events and activities which will be held throughout the entire duration of ADIBF. The Indian Pavilion will host Indian writers, authors and literary scholars who will serve as ambassadors for the literature and art of their country.

SIVA REDDY SELECTED FOR SARASWATI SAMMAN 2018

Context:

- » Telugu poet K Siva Reddy has been selected for the prestigious Saraswati Samman, 2018 for his collection of poetry titled Pakkaki Ottigilite.

Background:

- » The award carries a cash prize of 15 lakh rupees, a citation, and a plaque.
- » The award, instituted by the KK Birla Foundation in 1991, is given annually for an outstanding literary work written in any Indian language, published during the last 10 years.

INDIA, SWEDEN INKED PACT

Prelims:

- » India, Sweden bilateral relations
- » Geography of sweden

Mains:

1. What is triple-helix? What is its significance?

Context:

- » India and Sweden launched a joint programme that will work towards addressing a range of challenges around smart cities and clean technologies among others.



Background:

- » The programme was co-funded by the Indian Department of Science and Technology (DST) and Swedish agency Vinnova.
- » Vinnova will provide funding to Swedish participants up to 2,500,000 Swedish Krona (around Rs 1.87 crore) as a grant.
- » On the Indian side, conditional grant of up to 50 per cent (with a limit of Rs 1.5 crore) per project will be provided to the Indian partners.
- » This Programme is technically and administratively managed by the Global Innovation & Technology Alliance (GITA) on behalf of DST in India and Vinnova in Sweden.
- » Government, Academia, and Industry or the ‘triple helix’ - is key to the Sweden-India partnership.

INDIAN COMPANIES GREW 18%

Mains:

- » Effects of Liberalization on Indian economy and society.

Context:

- » Foreign investment of Indian companies grew 18% to USD 2.69 billion in March as compared to the year-ago period, according to an RBI data.

Background:

- » The domestic firms made investment of USD 2.28 billion in their subsidiaries and wholly-owned units abroad during March 2018.
- » In February 2019, the investment by Indian firms stood at USD 1.71 billion.
- » Major investors included Tata Steel, which pumped USD 1.15 billion in a subsidiary in Singapore. This was followed by JSW Cement (USD 82 million in a wholly-owned subsidiary in the UAE) and ONGC Videsh Ltd (USD 70.37 million in various joint ventures in Myanmar, Russia and Vietnam).

NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM HELD IN DELHI

Prelims:

- » About main theme of the symposium

Context:

- » A national symposium on evidence synthesis began in Delhi on 11 April 2019.

Background:

- » Its focus was on making science and synthesised knowledge the bedrock of all societal and policy interventions in the areas of public health, medicine, and social development.

- » The symposium is being organised by The George Institute for Global Health and the Campbell Collaboration.
- » Delivering the keynote address on 'Synthesising and Contextualising Evidence for Medicine and Public Health in India: Need and Way Forward', Professor Prathap Tharyan said evidence-informed health policy requires investments and partnerships between those who generate the evidence, those who disseminate it, those who frame policies and those who implement them.
- » Every policy decision should have an evidence footprint, said Tharyan, the Director of B V Moses Centre for Research and Training in Evidence-Informed Health Care and Health Policy at the Christian Medical College, Vellore.

INDIA, NETHERLANDS TO STRENGTHEN TIES

Prelims:

1. Recent India and Netherland ties
2. Border sharing countries

Mains:

1. Discuss about the India and the Netherland economic ties in exposés of UN
2. Explain about the India, UN bilateral ties

Context:

- » India and the Netherlands discussed ways to strengthen bilateral political and economic ties, including boosting cooperation at the United Nations.

Background:

- » The two countries held Foreign Office Consultations with the Indian side led by A Gitesh Sarma, Secretary (West), Ministry of External Affairs.
- » Johanna (Yoka) Brandt, Secretary General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, lead the Dutch delegation. India and the Netherlands share a multi-faceted relationship.
- » The two nations used the dialogue exchange as an opportunity to review the entire extent of bilateral relations, including political, economic, commercial, scientific and cultural cooperation. They exchanged views on regional and multilateral issues, including cooperation at the United Nations and other international forum.
- » India welcomed the participation of the Netherlands as the partner country for the 25th edition of the CII-DST Tech Summit scheduled to be held in New Delhi in October 2019.
- » The two nations also underlined the importance of sustaining exchanges at all levels, including the high level.

SPACEX CARRIED OUT FIRST COMMERCIAL LAUNCH

Prelims:

- » About the Space Vehicle (Place, Purpose)

Mains:

1. Explain about the SpaceX and its background.
2. Discuss about the India, Saudi Arabia ties and bilateral investment

Context:

- » SpaceX has carried out its first commercial launch with its Falcon Heavy rocket tasked with placing a Saudi satellite in orbit. The rocket exerts 5.1 million pounds of thrust -- that of more than a dozen jetliners.

BACKGROUND:

- » The rocket is to carry a Saudi Arabian satellite operated by Arabsat, a year after sending founder Elon Musk's red Tesla roadster into orbit as a test. The Falcon Heavy had been scheduled to lift off from the Kennedy Space Center on 11TH April but was delayed because of fierce winds in the upper atmosphere.

INDIA STARES A PILE OF SOLAR E-WASTE

Prelims:

- » Rules: Waste management

Mains:

- » Critically discuss about the Solar waste in new category and its challenge.

Context:

- » By 2050, India will likely stare at a pile of a new category of electronic waste, namely solar e-waste, as per a study made public on 11 April 2019. Currently, India's e-waste rules have no laws mandating solar cell manufacturers to recycle or dispose waste from this sector. India's PV waste volume is estimated to grow to 200,000 tonnes by 2030 and around 1.8 million tonnes by 2050.

Background:

- » Solar cell modules are composed of glass, aluminium and potentially hazardous materials such as lead compounds, polymers and cadmium compounds. These when disposed of in an inappropriate way can have negative environmental and health impacts. Despite the environmental concerns, India which is among the leading markets for solar cells in the world, do not have a requisite policy guideline to ensure recycling of module waste. The E-Waste (Management) Rules, 2016 do not cover solar e-waste. The European Union (EU) has Eco-Design Directive 2009 in place. It is a policy instrument to reduce environmental impact of energy-related products throughout their life cycle.

2 BENGAL GOVERNMENT SCHEMES WON UN AWARDS

Prelims:

- » Schemes in India and its Ministry

Mains:

- » Explain about World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) awards and Key features of the schemes.

Context:

- » The Bengal government has won the UN's World Summit on Information Society (wsis) Award for this scheme.

Background:

- » The 2 schemes are the Utkarsh Bangla and Sabooj Sathi projects for youngsters.
- » Two schemes of the West Bengal government for skill development for increasing employment opportunities for 6 lakh youth every year under Utkarsh Bangla and environment-friendly bicycles to school students of Classes IX to XII under Sabooj Sathi. The Bengal government has distributed nearly 1 crore bicycles.

EU, UK AGREED TO DELAY BREXIT

Prelims:

- » What comprises UK?

Mains:

1. Discuss how does Brexit affect India and the World.
2. Explain the Iris border issue.
3. Explain what UK can understand from other similar border issue and the suggest the solution

Context:

- » European Union leaders and Britain, agreed to a Brexit extension that will allow the U.K. to delay its EU departure date until Halloween.

Background:

- » Britain didn't leave the EU on April 12, 2019, after Britain and the EU agreed to an extension till the end of October 2019.
- » The period is longer than the extension till June 30 that Prime Minister Theresa May had sought.
- » Leaders made clear that the onus was very much on Britain to find a solution and deliver within this period.

AFC CONFERENCE INAUGURATED

Prelims:

- » About the Conference (Place, Significance)

Context:

- » The first bi-annual Commanders' Conference of IAF for the year 2019 began on 11 April 2019 at the Air Headquarters (Vayu Bhawan).

Background:

- » IAF will play a vital role in enhancing the defence manufacturing capabilities of the nation through its acquisitions in the form of Strategic Partnership Model.
- » Aware of the critical requirements projected by the IAF and assured that as a Nation we need to build those capabilities.
- » Minister said that IAF personnel, serving and retired could contribute immensely in enhancing defence manufacturing and production in India.
- » The defence production industry must utilize these assets to the fullest.
- » The CAS while addressing the Commanders emphasised on further enhancement of the IAF's capability in the field of Space, Cyber, Information, AI and Drone technology.
- » The theme of the conference is 'Enhancing our operational capability in the short and long term'.

A GRIM FUTURE IN ISRAEL

Context:

- » India needs to go beyond token homage to the cause of Palestinian freedom
- » With criminal indictment imminent on charges of corruption, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pulled off a fourth consecutive win in general elections to the Knesset on April 9. Though tied on seats with his main rival, Mr. Netanyahu has a clear pathway towards power in coalition with a bloc of right-wing allies.

Indian view on Isreal:

- » After a long freedom struggle India gained independence in 1947.
- » India claimed itself as leader of Non-Alignment Movement and started raising voice against colonial powers and Indian Administration seen British Administered Palestine as another British colony. During coming years India improved its relations with the Soviet Union and India relied in arms exports from Soviet for Indian Armed Forces.
- » During post-cold war, when Soviet Union was about to collapse, India started to look for alternative and it is said that US House refused to pass arms deal with India looking Indian relations with Soviets.

- » Now Israeal emerged as new alternative for India, who was ready to supply arms as good as U.S. without making noise and like this India-Israel defense trade increased gradually.
- » Still India don't have formal ties with Israel.
- » Formal ties with Israel established on May, 1992
- » In 1997 Ezer Weizman became the first Israeli President to visit India.
- » In 2003, Ariel Sharon was the first Israeli Prime Minister to visit India.
- » It is seen that whenever a Hindu-Nationalist Government is formed at New Delhi relations with Israel flourished. During Leftist Government led by Congress, India took a safe stand and keep supporting Palestinian Cause.

India – Israel Bilateral Relations:

- » 1992 Establishment of diplomatic relations
- » 1994 Agreement on Cooperation in Agriculture
- » 1994 Agreement on cooperation in Telecommunication
- » 1994 Agreement on Economic and Commercial cooperation
- » 1996 Agreement on Promotion and Protection of Investments
- » 1996 Avoidance of Double Taxation and for the Prevention of Fiscal evasion with respect to Taxes on Income and Capital
- » 1996 Bilateral Agreement regarding Mutual Assistance and Cooperation in Customs Matters
- » 1996 Framework Agreement for Cooperation in R&D
- » 2002 Agreement on Cooperation in Peace Uses of Outer Space
- » 2003 Agreement for Cooperation in the field of Protection of the Environment
- » 2003 Agreement for cooperation in Medicine and Health
- » 2005 MOU on India-Israel R&D Fund
- » 2006 Agricultural cooperation Three-year Work Plan

Israeli and Palestinian Conflict:

- » Jews were the most persecuted people back in the days so they are always angry at the world for not supporting them on their issues.
- » India doesn't know one thing on Israel and their religion the only reason that India supports Israel is because they see it as a Muslim vs Jews vice versa kashmir Muslims vs Indian hindus conflict and that's wrong Israel doesn't hate Muslims just that Muslims are giving them a hard time with the settlement issues.
- » Hinduism and Judaism are totally different religions infact Judaism and all the Abrahamic religions like Christianity and Islam are very harsh towards paganism or as you would understand idol worshipping if Jews were living in India in high numbers like Muslims the same thing would've happen to them as all other minority religions in India. India has are very

- » strong right-wing Hindu group called the RSS and they don't take kindly to Muslims and Christians so put in Jews and you'll have a party.
- » India as it is emerging to be a world power it doesn't want problems with nobody especially Muslims because the population of Muslims in the world is about 1.6 or more billion so that's a lot and a lot of business for India and her people. So India doesn't want to take sides and will always abstain from voting.
- » So what's my take on the issue well let say in this world religion and race caused the most bloodshed and destruction and in all countries you will find right wing groups because it is easy to blame somebody else for everything that goes wrong. So in my conclusion I say to have peace with Israel give the Jews there land as it was promised by God in the Holy book because the Jews have no land to call their own Christians have numerous countries that they can call their own also Muslims and Hindus have India so why can't Jews have a land they can call their own because Jerusalem was always a Jewish city and in order for the Jews to claim Israel they have to claim Jerusalem. So peace and love and hope the Palestinian and Israelis work out there differences.

Conclusion:

- » A renewal of India's commitment to Palestine should run concurrently with fighting back against the growing expressions of intolerance in political life and the shredding of the fabric of secular democracy. With Israel taking another perilous turn to the right, India's endorsement of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement, today the only option to gain justice for Palestine, seems a moral imperative.

NOT HALF-DONE: ENSURING FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS

Context:

- » Voter turnout remains high, but the ECI must be quicker in acting on code violations
- » The first phase of voting on Thursday to elect the 17th Lok Sabha witnessed enthusiastic participation of voters in 91 Lok Sabha constituencies across 20 States and Union Territories.

What is Lok Sabha Election?

- » Elections are conducted by the Election Commission of India.
- » The Prime Minister of India is elected by members of the Lok Sabha, the lower house of parliament. The Constitution of India allows for up to 552 members in the Lok Sabha, with up to 530 members representing the States.

How is LOKSABHA formed?

- » Members of the Lok Sabha are elected by adult universal suffrage and a first-past-the-post system to represent their respective constituencies, and they hold their seats for five years or until the body is dissolved by the President on the advice of the council of ministers.

Zero Hour in Parliament?

- » The total time allocated for Zero Hour is 30 minutes wherein a member gets three minutes to raise the issue. The session should be completed before 1 pm.
- » It was during the 1960s when several issues of national and international importance used to be raised by members of Parliament immediately after Question Hour.

Lok Sabha And Rajya Sabha Constitutional Relation

In Indian Constitution, one encounters a three-fold situation in the relation between the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha of the Parliament.

- » **First:** there are situations when the two Houses of the Parliament enjoy co-equal powers.
- » **Second:** there are situations when the Lok Sabha enjoys predominance over the Rajya Sabha.
- » **Third:** there are situations when the Rajya Sabha has superiority over the Lok Sabha.
- » **(1)** The constitution in general envisages an equality of status between the two Houses of Parliament. There are about half a dozen situations when the two Houses are equal.
- » Thus, ordinary bills may be introduced in either Houses of the Parliament and have to be passed by both the Houses before they are presented to the President for his assent.
- » In the matter of amendment to the constitution, the authorities of the two Houses are equal. Amendments have to be passed by $\frac{2}{3}$ rd majority in each House (Art.368).
- » In the election of the President, and the Vice-President, in their removal through impeachment, in the removal of the Judges of the Supreme Court and the High Courts, the Comptroller and Auditor General, the Chief Election Commissioner etc., the participation of both the Houses is necessary.
- » Emergencies proclaimed by the President under Arts. 352, 356 and 360 have to be approved by both the Houses of the Parliament.
- » The ministers, even the Prime Minister may be drawn from either Houses of the Parliament. In fact during her first term as Prime Minister, Mrs. Gandhi was a member of the Rajya Sabha.

Differences Between Loksabha and Rajyasabha

- » The constitution makes the Lok Sabha distinctly more powerful than the Rajya Sabha in several cases. The Lok Sabha has been given almost exclusive powers over money bills. Money bills may be introduced only in the Lok Sabha. Such bills need not be endorsed by the Rajya Sabha. If a money bill is rejected by the Rajya Sabha, it becomes a law after 14 days waiting.
- » Even with regard to ordinary bills which required to be passed by both the Houses, the Lower House has an indirect superiority.
- » In case of dead-locked bill, the President may call a joint session of the Parliament to resolve the dead-lock. In such a joint session, the will of the Lok Sabha prevails due to its numerical superiority (547 vs. 250).

- » The ministers are collectively responsible to the Lok Sabha. The ministry must resign whenever it loses its majority support in the Lower House. Thus the Lok Sabha is the support on which the Government rests. This alone makes the Lok Sabha to work far above the Rajya Sabha.

Situations where the Rajya Sabha is entrusted with greater powers than the Lok Sabha.

- » Article 249 of the constitution provides that Rajya Sabha by a resolution passed by 2/3 of its members present and voting, may authorize the Parliament to pass laws on a matter in the state list, in the national interest.
- » Article 312 of the constitution empower the Rajya Sabha to pass resolutions by 2/3 of its members present and voting, creating All India Services. It should be noted however, both under Art. 249 and Art 312, the special power of the Rajya Sabha enlarges the authority (kale Central Government at the expense of the powers of the states.
- » Though in matter of constitutional amendment, the powers of the two Houses are equal, the Rajya Sabha has the power to check a dominant Lower House, if the ruling party does not enjoy the necessary 2/3 majority in the Rajya Sabha.
- » Precisely such a situation arose during the Janata Rule.
- » The Government could not have its way in the case of both the 43rd and 45th amendments for lack of necessary 2/3 majority in the Rajya Sabha.

Membership Qualification:

Lok Sabha:

- a) Should Be Citizen of India
- Should Be of Age More Than 25
- Name must be in electoral panel (in any part of the country)
- Should not hold office of profit under Government

Rajya Sabha:

1. Citizen of India
2. Above 30 Years of Age
3. Posses qualification prescribed by the law should not hold office of profit under Government should not be undischarged insolvent/unsound mind

Terms of Office:

- » Lok Sabha: 5 years is the term of office and it can be dissolved.
- » Rajya Sabha: It is a permanent house and it can't be dissolved.

Conclusion:

- » In the Jammu constituency 72% polling was recorded, while in the Valley's Baramulla constituency the figure was 35%, marginally lower than the 2014 figures.
- »

- » Isolated complaints regarding mismanagement arose in some parts, but by and large the first phase went on well, and upheld India's reputation in managing what is the world's largest democratic exercise.
- » Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim and parts of Odisha also voted to elect their State Assemblies. Tripura and West Bengal topped in turnout, with 81.8% and 81%, respectively.
- » This is the first general election with VVPATs attached to all EVMs.

HONG KONG IS THIRD-LARGEST STOCK MARKET

Prelims:

- » Stock market time line, No of stock markets in India, bear and Bull

Mains:

- » Write about the various types of foreign investment? Explain how this investment affects the stock market in India?

Context:

- » Hong Kong beat Japan to become the world's third-largest stock market.
- » It is now only behind the US and mainland China.
- » Hong Kong's market cap was \$5.78 trillion compared with \$5.76 trillion
- » for Japan.

Background:

- » Hong Kong's market cap was \$5.78 trillion as of Tuesday and Japan's market cap was \$5.76 trillion. Hong Kong's Hang Seng Index climbed 17 per cent this year through Tuesday.

US: LEGISLATION FOR US-INDIA PARTNERSHIP

Prelims:

- » NATO overview
- » Significance of Bill

Mains:

- » Write about USA-India strategic partnership. Examine how the new legislation will enhance this partnership?

Context:

- » US lawmakers introduced new legislation in the House of Representatives to strengthen US-India strategic partnership. This will allow the US-India partnership to flourish in line with the US's security commitment to the Indo-Pacific region.
- » The legislation will bolster national security and help ensure full alignment between the Department of Defence and the Department of State.

Background:

- » The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for fiscal 2017 included special language recognising the unique US-India defence relationship that designated India as a “Major Defence Partner” of the United States. The language seeks unique consideration for trade and technology sharing with India and increased attention and support to advance this relationship in the areas of defence trade and technology sharing.

INDIA, ASEAN TO BOOST MARITIME TIES

Prelims:

- » ASEAN its members, its objectives and its developmental projects

Mains:

- » Write about the significance of India-ASEAN relations in maritime and infrastructural development.

Context:

- » India and ASEAN have vowed to strengthen ties by deepening cooperation in the maritime sector and boosting connectivity. The two sides met at the 21st ASEAN-India Senior Officials’ Meeting (SOM) held in New Delhi on April 11-12. The two sides also decided to hold an ASEAN-India Conference on Renewable Energy in 2019.

Background:

- » ASEAN countries, particularly Myanmar, Vietnam & Malaysia can potentially contribute to India’s energy security. The highly underdeveloped NE States of India, which lie at the gateway to a region offering unlimited economic opportunities, will witness an economic transformation. Trade between India and ASEAN comprises 10.12% of India’s total trade with the world. Conclusion of a balanced Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement will further boost our trade and investment ties with the region.
- » Cooperation in areas such as maritime security including freedom of navigation, drug trafficking and cybercrime.

PM MODI TO RECEIVE ORDER OF ST ANDREW

Mains:

- » What are the challenges in India-Russia trade relations? How they can be overcome.

Context:

- » Russia will confer the Order of St Andrew the Apostle on Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- » The award is being given for Mr. Modi’s exceptional services in promoting special and privileged strategic partnership between the Russian Federation and India.
- » The award is Russia’s highest state decoration.

Background:

- » It is awarded by Russian Govt to prominent statesmen and public figures and representatives of science, the arts and various industries for their exceptional services in promoting the prosperity, greatness and glory of Russia.
- » It is also awarded to foreign heads of states for outstanding services to Russia.
- » It is established in 1698 by Tsar Peter the Great, in honour of Saint Andrew.

RETAIL INFLATION UP TO 2.86% IN MARCH

Prelims:

- » Price management, Types of Inflation

Mains:

- » How price management in India is regulated?

Context:

- » Retail inflation rose to 2.86% in March this year due to increase in prices of food articles and fuel. Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation reported that the inflation based on Consumer Price Index was 2.57% in February 2019.
- » It was 4.28% in March 2018.

RBI ISSUES NORMS FOR CURRENCY CHESTS

Prelims:

- » Functions of RBI.
- » Why 1rs is not printed by RBI?

Context:

- » Reserve Bank of India has issued guidelines for banks to set up new currency chests.
- » These guidelines include a minimum area of 1,500 square feet for strong room and a processing capacity of 6.6 lakh pieces of banknotes per day.
- » For banks situated in hilly or inaccessible places, this capacity should be 2.1 lakh pieces of banknotes per day.
- » These guidelines include a minimum area of 1,500 square feet for strong room and a processing capacity of 6.6 lakh pieces of banknotes per day.
- » For banks situated in hilly or inaccessible places, this capacity should be 2.1 lakh pieces of banknotes per day.

JALLIANWALA BAGH MASSACRE CENTENARY

Prelims:

- » Causes and Consequences of Jallianwala Bagh massacre

Mains:

- » Name some acts which are similar to Rowlatt act in current scenario? How such acts can be checked and balanced?

Context:

- » The nation is paying homage to martyrs of Jallianwala Bagh massacre on its hundredth anniversary on 13 April, 2019. Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu will release a Commemorative Coin and Commemorative Postage Stamp.

Background:

- » Hundreds of innocent people were killed by Brigadier General Dyer during a peaceful meeting at the Jallianwala Bagh park on this day in 1919.

OIL IMPORT FROM IRAN MAY BE REDUCED AS U.S. MULLS WAIVER

Context:

- » The decision on the GSP could be deferred until after elections, the discussions on the Iran oil sanctions waiver have indicated an extension is likely, with India allowed a lower quantity of oil imports from Iran.

Background:

- » The Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) is the oldest trade preference programmes in the world; this was designed to provide zero duties or preferential access for developing countries to advanced markets.
- » The U.S. GSP programme was established by the U.S. Trade Act of 1974, and promotes economic development by eliminating duties on thousands of products when imported from one of the 129 designated beneficiary countries and territories.
- » In April 2018, the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) announced that it would review the GSP eligibility of India, Indonesia, and Kazakhstan. The proposed review for India was initiated in response to market access petitions filed by the U.S. dairy and medical device industries due to recent policy decisions in India, which were perceived as trade barriers.
- » This increased the purpose of promoting economic growth in a large number of developing countries by allowing increased exports of eligible products.
- » Most of the 3,500 Indian products imported by the U.S. under the GSP are raw materials or important intermediaries of value chains.

- » In many cases, Indian exports are less-expensive, high-quality alternatives that reduce the costs of final products, thereby creating value that is subsequently exported the world over by U.S. companies or directly conveyed to the U.S. consumer.
- » Indeed, this enables the U.S. economy to be more globally competitive.

Why GSP be Continued?

- » Incontinued economic growth over the last two decades or so, India is a lower middle-income country.
- » GSP allows Indian exporters a certain competitive edge and furthers the development of the country's export base.
- » It also allows India to integrate with global value chains (GVC) and hence, with global markets.
- » These advantages provide opportunities for small enterprises and help in the overall livelihood creation endeavour in India.
- » Indian exports to the U.S. under the GSP programme are mostly intermediaries, and are not in direct competition with U.S. producers — ultimately, these goods benefit the U.S. economy.
- » India's continued eligibility for GSP makes good economic sense given the low value, high-quality, and nature of its imports.
- » India and the U.S. will continue to intensify their economic relationship and interdependencies, and it is, therefore, critical to maintain the vision of the potential this partnership offers. The GSP remains a central aspect of the overall trade engagement and must remain available for Indian exporters keen to address the U.S. markets.

Issues:

- » The discussions on the Iran oil sanctions waiver have indicated an extension is likely, with India allowed a lower quantity of oil imports from Iran.
- » According to the officials, out of the nine outstanding issues on trade, the two sides were able to narrow differences on all but two or three, which were irreconcilable, and led to the U.S. notice on cancelling GSP.
- » These include the issue of certifying dairy products from “vegetarian” cows, and the price caps on medical devices like stents — both of which had originally triggered the GSP review in April 2018.
- » The U.S. also remains concerned about duties and regulations in the Information Technology industry, — an issue for which the European Union has filed a case against India at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) recently.

Conclusion:

- » The U.S. is watching India's decision on 5G technology closely, particularly the fate of the bid by Chinese company Huawei, given the U.S.'s cases against it.

CMFRI AND ISRO INK MOU TO PROTECT WETLANDS

Prelims:

1. Wetlands
2. Ramsar sites in India
3. What is CMFRI? its function

Mains:

- » How wetlands stabilize Economic imbalance?

Context:

- » A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) and Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO).
- » They will map, validate and protect smaller wetlands by restoring them through coastal livelihood programmes.
- » They will develop a mobile app and a centralized web portal with a complete database of wetlands.

Background:

- » As per the agreement, National Wetland Atlas which has been already developed by the Space Applications Centre of ISRO will be updated with real-time data of physical, chemical and biological parameters of the wetlands to be provided by the CMFRI.
- » The collaboration will aid in developing a comprehensive wetland information system which could facilitate the village-level wetland.
- » advisories to the local people by scientific communities. The National Innovations in Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA) is aimed at finding ways and means to mitigate the impact of climate change on marine fisheries and coastal region.

IMO'S NEW RULE ON INFORMATION EXCHANGE

Prelims:

- » IMO
- » FAL convention

Mains:

- » What is the role of technology in cross – border conflicts

Context:

- » A new global rule mandated by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) for national governments to introduce electronic information exchange between ships and ports took effect from 8 April 2019. The rule seeks to make cross-border trade simpler. The rule is mandatory under IMO's Convention on Facilitation of International Maritime Traffic (FAL Convention).

Background:

- » The Facilitation of International Maritime Traffic (FAL Convention) was adopted in 1965.
- » The main objective of the convention is to achieve the most efficient maritime transport as possible, looking for smooth transit in ports of ships, cargo, and passengers.
- » The Facilitation Convention encourages the use of a “single window” for data, to enable all the information required by public authorities in connection with the arrival, stay and departure of ships, persons and cargo, to be submitted via a single portal, without duplication.
- » Under the requirement for electronic data exchange, all national authorities should now have provision for electronic exchange of this information.

WORLD ALLERGY WEEK 2019: 7-13 APRIL

Context:

- » World Allergy Week 2019 was observed from 7 to 13 April 2019.
- » The theme for World Allergy Week 2019 is “The Global Problem of Food Allergy”.
- » World Allergy Week is a global campaign of the World Allergy Organization (WAO), which aims to raise awareness of the impact of allergy in our communities.

IMPACT OF SPACE TRAVEL ON ASTRONAUTS REVEALED

Prelims:

- » Space technology

Mains:

- » “Star Wars going to happen in reality”. Explain.

Context:

- » Scientists have found no major epigenetic differences in astronaut Scott Kelly, who spent a year in space aboard the International Space Station, and his twin brother, Mark Kelly, who remained on Earth.
- » Epigenetic changes involve chemical tweaks to DNA that can influence gene activity.
- » The changes affect when and how a gene is read, or expressed, for its protein-encoding instructions.

Background:

- » Space travel caused herpes viruses to reactivate in more than half of crew aboard Space Shuttle and International Space Station (ISS), according to a NASA study.
- » This finding could jeopardise mankind's future missions to Mars and beyond.
- » While only a small proportion develops symptoms, virus reactivation rates increase with spaceflight duration and could present a significant health risk on future missions.

NEW SENSOR CAN DETECT DANGEROUS CHEMICALS

Prelims:

- » Biosensors
- » Spectrometer characteristics.

Mains:

- » Do you think “ humans are too much depending on Technology”? Critically Evaluate.

Context:

- » Researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the US have developed a spectrometer that can be used in smartphone-sized devices to detect dangerous chemicals.

Background:

- » Spectrometer could be integrated with the camera of a typical cell phone. The device collects information about each individual pixel in an image to identify materials or detect specific objects.
- » The device also has an advanced capability called hyperspectral imaging, which collects information about each individual pixel in an image to identify materials or detect specific objects amidst a complicated background.

OIL CONSUMING BACTERIA FOUND AT SEA BOTTOM

Prelims:

- » Mariana Trench
- » Marine bacteria

Mains:

- » How microorganisms play a role in degrading oil spills in natural disasters? Evaluate.

Context:

- » Scientists have discovered a unique oil eating bacterium in the Mariana Trench.

Background:

- » In an expedition, organised by marine explorer and film director James Cameron, researchers collected samples from the trench.
- » In the samples, they found microorganisms that eat compounds similar to those in oil and then use it for fuel.
- » The bacteria are likely deriving a significant portion of their food from pollution that sinks from the ocean surface. But scientists also found evidence that some of the hydrocarbons are sourced from below.

GIANT BARRIERS TO KEEP WASTE OUT OF THE OCEANS

Prelims:

- » Ocean Cleanup Program

Mains:

- » Did we Wake too late in Curbing plastic? Critically Evaluate.

Context:

- » Sea Defence Solutions stops the flow of plastic before it reaches the sea, with a system of barriers that can catch garbage to send to recyclers.
- » Plastics that invade the sea, poisons the fish and birds entering the food chain and even the food we eat.
- » That's why Boyan Slat, the young Dutch inventor who founded The Ocean Cleanup, wants to clean up the oceans.
- » But why not try to capture plastic waste before it reaches the sea? This would avoid the degrading effect of salt water, which crumbles it into micro-plastics.

INDIA TO PARTNER WITH JAPAN AND UAE

Prelims:

- » India, Uae Bilateral relations.

Mains:

- » What is the role of Japan in India's Modernization? Explain.
- » Will India gain momentum against 'Dragon's Dream' "One Belt One Road"? Comment.

Context:

- » India is joining hands with Japan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to implement two projects in Africa. India will build a cancer hospital in Kenya in collaboration with Japan.
- » It will partner with the UAE to set up an information and communications technology (ICT) centre in Ethiopia.

MEDICAL DEVICES TO GET CDSCO CERTIFICATION

Prelims:

- » Functions of CDSCO

Mains:

- » Role of Medical sector in increasing FOREX Reserve? Explain

Context:

- » All imported, as well as locally manufactured medical devices sold in India will soon be required to clear specific safety and quality standards.

Background:

- » The move is aimed at preventing fiascos such as the one involving Johnson and Johnson hip implants.
- » The import, manufacture, and sale of all medical devices will need to be certified by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO).

NEW UREA POLICY 2015 EXTENDED

Prelims:

- » Aim of NUP
- » Govt Schemes.

Mains:

- » What are the limitations of New Urea Policy.
- » How New Urea Policy Reduces Imports? Evaluate.

Context:

- » The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved to extend the duration of New Urea Policy 2015 for existing gas-based urea unit from 1 April 2019 until further orders.
- » The move will facilitate the continuation of operations and regular supply of urea to farmers.
- » At present, there are 31 urea units in the country of which 28 units are gasbased.

Background:

- » The key objectives of the New Urea Policy 2015 are as follows: Maximise indigenous Urea Production to reduce import dependency and reduce import dependency and reduce subsidy burden on the government. Promote energy efficiency to reduce Carbon-footprint to make Urea production environment friendly. Make Urea production plant to adopt best technology available and become globally competitive. Timely supply of Urea to farmers at the same MRP.

ADDITIONAL POST OF DEPUTY CAG CLEARED

Prelims:

- » Duties and Powers of CAG
- » Constitutional provisions of the CAG

Context:

- » The government has decided to create an additional post of Deputy Comptroller and Auditor General, which will oversee coordination of audits of states as well as telecommunication.
- » The decision was taken at a Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 15 April 2019.
- » Expenditure on account of the creation of this post will be about Rs 21 lakh.

Background:

- » The role of the CAG evolved in British India with Lord Canning initiating a major administrative drive before the Mutiny of 1857.
- » In May 1858, for the first time, a separate department was set up with an Accountant General, who was responsible for accounting and auditing the financial transactions under the East India Company.
- » After Mutiny, the British Crown took over and passed the Government of India Act 1858.
- » This laid the foundation stone of Imperial Audit. Sir Edward Drummond took charge in 1860 as the first Auditor General and the term ‘Comptroller and Auditor General of India’ was first used in 1884. Under the Montford Reforms of 1919, the Auditor General became independent of the government.
- » The Government of India Act 1935 strengthened the position of the Auditor General by providing for Provincial Auditors General in a federal set-up.

SOUTH WEST MONSOON SEASONAL RAINFALL OVER THE COUNTRY LIKELY TO BE NORMAL.

Prelims:

- » India's Climatic Calender.
- » Temperature Conditions During This Season.

Mains:

- » Describe El nino Condition during extreme Chennai rainfall.

Context:

Summary of the Forecast Assessment	
a)	Southwest monsoon seasonal (June to September) rainfall over the country as a whole is likely to be near normal.
b)	Quantitatively, the monsoon seasonal (June to September) rainfall is likely to be 96% of the Long Period Average (LPA) with a model error of $\pm 5\%$. The LPA of the season rainfall over the country as a whole for the period 1951-2000 is 89 cm.
c)	Weak El Niño conditions are likely to prevail during the monsoon season with reduced intensity in the later part of the season. The sea surface temperature (SST) conditions over the Pacific (El Niño/La Niña) and Indian Oceans (Indian Ocean Dipole-IOD) which are known to have strong influence on Indian monsoon are being continuously monitored. Overall, the country is expected to have well distributed rainfall scenario during the 2019 monsoon season, which will be beneficial to farmers in the country during the ensuing kharif season.
IMD will issue the second stage Monsoon-2019 Forecast during the first week of June, 2019.	

Summary of The Forecast Assessment

- » Southwest monsoon seasonal (June to September) rainfall over the country as a whole is likely to be near normal.

- » Quantitatively, the monsoon seasonal (June to September) rainfall is likely to be 96% of the Long Period Average (LPA) with a model error of $\pm 5\%$. The LPA of the season rainfall over the country as a whole for the period 1951-2000 is 89 cm. Weak El Niño conditions are likely to prevail during the monsoon season with reduced intensity in the later part of the season.
- 1. The sea surface temperature (SST) conditions over the Pacific (El Niño/La Niña) and Indian Oceans (Indian Ocean Dipole-IOD) which are known to have strong influence on Indian monsoon are being continuously monitored.
- 2. Overall, the country is expected to have well distributed rainfall scenario during the 2019 monsoon season, which will be beneficial to farmers in the country during the ensuing kharif season.

Background:

- » India Meteorological Department (IMD) issues operational forecast for the southwest monsoon season (June to September) rainfall for the country as a whole in two stages.
- » The first stage forecast is issued in April and the second stage forecast is issued in June.
- » These forecasts are prepared using state-of-the-art Statistical Ensemble Forecasting system (SEFS) and using the dynamical coupled Ocean-Atmosphere global.
- » Climate Forecasting System (CFS) model developed under Monsoon Mission of the Ministry of Earth Sciences.

RBI EMPLOYEES NOT GOVERNMENT SERVANTS

Prelims:

- » Constitutional provisions of RBI

GATEWAYY

Context:

- » The Madras High Court observed that the employees of RBI cannot be referred to as 'government servants' while identifying their employment status.
- » The observation came after an RBI employee, E. Manoj Kumar, moved the High Court seeking the declaration of his result in the Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission (TNPSC).

UAE TO HOST WORLD'S FOREMOST AI SUMMIT

Prelims:

1. India, UAE Trade Relations.
2. UAE Geography
3. Applications of AI

MAINS:

- » How Gulf Crisis violated Human Rights.
- » Ethics Of AI

- » What are the Risks for Mankind in the AI Era? Evaluate.

Context:

- » UAE is set to host the world's foremost Artificial Intelligence, AI Summit to empower global dialogue on the future of government, business and society.
- » The inaugural 'AI Everything', will take place at the Dubai World Trade Centre, between 30 April- 1 May 2019. It will be hosted by the UAE National Programme for Artificial Intelligence.

UNESCO CANO PRESS FREEDOM PRIZE ANNOUNCED

Prelims:

- » What is Cano Press Freedom Prize.
- » List out Indians who won Canos Press Freedom Prize.

Context:

- » The UNESCO/Guillermo Cano Press Freedom Prize 2019 has been awarded to Reuters reporters Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo. The prize carries a reward of \$25,000 Prize.
- » It recognises the exceptional courage in reporting on alleged human rights violations in Myanmar's state of Rakhine. The award was established in 1997 and named after Guillermo Cano Isaza.

Background:

- » The annual UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize recognises outstanding contribution to the defence and, or promotion of press freedom, and especially in the face of danger

LAST FEMALE RARE TURTLE SPECIES DIED

Prelims:

- » Status in IUCN RedList
- » Marine National Parks and Sanctuaries in india

Mains:

- » What is the role of Turtles in maintaining the health of Marine Ecosystem? Explain.

Context:

- » The only known female member of one of the world's rarest and most endangered turtle species died on 13 April 2019. It was more than 90 years old. The female Yangtze giant softshell turtle died at the Suzhou Zoo in Suzhou, China. The death means only three giant softshell turtles remain in the world.

BACKGROUND:

- » It is also known as the Red River giant softshell turtle, Shanghai softshell turtle, Swinhoe's softshell turtle or speckled softshell turtle.

- » The Suzhou zoo, where the female turtle lived, also houses a male Yangtze giant softshell turtle. The other two live in Vietnam.
- » It is listed as critically endangered in the IUCN Red List.
- » It may be the largest living freshwater turtle in the world.
- » The female of the last breeding pair has died, making the species functionally extinct unless a wild female is found.

EGYPT UNVEILED 4300 YEARS OLD TOMB

Context:

- » Egypt unveiled the 4,300-year old tomb of a Fifth Dynasty nobleman adorned with colourful reliefs and well-preserved inscriptions a month after being discovered.
- » The tomb is located south of Saqqara, a vast necropolis south of Cairo, and belongs to a senior official named Khuwy.
- » It is mostly made of white limestone bricks and is adorned with ornate paintings.

ESSEL WORLD LAUNCHED BIRD PARK

Prelims:

- » Theme and Motive of the Bird Park.

Context:

- » Essel World launched an interactive bird park in Gorai recently.
- » The first-of-its-kind rain forest-themed park spread across 1.4 acres is home to over 500 exotic birds from more than 60 species.
- » The park is equipped with small ponds for aquatic birds, dense cover of trees for birds to incubate their eggs and a water stream that offers drinking water to birds.

APOLLO HOSPITALS LAUNCHED ADVANCED CENTRE

Context:

- » On World Parkinson's Day, Apollo Hospitals launched an advanced centre for movement disorders.
- » It will offer medical and surgical treatment for patients affected by various movement disorders including Parkinson's Disease.
- » The centre would offer Deep Brain Stimulation surgeries and other services to treat a wide spectrum of diseases such as Parkinson's Disease, cerebral palsy, and dystonia.

LEWIS HAMILTON WON FORMULA ONE'S 1,000TH RACE

Context:

- » In motor racing, Lewis Hamilton won the Chinese Grand Prix for a record
- » Sixth Time on 14 April 2019.
- » He seized the overall lead from his Mercedes teammate Valtteri Bottas in
- » Formula One's 1,000th world championship race.
- » Valtteri Bottas was second for his team's third one-two finish in as many
- » Races this season. Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel took third place.

MEENA KUMARI CLINCHED GOLD IN BOXING WORLD CUP

Context:

- » India finished with 5 medals in the Boxing World Cup which concluded at Cologne, Germany on 13 April 2019.
- » Meena Kumari Maisnam won gold in the 54 kg category.
- » Sakshi (57 kg) and Pwilao Basumatary (64 kg) settled for the silver.
- » Pinki Rani (51 kg) and Parveen (60 kg) won bronze.

HIGHWAY HURDLE – VERDICT ON THE CHENNAI-SALEM CORRIDOR

Context:

- » This verdict on the Chennai-Salem corridor reveals the perils of fast-tracking projects

Case detail:

- » The High court ruling is an indictment of the arbitrary decision-making process behind the project.
- » The project was pushed by the Centre and the State even though it was set to pass through wetlands, fertile farmlands, reserve forests and waterbodies.
- » Farmers who stood to lose their land and environmentalists had questioned the claim that by reducing the transit time, there would be saving of fuel, thereby cutting the carbon footprint.
- » What has been exposed in the verdict is that the eight-lane corridor was never really cleared as a project under the Centre's Bharatmala Pariyojana.
- » It did not figure in the list of road projects approved under Bharatmala-I.
- » The NHAI did not explain in its counter-affidavit how the Chennai-Madurai highway, an approved project, was dropped and the Chennai-Salem project included in its place.

- » The court examined the record and found that there was nothing to show that it was approved by either the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs or the Public-Private Partnership Appraisal Committee; the Chennai-Tiruchi-Madurai corridor had much higher vehicular traffic to justify its inclusion in Bharatmala.

Decision:

- » The decision is important for affirming the principle that environmental clearance ought to be obtained before any project is allowed to advance to a stage where measures become irreversible. It underscores that sufficient data on the possible harm to the environment is needed before resources are committed to a project.
- » In this case, not only would land titles be transferred to the state; heavy compensation amounts would also have been paid by the time the environmental impact is known.

Conclusion:

- » The court's conclusion that labelling its replacement by the Salem project as a 'policy decision' was not a sufficient explanation is unexceptionable. Having failed to convince the court that the procedures it followed were above board, the least that the Centre can now do is to make a comprehensive study of its impact on the environment and on farming and rural livelihoods before moving ahead.

SC BANNED MINING ACTIVITIES IN KAZIRANGA PARK

Prelims:

- » UNESCO recognized National Parks and Wild Life Sancturies in India.

Mains:

- » "Banning of Mining" is to save the environment or for the survival? Comment.

Context:

- » The Supreme Court has banned all mining activities along the Kaziranga National Park and catchment area of rivers originating in Karbi Anglong Hills in Assam. A bench comprising Justices Arun Mishra and Deepak Gupta issued a notice to the Assam government and sought its reply within 3 weeks.

SANITARY PAD MACHINES TO BE INSTALLED

Prelims:

- » Ujjwala Sanitary Napkins initiative

Context:

- » As part of a police welfare scheme, Mumbai Police is set to install over 100 sanitary pad vending machines and incinerators for women police officers across the city.

- » Action Committee Against Unfair Medical Practices along with Brihan Mumbai police have launched a project "Smart Maitrin".
- » Under this project, 140 sanitary pad machines will be installed at 93 police stations across the city.

GREENAM ENERGY SET UP POWER PLANT

Prelims:

- » National action plan on climate change (NAPCC)

Mains:

- » Is it vital for India to remain in compliance with the global trade regime?

Context:

- » Greenam Energy has set up its first floating solar power plant at Tuticorin.
- » AM International Group Founder-Chairman Ashwin Muthiah laid the foundation stone for the power plant, which would lead to significant energy savings.
- » The 24 MW floating solar power plant would be one of its kind and the first floating renewable energy initiative to optimise energy production in industrial plants.

Background:

- » The project is a one-of-its-kind and one of India's first floating renewable energy initiatives to optimise energy production in industrial plants.
- » As no land is required for construction, floating solar plants are gaining popularity across India. Also, the water beneath keeps the panels cool and boosts efficiency, thus providing mechanical leverage.
- » The tropical climate of Southern India and availability of water bodies provide ideal opportunities for the construction of floating solar power plants.

12 MONTHS TO SELL NON-CRORE ASSETS

Mains:

- » write about Public Asset Management authority.
- » State-run companies will have 12 months to monetise non-core assets identified by a ministerial panel, failing which the finance ministry may restrict budgetary allocations to the CPSEs.
- » The Department of Investment and Public Asset Management
- » (DIPAM) issued the guidelines for monetisation of non-core assets of CPSEs and immovable enemy properties, following a Cabinet decision in February.

INS MAGAR REACHED MOZAMBIQUE

Prelims:

- » India, Mozambique Trade Relations

Context:

- » Another Indian naval ship INS Magar reached Mozambique's Beira city loaded with suitable relief material.
- » The ship handed over 250 tonnes of rice and 500 kg of epidemic medicines for the population of Beira affected by Cyclone Idai.
- » The material was received by Mozambican Minister of Agriculture Higino Francisco de Marrule..

EXPORTS OUTSPACE IMPORTS AT 11%

Mains:

- » What steps to be taken to narrow Indian trade deficit?

Context:

- » India's exports rose to a five-month high of 11% in March on account of higher growth mainly in pharma, chemicals and engineering sectors.
- » It marked the outbound shipments at \$331 billion for FY 2018-19.
- » Merchandise exports in March stood at \$32.55 billion as against \$29.32 billion last year.
- » This is the best growth rate for exports since October 2018, when shipments grew by 17.86%.

INDIA NARROWED TRADE DEFICIT WITH CHINA

Prelims:

- » India, China Bilateral Relations.

Mains:

- » How China seeks to hide extent of trade surplus with India.

Context:

- » India cut its trade deficit with China by the most in more than a decade.
- » India's exports to China jumped 31% year-on-year to \$17 billion in the financial year ended March 31, 2019.
- » In the process, it cut the bilateral trade deficit by \$10 billion to \$53 billion.

BAMBOO RICE IN ODISHA AFTER FOUR DECADES

Prelims:

- » Major Crops and its patterns in India
- » Bamboo Crops and its features.

Mains:

- » Bamboo plantations can help India to achieve carbon neutral status

Context:

- » Bamboo rice has shown up in Odisha nearly after four decades. Odisha had last witnessed Bamboo rice in 1979.

Background:

- » Bamboo rice is special rice that is grown out of a dying bamboo shoot. When the bamboo shoot breathes its last, it flowers into a rare variety of rice seeds, which are known as bamboo rice. It is said that the bamboo rice harvesting is a major source of income for the tribal communities living in the interiors of Wayanad Sanctuary in Kerala. The gates of Chandaka-Dampara Wildlife Sanctuary in Cuttack district Odisha have been recently opened for forest dwellers to come and collect the rice.

300% INCREASE IN MEASLES GLOBALLY

Prelims:

- » Role of International Organisation.

Mains:

- » What are the initiatives taken by the Govt of India in eradication of measles.

Context:

- » WHO raised alarm over a 300% increase in the case of measles globally in the first quarter of 2019 compared with last year.
- » So far this year, 170 countries have reported 112,163 measles cases to WHO.
- » Africa has witnessed the most dramatic rise - up 700% which has weaker vaccination coverage than other regions.

Background:

- » Measles virus is an enveloped, ribonucleic acid virus of the genus Morbillivirus.
- » Measles is highly contagious, and an infected person will often transmit the virus to over 90% of unprotected close contacts. The virus infects the respiratory tract, then spreads throughout the body. Measles is a human disease and is not known to occur in animals.
- » Measles can be entirely prevented through a two-dose vaccine and had been officially eliminated in many countries with advanced healthcare systems.

NOTRE DAM IN PARIS CAUGHT FIRE

Context:

- » A major fire engulfed the medieval cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris, one of France's most famous landmarks. The 850-year-old Gothic building's spire and roof have collapsed but the main structure, including the two bell towers, has been saved. Notre-Dame has stood tall above Paris since the 1200s. A Unesco World Heritage site, it was built in the 12th and 13th centuries.

INS KOZHIKODE DECOMMISSIONED

Prelims:

- » Naval bases in india.

Mains:

- » What is the role of minesweepers in marine conflicts.

Context:

- » Indian Naval Ship Kozhikode was decommissioned in a grand ceremony conducted at Naval Jetty in Visakhapatnam. Vice Adm S N Ghormade, Chief of Staff, Eastern Naval Command was the chief guest for the occasion. INS Kozhikode was commissioned on 19 December 1988 at Riga (erstwhile USSR) and was the sixth and the last of the modified NATYA class of minesweeper.

Background:

- » INS Kozhikode was commissioned on December 19, 1988, at Riga (erstwhile USSR)
- » It was named after the historic port of Calicut, the ship was an integral part of the 21 Mine Counter Measures Squadron, based in ENC at Visakhapatnam
- » INS Kozhikode (M71) was a minesweeper of the Karwar class, of similar design to the Pondicherry-class ships that were in service with the Indian Navy till 2012. It was built by the Sredne-Nevskiy Shipyard at Saint Petersburg, Russia, except for the addition of surface-to-air missiles. Kozhikode was the sixth and the last of the modified 'Natya' class of minesweepers. The ship took part in the International Fleet Review 2016 that was held off the coast of Visakhapatnam

DRDO SUCCESSFULLY TEST-FIRED NIRBHAY

Context:

- » India successfully test-fired its first Sub-sonic cruise missile, Nirbhay on 15 April 2019.
- » The launch was conducted from a test range in Odisha at 11:44 am.
- » The missile can be deployed from multiple platforms and was launched by DRDO from complex-3 of the Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Chandipur.

- » The last successful trial of 'Nirbhay' cruise missile was conducted on November 7, 2017.

Background:

- » Nirbhay is powered by a solid rocket booster for take-off which is developed by Advanced Systems Laboratory (ASL).
- » The missile has a Ring Laser Gyroscope (RLG) based guidance, control and navigation system.
- » It also has a MEMS based Inertial Navigation System (INS) along with the GPS system.
- » It has a range of about 1000 km and is capable of delivering 24 different types of warheads depending on mission requirements between 200-300kg.
- » It will eventually supplement the role played by Brahmos missile for the Indian Armed Forces by delivering warheads farther than the 450 km range of Brahmos.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE INDONESIAN VOTE

Context:

- » Indonesia's single-day and complex elections are going to be held today (17th April, 2019).
- » The rematch, after 2014, between incumbent President Joko 'Jokowi' Widodo of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) and his challenger, Prabowo Subianto of the Great Indonesia Movement Party (Gerindra) will decide what trajectory the country will take over the next five years.

Causes for Concern:

- » Jakarta's current account deficit, owing to a slump in exports, could cause concern unless the U.S.-China trade dispute is settled amicably.
- » The liberal-leaning President's challenges are linked to the poll-time rise in religious tensions.
- » In the 2014 contest, Mr. Jokowi's opponents played the identity card by claiming that he, a Javanese Muslim, was a Christian and a communist. In 2017, an ethnic Chinese and Christian successor of Mr. Jokowi as Jakarta governor was convicted of blasphemy soon after re-election. The government's subsequent ban on Hizb ut-Tahrir, an Islamist organisation wedded to the establishment of an international caliphate, underscored the difficulties in balancing conflicting political interests.
- » Rising religious militancy in some regions of Indonesia has also endangered the rights of the LGBTQ community, denting the country's record of respect for cultural pluralism and tolerance of heterodox social behaviour.

Election Specification:

- » In a unique Indonesian electoral operation, votes for thousands of seats, fought by hundreds of thousands of candidates at various levels, are tabulated manually in full public view during daylight hours.

- » The complex nature of the process and provision for quick counts based on a sample of the actual votes cast have in the past led rival camps to trade accusations of manipulation and intimidation.
- » In 2019, the Election Commission approved 16 parties to run for parliament.
- » Jokowi's coalition has 338 out of 560 current MPs to Mr. Subianto's 222 MPs.
- » Indonesian law requires that political parties have at least 20% of the seats in Parliament, or 25% share of the popular vote, before they can nominate a presidential candidate in 2019.
- » If the Democratic Party of former President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono had not supported Mr. Subinato's bid, his candidacy would have failed and Mr. Jokowi may have been the only candidate.
- » The churning in parties like the Golkar and National Mandate Party (PAN) which were firmly with Mr. Subianto in 2014 has made a change in Indonesian politics.

About JOKOWI:

- » Jokowi is also seen to be pro-Chinese, having pledged support for the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and being a vocal supporter of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
- » He has even handed over to China a prestigious high-speed railway that was proposed by the Japanese in 2015, but which has still not taken off. His support to Chinese overtures to build infrastructure for Indonesia has often seen others shut out, at Chinese behest, or by a tweaking of rules.
- » Most Chinese engagement is through public sector entities, which are now in heavy debt since the sovereign guarantee route was not applied to keep up with constitutional norms of debt and deficits. Due to the slow pace of the BRI projects, many public sector units have serious debt issues.
- » But these are not the ideas which win elections and Mr. Jokowi's finger on the popular pulse through welfare measures, including the 'Indonesia Health Card', has won him support.

About SUBIANTO:

- » Subianto presents a more nationalistic image with an emphasis on security, balanced foreign policy, more local manufacturing, and a just social order.
- » He is seen to be more open to partnerships with countries besides China, having said so at an Indonesian economic summit in 2018.
- » His support to business is seen through his choice of running mate for 2019, 'Sandi' Sandiago Uno, 49, a wealthy former fund manager who was Jakarta Deputy Governor (2017-18). The latter is seen as pro-business, particularly the private sector.
- » Being young and social media savvy, he could get the support of millennials, who form about 30% of the electorate.

Indonesia and India-Indonesia Relations:

- » Indonesia has a GDP of over \$1 trillion (2017 figures) and a growth rate of about 5%.
- » Its population is nearly 270 million. Its diverse natural resources include abundant coal and palm oil. Changing trade rules are having an effect on the Indonesian rupiah.
- » In the run-up to these elections and after, the dominant themes are the growing debt, social and economic inequalities, the role of Islam in politics as well as fake news.
- » India and Indonesia have shared friendly relations. Mr. Jokowi paid a bilateral visit in 2016 and again in 2018 for an ASEAN commemorative summit in New Delhi.
- » Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid a visit to Jakarta last year (2018) as part of a three-nation tour. The two leaders have given shape to several ideas on infrastructure, strategic partnership, naval and army cooperation and trade and commerce.
- » The dialogue among faiths is on, and there is closer cooperation on counter-terrorism and other non-traditional threats.
- » They have different views on China, but it is not seen as a hindrance to the bilateral relationship. If Mr. Jokowi wins, as polls predict, the relationship will be on firmer footing than it is now. However, India need not worry too if Mr. Subianto wins. He sees many models in India's development that are worth emulating.
- » He could, in fact, open more strategic space and markets for India, but he would need time to settle down as he has little prior experience in administration.

Conclusion:

- » The dialogue among faiths is on, and there is closer cooperation on counter-terrorism and other non-traditional threats.
- » They have different views on China, but it is not seen as a hindrance to the bilateral relationship. If Mr. Jokowi wins, as polls predict, the relationship will be on firmer footing than it is now.
- » However, India need not worry too if Mr. Subianto wins.
- » He sees many models in India's development that are worth emulating.
- » He could, in fact, open more strategic space and markets for India, but he would need time to settle down as he has little prior experience in administration.

EARTH'S SURFACE HEATING UP: NASA STUDY

Prelims:

- » Seasons
- » Day n night
- » Process of heat affect.

Mains:

- » How uneven heating of Earth Surface Affects Climate

Context:

- » Satellite measurements by NASA researchers have verified the groundbased data which shows the Earth's surface has been warming globally over the past 15 years.
- » The team used measurements of the 'skin' temperature of the Earth taken by a satellite-based infrared measurement system called AIRS from 2003 to 2017.
- » The study was published in the journal Environmental Research Letters.

MONEY CONTROL ELIGIBLE NBFCS TO GET LICENSE

Prelims:

- » NBFC's

Mains:

- » Difference between schedule banks ad non schedule banks.
- » Characterictics of NBFC's

Context:

- » Systematically important non-deposit taking NBFCs offering foreign exchange transactions on individual accounts will be eligible to obtain Authorised Dealer (AD) Category-II licence from it. AD-Cat II means entities that are authorised by the RBI to deal in foreign exchange for specified purposes. These include upgraded full-fledged money changers (FFMCs), and select regional rural banks.

MUJIBNAGAR DAY OBSERVED IN BANGLADESH

Prelims:

- » Significance of Mujibnagar Day
- » India, Bangladesh Relations

Context:

- » In Bangladesh, the historic Mujibnagar day is being observed on 17 April 2019.
- » The day marks the oath-taking ceremony of Bangladesh's first government in 1971 at Baidyanathatala in Meherpur.
- » The day is being observed by political parties and social and cultural organisations through various programs across Bangladesh.

ADB PROVIDED LOAN TO INDIA

Prelims:

- » ADB, its HQ, its objectives.
- » List of projects funded by ADB.

Context:

- » ADB committed to provide \$3 billion in sovereign loans to India in 2018, the highest level of assistance since sovereign operations began in the country in 1986.
- » The Asian Development Bank (ADB), owned by 68 member countries, committed a total of USD 3.88 billion.
- » New commitments included USD 21.6 billion in loans, grants and investments from ADB's own resources.

GOOGLE OPENED AI LAB IN GHANA

Prelims:

- » What is AI.

Mains:

- » Write about NITI Aayog report on AI

Context:

- » Ghana and Google have cooperated to open Africa's first AI research laboratory, which, experts hope, will take on some of the region's struggles.
- » Africa has many challenges where the use of AI could be beneficial, sometimes even more than in other places.
- » The AI research lab will work to create solutions for healthcare, educations, and agriculture.

MITHALI RAJ: GOODWILL AMBASSADOR SCCWC 2019

Context:

- » Indian women's cricket team captain Mithali Raj has been named the goodwill ambassador of Team India at the Street Child Cricket World Cup (SCCWC).
- » She, alongside Saurav Ganguly and Rajasthan Royals, joins in supporting the team.
- » The 2 teams, India North and India South, are put together by Save the Children, HOPE Foundation, Magic Bus and Karunalaaya.

NASA FOUND ALIEN WORLD

Prelims:

- » Kepler Telescope

Context:

- » NASA's newest planet hunter has discovered its first Earth-size alien world.
- » The Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) spotted the planet, as well as a weird sub-Neptune world, circling the star HD 21749, which lies about 53 light-years from Earth.

COAST GUARD SHIP VEERA COMMISSIONED

Prelims:

- » Role of Coast Guard ship in piracy.

Context:

- » Chief of Army Staff General Bipin Rawat commissioned the Indian Coast Guard Ship Veera at a ceremony held at Naval Jetty, Visakhapatnam.
- » Veera, third in the series of offshore patrol vessels of the Coast Guard, was built by L&T at its shipbuilding facility at Kattupalli in Chennai. Its induction will give a fillip to the maritime protection of India's vast coastline of Eastern Seaboard.

ICC PARTNERED WITH UNICEF

Prelims:

- » ICC, UNICEF, Its HQ, significance

Context:

- » International Cricket Council (ICC) Cricket for Good in partnership with UNICEF announced #OneDay4Children, a tournament-wide campaign. It is focussed on bringing the world of cricket together as one team to help build a better world for every child, at the World Cup. Former England batsman and #OneDay4Children ambassador Nasser Hussain along with Chris Woakes launched the campaign.

DURJANPUR TO BE RENAMED AS SHIVDHAM

Context:

- » The MHA approved a proposal to change the name of a village in Madhya Pradesh from 'Durjanpur' to 'Shivdham'. The move came after the Home Ministry got no objection from the Geographical Survey of India (GSI), the Department of Post, the Ministry of Railways.
- » Some of the name change proposals cleared by the Home Ministry in recent past include Arikod as Areekode and Laxman Garh as Adawala.

WORLD HAEMOPHILIA DAY: APRIL 17

Prelims:

- » What is Haemophilia?
- » Theme of the day
- » What are the causes for Haemophilia.

Mains:

- » How WHO taking initiatives for the prevention of haemophilia

Context:

- » April 17 is observed as the World Haemophilia Day every year.
- » It was started in 1989 by the World Federation of Hemophilia (WFH) which chose to bring the community together on April 17 in honour of WFH founder Frank Schnabel's birthday.
- » World Hemophilia Day theme for the year 2019 is 'Outreach and Identification'.

Background:

- » World Haemophilia Day is recognised worldwide to increase awareness of haemophilia and other inherited bleeding disorders.
- » This is a critical effort since with increased awareness comes better diagnosis and access to care for the millions who remain without treatment.
- » World Haemophilia Day was started in 1989 by the World Federation of Hemophilia (WFH) which chose to bring the community together on April 17 in honour of WFH founder Frank Schnabel's birthday.

3-MEMBER WOMEN TEAM SET OUT TO SUMMIT EVEREST

Prelims:

- » Peaks present in Himayalas
- » National parks and Sancturies in Himalayas.

Mains:

- » How Women showing strength by creating 'possible' vibes in the dominated world? Comment.

Context:

- » For the first time, a 3-member team of women climbers from India, Nepal, and China set out to scale the world's highest peak, Mt Everest.
- » This is being done to spread the message of women empowerment, world peace, and friendship.
- » The expedition, supported by the Visit Nepal Year 2020 campaign of the Nepal Tourism Board, was flagged off on 16 April 2019.

BBC INDIA LAUNCHED CHATBOT

Mains:

- » Role of AI in Electronic Media

Context:

- » BBC India launched an experimental interactive election chatbot in Hindi and English on Facebook's Messenger platform as part of a series of Indian General Election-related content.
- » The chatbot allows users to interact with the BBC, ask questions and get regular updates as the elections unfold. The special election coverage will be available on smartphones.

GOVT GRANTED FINANCIAL POWERS TO BUY WEAPONS

Mains:

- » How India making efforts to isolate Pakistan diplomatically? Evaluate.

Context:

- » In the wake of the Pulwama terror attack, the government has granted emergency powers to the three services to procure weapons and military hardware. This would enhance their operational preparedness along the border with Pakistan. The threshold granted to the three forces a couple of weeks ago for each proposal is around Rs 300 crore.

ASTRONOMERS DISCOVERED 3RD PLANET

Prelims:

- » Kepler Telescope

Mains:

- » “Kepler is the New planet Hunter” Discuss.

Context:

- » Astronomers have discovered a third planet in the Kepler-47 system, securing the system's title as the most interesting of the binary-star worlds. Using data from NASA's Kepler space telescope, a team of researchers, led by astronomers at San Diego State University, detected the new Neptuneto-Saturn-size planet orbiting between two previously known planets.

RBI PUT RS 50 NOTES INTO CIRCULATION

Mains:

- » Why RBI again Demonitized ‘2000’ rupees Note? Critically Evaluate.

Context:

- » The RBI has put into circulation 50 rupees denomination banknotes signed by its Governor Shaktikanta Das.

- » The design of these notes is similar in all respects to 50 banknotes in Mahatma Gandhi new series.
- » All banknotes in the denomination of 50 issued by the Reserve Bank in the past will continue to be legal tender.

WORKSHOP ON LOSS & DAMAGE CONDUCTED

Context:

- » A 1-day National Consultation on Loss and Damage was hosted by the Ministry of Environment in New Delhi on 16 April 2019.
- » India has been experiencing weather and climate-related loss and damage, the Kerala floods and Ockhi being the rarest of the rare events.
- » The workshop had 2 technical sessions on topics including ‘Strengthening response to address loss and damage’.

FMCG GROWTH TO SLOW DOWN IN 2019

Prelims:

- » What is FMCG sector?
- » Sectors in Indian economy.
- » Initiatives taken by the govt for FMCG sector.

Context:

- » India's fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry is likely to grow at a slower pace at 11-12% in 2019, almost 2% lower than that in 2018, as per a report.
- » The industry is also expected to grow at 12-13% during the April to June quarter of the calendar year 2019, according to Nielsen.
- » In line with the FMCG growth forecast for Q1 2019 at 13-14%, this sector grew at 13.6%.

Background:

- » Fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector is the 4th largest sector in the Indian economy with Household and Personal Care accounting for 50% of FMCG sales in India.
- » Growing awareness, easier access and changing lifestyles have been the key growth drivers for the sector.

Industry Analysis:



GOVT BONDS ISSUANCE JUMPED TO RS. 64,192 CR.

Prelims:

- » Govt Gold Bonds.

Context:

- » The issuances of government-fully serviced bonds (GoI-FSBs) rose to ₹64,192 crore in the year ended March 2019 as compared to ₹15,095 crore during the last fiscal.
- » These borrowings are estimated to have accounted for 0.34% of GDP for FY19 as compared to 0.09% of GDP for FY18. The total outstanding value of these GoI-FSBs stood at ₹88,454 crore at the end of FY19, according to Icra.

GOVT TARGETES IRCTC, IRFC IPOS

Prelims:

- » What are Initial Public Offerings (IPO).

Context:

- » The government is targeting to raise about ₹1,500 crore from initial public offerings (IPOs) of two railway companies, IRCTC and IRFC, by September 2019.
- » Earlier in April 2019, the government raised about ₹480 crore by selling 12.12% stake in Rail Vikas Nigam Ltd (RVNL).
- » The government has budgeted to raise ₹90,000 crore by way of CPSE disinvestment in the current financial year.

MT EVEREST TO GET AN ECO-FRIENDLY TOILET

Prelims:

- » Mt. Everest Geography
- » National parks
- » Himalayan Border Sharing countries

Mains:

- » How Climate threatening us by commercializing Mt. Everest? Evaluate.

Context:

- » Mount Everest will get an eco-friendly toilet at a Chinese campsite 7,028m above sea level in an ongoing campaign to deal with the peak's waste problem.

Background:

- » Decades of commercial mountaineering have turned Mount Everest into the world's highest rubbish dump.
- » The toilet will make it easy to collect the human waste produced by the climbers.

MARS BASED SIMULATOR UNVEILED IN GOBI DESERT

Prelims:

- » Govi desert location.

Context:

- » In the middle of China's Gobi Desert sits a Mars base simulator, the facility is full of teenagers on a school trip. Surrounded by barren hills in northwestern Gansu province, Mars Base 1 opened on 17 April 2019.

Background:

- » These projects are part of China's Mars exploration preparation. China has planned to send a probe to the Mars in 2020. Its aim is to expose teens and soon tourists to what life could be like on the planet.

THUNDERSTORM LEAVES 50 DEAD IN 4 STATES

Prelims:

- » Formation of Thunderstorms

Mains:

- » Do you think 'there is a connection between El-nino and unseasonal rains and storms.'
- Comment

Context:

- » Over 50 people were killed as rain, coupled with thunderstorm and lightning, hit several parts of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra overnight.
- » The unseasonal rain and storm also caused damage to property and crops in Gujarat and Rajasthan. Rajasthan witnessed 25 deaths, followed by Madhya Pradesh with 15 And 10 people were killed in Gujarat, three were killed in Maharashtra.

SPACEX TO FLY ITS DART MISSION

Prelims:

- » What is DART?
- » SpaceX Programme.

Mains:

- » Will Humanoids takeover charge of Asteroids? Explain.

Context:

- » NASA announced that SpaceX will fly its Double Asteroid Redirection Test (DART) planetary-defense mission. The total launch cost for NASA is estimated to be about \$69 million.

Background:

- » DART - Double Asteroid Redirection Test.

- » It is a planned space probe that will demonstrate the kinetic effects of crashing an impactor spacecraft into an asteroid moon for planetary defense purposes.

IDRBT SET UP 5G LAB FOR BANKING SECTOR

Prelims:

- » IDRBT
- » Blockchain Technology.

Mains:

- » How Govt taking initiatives for ‘DIGITAL INDIA’ Programme? Discuss.

Context:

- » The Institute for Development and Research in Banking Technology (IDRBT) has launched a 5G Use Cases Lab for banking and financial sector. The 5G technology, along with blockchain, will be progressively adopted by banks. The use of 5G will change a range of technologies and applications including point of sale machines in the banking sector which were now using 2G.

WORLD HERITAGE DAY: 18 APRIL

Prelims:

- » International organizations for World Heritage sites.

Mains:

- » Why Man-Made sites are more precious than our Natural Beauties? Critically Evaluate.

Context:

- » April 18 is annually observed as the International Day for Monuments and Sites (IDMS), also known as World Heritage Day. This day is celebrated to remind the citizens about beautiful places or heritage sites in our country. The theme for 2019 is Rural Landscapes. The day was proposed by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) on 18 April 1982.

GOVERNMENT SUSPENDS LOC TRADE IN J&K

Prelims:

- » LOC Stretch
- » LOC Sharing States

Mains:

- » Suspending trade to LOC is another surgical strike? Comment.

Context:

- » The government has suspended the LoC trade in Jammu and Kashmir.
- » The Cross-LoC trade routes are being misused by the Pakistan-based elements for funnelling illegal weapons, narcotics and fake currency.

Background:

- » The trade is allowed through two Trade Facilitation Centres located at Salamabad, Uri, District Baramulla and Chakkan-da-Bagh of District Poonch. The trade is based on the Barter system and zero duty basis. The main objective of allowing LoC trade between Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan occupied areas of Jammu and Kashmir was to encourage local trade and exchange of locally made and grown products.

2nd EDITION OF IN – VPN BILAT EX CONCLUDED

Prelims:

- » India, Vietnam Trade Relations.

Mains:

- » Role of India in Indochina War.

Context:

- » The 2nd edition of 'Indian Navy-Vietnam Peoples' Navy Bilateral Exercise' (IN – VPN BILAT EX) off Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam from 13-16 April 2019. The exercise was undertaken as a part of the ongoing Overseas Deployment of Eastern Fleet ships to South East Asian countries. IN Ships Kolkata participated in the exercise, comprising a harbour and a sea phase.

TIME 100 MOST INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE REPORT

Prelims:

- » Landmark judgements.

Context:

- » The Time 100 most influential people of 2019 includes lawyers Arundhati Katju and Menaka Guruswamy. They were instrumental in the Supreme Court partly striking down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. Reliance Industries (RIL) Chairman Mukesh Ambani also featured in the TIME magazine's list of 100 most influential people.

DEEPEST RADIO IMAGES OF SUN CREATED

Prelims:

- » Various Space missions to Solar Head.
- » Sun Internal Structure.

Mains:

- » Too much dependency on Solar also creates problems. Comment

Context:

- » Scientists have captured the deepest radio images of the Sun, an advance that may help reliably predict space weather and its possible effects on Earth.

- » Sun's emission can change within a second and can be very different, even across nearby frequencies. The Sun has some of the most powerful explosions in the solar system.

TITAN HAS 100 M DEEP METHANE LAKES

Prelims:

- » Cassini-Huygens Mission

Mains:

- » Hydrology of earth and other celestial bodies

Context:

- » Saturn's largest moon Titan has small liquid lakes that run more than 100 metres deep, perched atop hills and filled with methane.
- » This was founded by scientists using data from NASA's Cassini spacecraft.
- » The findings are published in the journal Nature Astronomy.
- » They provide new information about the way liquid methane rains on, evaporates from and seeps into Titan.

Background:

- » The NASA probe found that Saturn's largest moon has small, deep lakes filled with methane.
- » Titan is the only known body in our solar system other than Earth with a liquid on its surface. But rather than a water cycle, it has a methane and ethane cycle.

BANKS MUST FLAG BAD LOANS

Prelims:

- » NPA's
- » Various cases on NPA's

Mains:

- » How serious is India's bad loan problem?

Context:

- » RBI told the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) that banks had an obligation to mark bad loans as non-performing asset (NPA) after the default of 90 days.
- » The banking sector regulator has moved the NCLAT seeking a modification of its February 25 order.
- » An asset is tagged as non performing when it ceases to generate income for the lender.

Background:

- » You may note that for a bank, the loans given by the bank is considered as its assets. So if the principle or the interest or both the components of a loan is not being serviced to the lender (bank), then it would be considered as a Non-Performing Asset (NPA).

- » Any asset which stops giving returns to its investors for a specified period of time is known as Non-Performing Asset (NPA).
- » Generally, that specified period of time is 90 days in most of the countries and across the various lending institutions. However, it is not a thumb rule and it may vary with the terms and conditions agreed upon by the financial institution and the borrower.

BEIJING SURPRISE: CHINA'S GROWTH

Context:

- » The Chinese economy grew at 6.4% compared to the same period last year.
- » The world's second largest economy are beginning to have a positive effect.
- » Total social financing grew by almost 40% to 8.2 trillion yuan in the first quarter of the year, pointing to a credit expansion that will boost growth in the coming quarters.

China-India Relations:

- » This is also called Sino-Indian relations or Indo-Chinese relations, refers to the bilateral relationship between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of India.
- » Although the relationship has been cordial, there are border disputes and an economic competition between the two countries that have at times led to strained relations.
- » Cultural and economic relations between China and India date back to ancient times.
- » The Silk Road not only served as a major trade route between India and China, but is also credited for facilitating the spread of Buddhism from India to East Asia.
- » Bilateral trade between China and India touched US\$89.6 billion in 2017-18, with the trade deficit widening to US\$62.9 billion in China's favour.
- » In 2017, the volume of bilateral trade between India & China stands at US\$84.5 billion.
- » This figure excludes bilateral trade between India & Hong Kong which stands at another US\$34 billion.

Geographical view:

- » China and India are separated by the Himalayas.
- » China and India today share a border with Nepal and Bhutan acting as buffer states.
- » Parts of the disputed Kashmir region claimed by India are claimed and administered by either Pakistan (Azad Kashmir and Gilgit and Baltistan) or by the PRC (Aksai Chin).
- » The Government of Pakistan on its maps shows the Aksai Chin area as mostly within China and labels the boundary "Frontier Undefined" while India holds that Aksai Chin is illegally occupied by the PRC.
- » China and India also dispute most of Arunachal Pradesh. However, both countries have agreed to respect the Line of Actual Control.

Border dispute:

- » One in a region called Aksai Chin and another in a region called Arunachal Pradesh. Both nations claim both regions although China controls the former and India the latter.
- » In both these places the geography favors the current arrangement. With both nations nuclear armed, it is inconceivable for any solution other than formalizing the status quo.
- » When Prime Minister Indian PM visited China in May 2015, one of his objectives was to persuade the Chinese leadership to restart discussions on the clarification of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) through the exchange of maps.
- » The rationale for India's demand was that, pending a final settlement of the border question, LAC. Clarification would help ease border tensions. But the Chinese leadership was not enthusiastic about India's proposal. Instead, China called for a comprehensive 'code of conduct' for the forces deployed along the border.
- » Here, it is useful to remember that both LAC clarification and Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) are part of the agreed principles in the 2005 agreement.
- » This mismatch in desired outcomes was the main obstacle in the recent border talks, and it showed once again India and China's contrasting approaches to border negotiations at large.
- » India's reluctance to consider a 'code of conduct' suggests that it entertains reservations about agreeing to restrictions on its plans for infrastructure development in the border region.
- » Perhaps, this reluctance is because of two inferences. One, that the Chinese proposal is aimed at limiting India's military and infrastructure modernisation, and thereby enabling China to preserve its military advantage in Tibet. And two, accepting the Chinese proposal could potentially curtail the ability to effectively patrol and intercept PLA movements in territory claimed by India. The Indian position on the Sino-Pakistan understanding on Chinese activities in PoK has been consistent.
- » There are often debates in India-mostly episodic and lacking vigour-about Sino-Pakistan relations.

Domination in Indian Ocean:

- » China has been accused of pursuing strategic maneuvers on a well-thought out route encircling India in the Indian Ocean. Beijing has been reaching out to India's neighbors on the premise of development and trade, allegedly recreating the Silk Route.
- » From Nepal in the south east to Myanmar, Bangladesh to Sri Lanka in the south and Pakistan in the west, China plans to choke India diplomatically.
- » There are diplomatic visits, courtesy calls, exchange of gifts and promises between Mr. Modi and the heads of all of the surrounding countries, to not just counter the Chinese influence but also strengthen the Indian presence.

Water Issue:

- » The dispute between India and China is mainly regarding the Brahmaputra River flowing through the two countries the search for water resources in China and India has persistently been a source of tension between the two countries.
- » Chinese efforts to divert the water resources of the Brahmaputra River away from India will worsen a situation that has remained tense since the 1962 Indo-China war.
- » The melting glaciers in the Himalayas as a result of accelerating global climate change will have a dramatic effect on this river's water supply. This will increase water scarcity as well as the likelihood of floods, impact agrarian livelihoods and strain the fragile equilibrium between the two Asian giants.

Pakistan Factor:

- » The long-time friendship between China and Pakistan, rooted in a time when both countries were deeply mistrustful of India, has long made New Delhi nervous. The relationship has mainly gone one way, with China providing economic assistance and political backing to Pakistan.
- » Islamabad is also anxious for an alliance it can use to balance the growing economic and political clout of India. But Pakistan also offers China a gateway to South Asia, Iran and the Arabian Sea, one of the economic beltways that President Xi Jinping has sought to build through the region. Earlier this year, during a visit to Islamabad, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said China and Pakistan have an “all-weather friendship.”

South China Sea Issue and India:

- » China opposes India's oil exploration in the SCS (which has been undertaken at Vietnam's request) by calling the area of exploration a 'disputed' area and asserting 'Chinese sovereignty' over the SCS in the 'historical' context.
- » It has been continuously expressing its reservation in this regard in the last few years, and sometimes quite belligerently at that. India has taken note of the Chinese reservation and has carefully gone ahead in signing a few agreements with Vietnam for oil exploration in the SCS.
- » These exploration fields are very much within the maritime space under the actual control of Vietnam. But at the same time, China casually shrugs off the issue of India's 'sovereignty' over POK in the 'historical' context.
- » China is currently engaged on a variety of investment projects and infrastructural building activities in Gilgit-Baltistan, and these will be expanded under the CPEC project.
- » China further explains that the Sino-Pak understanding to implement CPEC through POK is based on a range of bilateral agreements and understandings, including their 1963 Border Agreement.

Trade deficit:

- » India faces trade imbalance heavily in favour of China. India has a trade deficit with China of nearly \$50 billion, its largest with any country. Singapore, with a population about 240 times smaller than India, sells twice as many goods to China each year.

Reasons for the Deficit:

- » China imports raw material from India e.g. iron ore and exports the finished goods as it has got core competency in manufacturing sector and provides huge energy subsidies.
- » Importing finished goods obviously cost more. India also imports power equipment's, consumer electronics and telecommunications gear from china.
- » China is dumping manufactured products in India. On the other hand, India does not have a large access to Chinese market and with Indian rupee declining while renminbi gaining centre stage the trade deficit is becoming huge.

Maritime Silk Route project: Impact on India:

- » Beijing's plan for a maritime infrastructure corridor in the broader Indo-Pacific region, first proposed by President Xi Jinping's during his trip to Southeast Asia in October 2013, has attracted attention because of its potential to establish a Chinese foothold in the Indian Ocean. Needless to say, China's outreach to India inviting it to join the project has generated much analytical curiosity. The first thing of interest about the MSR is that it was initially mooted as an ASEAN-centered project. The intention then was to enhance connectivity and cultural links in China's strategic backyard-the South China Sea. Beijing later expanded the scope of the project to include the Indian Ocean, but in reaching out to Colombo and New Delhi, it found a willing partner only in the former. India has been ambivalent about the MSR and is yet to make up its mind on joining the project. The problem with the MSR, essentially, is the 'opaque' nature of its proposal.
- » Outwardly, the project is about the development of massive maritime infrastructure and connectivity in the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific.
- » Beijing has been careful to project the MSR as an exclusively commercial venture, trying hard to dispel any impressions of it being a cover for maritime military bases.
- » The lack of firm plans, proposals and timelines then does lead to a suspicion that there may be something about the MSR that Beijing is hesitant to reveal quickly. The aim apparently is to shore-up China's image as a benevolent state. Beijing's would also conceivably use the project's commercial investments to establish its legitimate interests in the Indian Ocean. And while China can be expected to do everything in its power to force region states to join the project – including offering economic aid to potential partners – the bottom-line for it will be to make an offer to India that is hard to refuse.

- » **For India, it is instructive that the sales pitch of shared economic gains does not conceal the MSR's real purpose:** ensuring the security of sea lines of communications (SLOCs) in the Indian and Pacific oceans. Since African resources are China's focus right now, the project could well be a surrogate for a giant Chinese SLOC running all the way from the East African coast, to the Southern coast of China – created, maintained and controlled by Beijing.
- » In its ultimate form, therefore, the MSR could end up setting up Chinese logistical hubs in the Indian Ocean, linking up already existing string of pearls. India's appreciation of the MSR must be based on an objective appraisal of these new realities.
- » Even assuming the project delivers on its economic promise, it could well turn out to be detrimental to India's geopolitical interests in the IOR.
- » As Beijing becomes more involved in building infrastructure in the Indian Ocean, it will play a larger part in the security and governance of the IOR, which could pose a challenge to India's stature as a 'security provider' in the region and also adversely affecting New Delhi's strategic purchase in its primary area of interest.

China's Reluctance to Support India's Membership Of International Bodies:

- » China has continuously blocked India's entry in UNSC. Recently China has blocked India's entry in NSG. Chinese diplomats say Beijing wants NSG entry to be norm-based in other words, whatever rules govern Indian entry should apply to others too.
- » Norm-based entry would, presumably, help Pakistan gain entry, something many in the NSG are certain to resist because of the country's record as a proliferator of nuclear-weapons technology to Iran, Libya and North Korea.

Areas of Cooperation:

- » Despite their rivalries, the two countries have played up their cultural links-such as the importation of Buddhism into China by wandering Chinese monks more than 1,500 years ago-and have found ample room for economic cooperation.
- » Both are members of the BRICS grouping of emerging economies, which is now establishing a formal lending arm, the New Development Bank, to be based in China's financial hub of Shanghai and to be headed by a senior Indian banker.
- » India also was a founding member of the China-backed Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which plans to be formally established by year's end and seeks to emulate institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

Educational areas:

- » India and China signed Education Exchange Programme (EEP) in 2006, which is an umbrella agreement for educational cooperation between the two countries.

- » Under this agreement, government scholarships are awarded to 25 students, by both sides, in recognized institutions of higher learning in each other's country.
- » The 25 scholarships awarded by India are offered by Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR).

One Belt, One Road (OBOR)

- » The One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative is part of China's major policy framework to boost domestic development and foreign diplomacy.
- » China also wants to 'reconstruct' the world order to fulfill its interests and become a dominant world power.

About OBOR:

- » The "belt and road" have two components—the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) that would be established along the Eurasian land corridor from the Pacific coast to the Baltic Sea, and the 21st century Maritime Silk Road (MSR).
- » The "belt and road" run through the continents of Asia, Europe and Africa, connecting the vibrant East Asia economic circle at one end and developed European economic circle at the other.
- » The SREB focuses on bringing together China, Central Asia, Russia and Europe (the Baltic); linking China with the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea through Central Asia and West Asia; and connecting China with Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Indian Ocean.
- » On land, the initiative will focus on jointly building a new Eurasian Land Bridge and developing China- Mongolia-Russia, China-Central Asia-West Asia and China-Indochina Peninsula economic corridors.
- » The 21st-Century MSR, in turn is designed to go from China's coast to Europe through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean in one route, and from China's coast through the South China Sea to the South Pacific in the other.
- » To implement the concept, the Chinese have stressed on joint consultation and joint building.
- » China sees this as the most effective model that can be used to safeguard mutual benefits.

China Expectation From OBOR?

- » Address security threats
- » Achieve long-term economic benefits
- » Reduce America's threat to trade lifelines

Analysis:

- » 'One Belt One Road' initiative, backed by a solid financial institutional network, once implemented, is expected to accelerate the shift of geo-economic power away from the United States, towards Eurasia.

- » More than 4.4 billion people, or 63 per cent of the global population countries, are expected to benefit from China's game-changing plans.
- » Analysts say that the “belt and road” initiative could shift the center of geo-economic power towards Eurasia, and undermine the “Asia Pivot” of the United States and its allies.
- » Chinese President Xi Jinping is hopeful that the mega-trade volumes among the Silk Road economies would touch \$ 2.5 trillion over the next 10 years.

Pros of India Joining OBOR:

- » The technical know-how the project will bring back could be used to develop or iron out issues facing technical bottlenecks.
- » The OBOR initiative could be icing on the cake for India's flagship programs like Digital India.
- » The “Information Silk Route” has the telecom connectivity between the countries through fiber, trunk line and under-sea cables.
- » This will expand the bandwidth capabilities for India significantly, without which offering e-Governance and delivering public services in an efficient manner will remain a pipe dream and a good marketing campaign.
- » India will have excellent connectivity of various transport modes, and a great facilitator to Make in India initiative if India joins such global infrastructure project.

India's Strategy to Counter OBOR

- » India is not part of OBOR. India reaffirmed its opposition of One-Belt-One-Road initiative of China, with Foreign Secretary stating that New Delhi will join multilateral connectivity initiatives in Asia, only if they were pursued through a consultative process.
- » India has indicated that it sees China's OBOR as a “national Chinese initiative”.
- » The defence establishment is concerned that the project might not be altogether benevolent and that these corridors in future could be used for military mobilisation.
- » There are concerns in India about being part of a “hegemonic project” that would ensure China led development in the Indian Ocean region.
- » The main point of contention for India is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor or CPEC, which is also part of OBOR.
- » For New Delhi, OBOR may be a potential economic opportunity but it also threatens India's interests.

India's Strategy to Counter OBOR:

- » India recently proposed the ‘Cotton Route’ (seen by many as its answer to the Silk Route) to strengthen economic ties between countries in the Indian Ocean rim.
- » It has also launched Project Mausam and Spice Route apparently in response to China's Belt and Road initiative.

- » The ‘Mausam’ project envisages the re-establishment of India’s ancient maritime routes with its traditional trade partners along the Indian Ocean.
- » The ‘Spice Route of India’, visualises the India-centered linkup of historic sea routes in Asia, Europe and Africa.
- » Many people in India perceive the Mausam Project and the Spice Route as rivals to the Maritime SilkRoad.

South China Sea (SCS) Dispute:

- » The three million square kilometers South China Sea is the maritime heart of Southeast Asia but also a disputable property.
- » Maritime boundaries in the South China Sea are particularly problematic because they involve six separate claimants in a mostly enclosed body of water with a large number of disputed land features.
- » The South China Sea is ringed by Brunei, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam, and dotted with hundreds of small islands, shoals and reefs, many of them occupied by the disputants.
- » The fundamental issue in the South China Sea is one of territorial sovereignty, that is, which state has sovereignty over the islands and their adjacent waters.
- » UNCLOS has no provisions on how to determine sovereignty over offshore islands.
- » As there is no treaty that governs the issue of sovereignty, states have to look for guidance to the rules of customary international law on the acquisition and loss of territory.

Main Disputes:

- » The Spratly Islands are located in the central part of the South China Sea, north of the island of Borneo (which comprises Brunei Darussalam and the east Malaysian States of Sarawak and Sabah), east of Vietnam, west of the Philippines, and south of the Chinese island of Hainan.
- » The Spratly Islands are claimed in their entirety by China, Taiwan, and Vietnam, while some islands and other features are claimed by Malaysia and the Philippines. The Spratly Islands consist of more than 140 islets, rocks, reefs, shoals and sandbanks (some totally or occasionally submerged while others are always dry) spread over an area of more than 410,000 square kilometres.
- » The Paracel Islands are located in the northern part of the South China Sea, approximately equidistant from the coastlines of Vietnam and China (Hainan). They are claimed by China, Taiwan and Vietnam. China forcibly ejected South Vietnamese troops from the Paracels in 1974, and they are now occupied exclusively by China.
- » China denies the existence of a dispute over these islands, but they are a continual source of tension between China and Vietnam.

- » Woody Island, the largest island in the Paracels, which is about the same land area as all of the Spratly Islands combined. Woody Island is the location of Sansha City, a prefecture-level city established by China in June 2012 as its administrative centre for its claims in the South China Sea.
- » Scarborough Reef is located in the northern part of the South China Sea between the Philippines and the Paracels, and is claimed by China, the Philippines and Taiwan. Scarborough Reef is located about 130 miles from the Philippine island of Luzon.
- » Most of the reef is either completely submerged or above water at low tide, but it contains several small rocks which are above water at high tide.
- » It has been a major source of tension between China and the Philippines since the Philippines attempted arrest of Chinese fishermen in June 2012.
- » The Pratas Islands are located just over 200 miles southwest of Hong Kong. They are occupied by Taiwan, and are also claimed by China.
- » Macclesfield Bank, a large sunken reef that is completely submerged at low tide, is located between Scarborough Reef and the Paracels. It is claimed by China and Taiwan.

Conclusion:

- » The Chinese government is now walking a tightrope as it attempts to keep the momentum from slowing in the short term, even as market forces try to correct imbalances within the economy. Such macroeconomic policy, focussed too narrowly on the short term while ignoring the long-term consequences, however, does not bode well for either the Chinese economy or the wider global economy.

EITHER WAY, THE NEWS IS BAD

Context:

- » If Pakistan does not take the IMF loan, it is in a mess.
- » If it does, it is in a bigger mess.

What is IMF?

- » The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is an international organization.
- » Headquartered in Washington, D.C., consisting of "189 countries working to foster global monetary cooperation, secure financial stability, facilitate international trade, promote high employment and sustainable economic growth, and reduce poverty around the world."

Does IMF Give Loans?

- » IMF loans are meant to help member countries tackle balance of payments problems, stabilize their economies, and restore sustainable economic growth.
- » The IMF is not a development bank and, unlike the World Bank and other development agencies, it does not finance projects.

Functions of IMF:

- » It functions as a centre for international cooperation and a source of counsel and technical assistance to its members.
- » The main function of the IMF is to provide temporary financial support to its members so that 'fundamental' BOP disequilibrium can be corrected.

How does IMF get money?

- » Where the IMF Gets Its Money. Resources for IMF loans to its members on non-concessional terms are provided by member countries, primarily through their payment of quotas.
- » These borrowed resources played a critical role in enabling the IMF to support its member countries during the global economic crisis.

How does the IMF help countries?

- » The IMF provides policy advice and financing to members in economic difficulties and also works with developing nations to help them achieve macroeconomic stability and reduce poverty. Helping a country benefit from globalization while avoiding potential downsides is an important task for the IMF.

Present Issue of Pakistan?

- » Pakistan's economy has been ruined in the last eight months since when Imran Khan became Prime Minister and his party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) formed the government.
- » Almost every indicator has deteriorated substantially. For example, inflation, at 9.4%, is at its highest level in five-and-a-half years and is likely to rise to double digits for the months ahead. The rupee continues to lose value every other day, which adds to further inflation especially with the oil price on the way up.
- » The government owes power producing companies huge amounts of money known as the circular debt which continues to accumulate, and interest rates are also going up making the cost of business even more uncompetitive.
- » The State Bank of Pakistan recently lowered the expectations of the GDP growth for the current fiscal year to an eight-year low, to around 3.5%, an estimate which was reduced further by the IMF and the World Bank to a dismal 2.9% for the current fiscal year, and expected to fall further over the next three years.
- » The GDP grew by 5.8% in the last fiscal year, the highest in 13 years. By all accounts, Pakistan's economy is in a dismal state.

Reason for Sudden Economy Sharp Plunge:

- » Mismanagement and incompetence of the current government and by its economic team.
- » Pakistan PM strategy was to run to a few of Pakistan's friends begging for money, and to not bow his head in front of the IMF.

- » By not submitting to the IMF then, they now have no option but to submit almost a year later.
- » A non-IMF policy and programme was always preferred and a better option in August last year, but the incompetence of PM, matched with vanity, did not allow for reforms to be undertaken, and has only made matters far worse.
- » When the IMF implements its strict conditionalities and adjustment programme, to which the finance minister and the country supposedly ‘agree’, the finance minister becomes redundant and is simply the bearer and front for bad news and tough conditions.
- » The new finance Adviser will fit this role perfectly.

Way Forward:

- » The new IMF programme, the biggest Pakistan is expecting to receive, to be between \$6-\$10 bn, which is almost a certainty now, is going to make things far worse for all Pakistanis, and especially for the working people already dealing with prospects of a marked economic slowdown and high and rising inflation.
- » Each time there is an economic crisis created due to mismanagement, the elite remain under-taxed, the IMF and World Bank jump in to save them.
- » Usually, Pakistan’s governments in the past, especially the military, leverage Pakistan’s so-called geostrategic position and situation and gain undue access, with the U.S. having been Pakistan’s biggest champion and supporter.
- » As global power shifts and the region changes, so has Pakistan’s position in it. One of the stumbling blocks to the deal this time has been the IMF’s insistence that Pakistan reveal the financial deals made with China, including financial loans, as well as the \$60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.
- » If Pakistan doesn’t take the IMF loan

HUMANISE THE LAW: DRAFT INDIAN FOREST ACT

Context:

- » Modernising colonial era laws is a long-delayed project, but the draft Indian Forest Act, 2019 is woefully short of being a transformative piece of legislation.
- » The original law, the Indian Forest Act, 1927, is an unsuitable relic, its provisions having been drafted to suit the objectives of a colonial power that had extractive uses for forests in mind.

Indian Forest Act, 1927:

- » The Indian Forest Act, 1927 was largely based on previous Indian Forest Acts implemented under the British. The most famous one was the Indian Forest Act of 1878.
- » Both the 1878 act and the 1927 one sought to consolidate and reserve the areas having forest cover, or significant wildlife, to regulate movement and transit of forest produce, and duty taxable on timber and other forest produce.

- » It also defines the procedure to be followed for declaring an area to be a Reserved Forest, a Protected Forest or a Village Forest.
- » It defines what a forest offence is, what are the acts prohibited inside a Reserved Forest, and penalties taxable on violation of the provisions of the Act.

Significant Powers to India's Forest Officers:

The Amendment Accords:

- » The power issue search warrants, enter and investigate lands within their jurisdictions, and to provide indemnity to forest officers using arms to prevent forest-related offences.
- » Forest-officer not below the rank of a Ranger shall have power to hold an inquiry into forest offences and shall have the powers to search or issue a search warrant under the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973.
- » **The amendment defines** community as “a group of persons specified on the basis of government records living in a specific locality and in joint possession and enjoyment of common property resources, without regard to race, religion, caste, language and culture”.
- » **Forest is defined** to include “any government or private or institutional land recorded or notified as forest/forest land in any government record and the lands managed by government/community as forest and mangroves, and also any land which the central or state government may by notification declare to be forest for the purpose of this Act.”
- » **“Village forests”**, according to the proposed Act, may be forestland or wasteland, which is the property of the government and would be jointly managed by the community through the Joint Forest Management Committee or Gram Sabha.
- » The legislation also proposes a forest development of up to 10% of the assessed value of mining products removed from forests, and water used for irrigation or in industries.
- » This amount would be deposited in a special fund and used “exclusively for reforestation; forest protection and other ancillary purposes connected with tree planting, forest development and conservation,” the draft document noted.
- » While the preamble of IFA, 1927, the Act was focused on laws related to transport of forest produce and the tax on it, the amendment has increased the focus to “conservation, enrichment and sustainable management of forest resources and matters connected therewith to safeguard ecological stability to ensure provision of ecosystem services in perpetuity and to address the concerns related to climate change and international commitments”.
- » **Increased role of states:** The amendments say if the state government, after consultation with the central government, feels that the rights under FRA will hamper conservation efforts, then the state “may commute such rights by paying such persons a sum of money in lieu thereof, or grant of land, or in such other manner as it thinks fit, to maintain the social

organisation of the forest dwelling communities or alternatively set out some other forest tract of sufficient extent, and in a locality reasonably convenient, for the purpose of such forest dwellers". The amendment also introduces a new category of forests production forest.

- » These will be forests with specific objectives for production of timber, pulp, pulpwood, firewood, non-timber forest produce, medicinal plants or any forest species to increase production in the country for a specified period.

Conclusion:

- » In parallel, environmental policy has weakened public scrutiny of decisions on diversion of forests for destructive activities such as mining and large dam construction
- » The government needs to launch a process of consultation, beginning with the State governments to ensure that a progressive law is adopted by all States, including those that have their own versions of the existing Act. The Centre must hear the voice of all stakeholders and communities, including independent scientific experts.

WORLD LIVER DAY OBSERVED ON 19TH APRIL

Mains:

- » What are the initiative taken by the govt to reduce the Tobacco usage in India.

Context:

- » April 19 is observed as World Liver Day. This day is meant to raise awareness about liver and following a lifestyle which supports liver health.
- » This day is observed to understand importance of liver in human body and how liver ailments can be treated. As per World Health Organisation (WHO), liver diseases are 10th most common cause of death in India.

220 MILLION YR OLD DINOSAUR FOSSILS FOUND

Context:

- » A site containing the 220-million-year-old fossilised remains of nearly a dozen dinosaurs has been discovered in western Argentina.
- » There are almost ten different individuals, it's a mass of bones, there's practically no sediment.
- » This discovery is doubly important because there are at least seven or eight individuals of dicynodonts, the ancestors of mammals, the size of an ox.

Background:

- » In San Juan province, western Argentina, scientists from University of San Juan have been discovered a site containing fossils of nearly a dozen dinosaurs. It is 220 million year old and belonging to an unknown era. They were found at the Ischigualasto National Park.
- » The fossils was laid as "bed of bones" and discovered in September 2018.

14 PRODUCTS RECEIVED GI TAGS

Prelims:

- » List of GI Tags in India

Mains:

- » Explain the role of IPR in country's growth.

Context:

- » Himachali Kala Zeera, Jeeraphool from Chhattisgarh and Kandhamal Haldi from Odisha are among the 14 products that have received Geographical Indication (GI) tag from the government for 2019.
- » The other products which received this tag include Coorg Arabica coffee from Karnataka, Wayanad Robusta coffee from Kerala, Araku Valley Arabica from Andhra Pradesh, and Sirisi Supari from Karnataka.

Background:

- » Geographical Indications of Goods are defined as that aspect of industrial property which refer to the geographical indication referring to a country or to a place situated therein as being the country or place of origin of that product.
- » Typically, such a name conveys an assurance of quality and distinctiveness which is essentially attributable to the fact of its origin in that defined geographical locality, region or country.
- » Proponents of GIs regard them as strong tools for protecting their national property rights. Opponents, however, consider GIs as barriers to trade.

SCIENTISTS IDENTIFIED GREEN MATERIAL

Prelims:

- » Green House Gases.

Mains:

- » How Science and Technology saves earth from Heat Radiation? Evaluate.

Context:

- » Researchers have identified an eco-friendly solid that could replace the inefficient and polluting gases used in most refrigerators and air conditioners.
- » When put under pressure, plastic crystals of neopentyl glycol yield huge cooling effects, and are competitive with conventional coolants. The material is inexpensive, widely available and functions at close to room temperature.

TERRA DRONE INKED PACT WITH IIT HYD

Prelims and Mains:

- » National Drone Policy.
- » “Drone invading the privacy of Indian citizens” Critically Evaluate.

Context:

- » Terra Drone Corporation and Terra Drone India signed a tripartite MoU with IIT-Hyderabad to co-establish Centre of Excellence for Unmanned Aerial Solutions (drones).
- » Under the MoU, the Japanese company and its Indian subsidiary would offer a complete sales-service-support module for the drone ecosystem in India.

FINTECH STARTUPS TO TEST REGULATORY SANDBOX

Prelims:

- » What is regulatory Sandbox

Mains:

- » Challenges to India as a growing fintech market

Context:

- » RBI proposed that fintech start-ups could set up a regulatory sandbox or live-testing of innovative products and services.
- » This would be done in segments such as retail payments, money transfer, artificial intelligence and data analytics in the financial sector. A regulatory sandbox (RS) refers to live-testing of new products or services in a controlled and test regulatory environment.

Background:

- » According to bank regulator RBI, a Regulatory Sandbox (RS) refers to live-testing of new products or services in a secure and test regulatory environment for which regulators may or may not allow certain regulatory relaxations for the limited purpose of the testing.
- » The Regulatory Sandbox (RS) permits the innovators, regulators, financial providers and the customers to carry out field tests so that they can verify the benefits and risks of new financial innovations.
- » The objective of RS is to provide a formal regulatory programme for testing new products and services with a customer in a live environment.
- » After 10-12 entities were selected through a comprehensive selection process, the RS will begin the testing process. The entities were selected under ‘Fit and Proper criteria’ for participants in RS.

EXIM BANK FUNDED PROJECTS IN RWANDA

Prelims:

- » Objectives and functions of Export-Import (Exim) bank.
- » Dollar Swap.

Context:

- » The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said Exim Bank has provided soft loans of USD 266.60 million to Rwanda for various projects.
- » The funding is done in 3 separate tranches to support agricultural projects, development of special economic zones (SEZs) and for financing road projects.
- » USD 66.60 million will be funded for the Base-Butaro-Kidaho Road Project.

Background:

- » The funding for the projects has been done in 3 distinct tranches. The names of the projects are as follows:
 1. For supporting agricultural projects
 2. For the development of special economic zones (sezs)
 3. For financing road projects in rwanda.

20 STATES JOINED HELPLINE NUMBER 112

Context:

- » 20 states and UTs have so far joined a pan-India network of single emergency helpline number '112' on which immediate assistance can be sought by anyone in distress.
- » The '112' helpline is an integration of police (100), fire (101) and women (1090) helpline numbers and the project is being implemented under the Nirbhaya Fund.
- » It is similar to '911' in the United States.

Background:

- » To trigger an emergency response, you can dial 112 from phone or press power button on smartphone 3 times quickly to activate a panic call to Emergency Response Centre (ERC)
- » You can also visit ERSS website for the state and lodge emergency email or send SOS alert to state ERC.

WHO ISSUED GUIDELINES ON DIGITAL HEALTH TECH

Prelims and Mains:

- » Digital Health Technology
- » Significance of Digital Health guidelines.

Context:

- » The WHO has released new recommendations on 10 ways countries can use digital health technology, accessible via mobile phones, tablets and computers, to improve people's health and essential services.
- » The guidelines demonstrate that health systems need to respond to the increased visibility and availability of information.

I-T DEPT PROPOSES NEW NORMS FOR TAXING MNCS

Prelims:

- » Taxation system in India.

Mains:

- » How these new norms will affect FDI's.

Context:

- » The income tax department proposed a change in the methodology for taxing multinational companies (MNCs).
- » This includes digital firms, having permanent establishment in India by giving weightage to factors like domestic sales, employee strength, assets and user base.

Background:

- » Earlier, CBDT had set up a committee to bring greater clarity and predictability for taxing MNCs having permanent establishment in India.
- » The MNC having a fixed place of business in India is considered as having a Permanent Establishment (PE) in India and is taxed as per domestic laws.
- » MNCs that are incurring global losses or a global profit margin of less than 2% will be deemed to have made a profit of 2%.

UPI PAYMENTS NOW LIVE ON ETMONEY APP

Prelims:

- » Digital India Initiative.

Context:

- » ETMONEY has integrated Unified Payments Interface (UPI) as a payment option on the application.
- » The company hopes to simplify the user journey through the app, especially for making payments for mutual funds.
- » It has set a target to grow to Rs 5,000 crore in mutual fund transactions in the next 12-18 months and is targeting 10 million users by the end of the current year.

NEPAL LAUNCHED ITS FIRST SATELLITE FROM USA

Prelims:

- » India, Nepal trade relations.

Mains:

- » “Despite being an ally with India, Nepal choose USA to launch its 1st Satellite.” What are the reasons for Nepal-India rift in recent times?

Context:

- » Nepal successfully launched its first satellite NepaliSat-1 into space from America on 18 April 2019. The satellite developed by the Nepalese scientists was launched from Virginia in the US, according to Nepal Academy of Science and Technology (NAST). Nepali scientists, Aabhas Maskey and Hariram Shrestha developed the satellite under the BIRDS project of their institute.

BANDHAN BANK TO MERGE WITH GRUH FINANCE

Prelims:

- » Bimal Jalal committee issuing bank licenses.

Mains:

- » Merger of banks and its effects on economy.

Context:

- » Bandhan Bank has received approval from the Competition Commission of India (CCI) for the proposed scheme of acquiring of Gruh Finance. Bandhan Bank had, in January 2019, announced the merger of Gruh Finance with it. The move was taken to bring down promoter holding in the bank to 61% from 82.3%.

CANARA BANK: 1ST TO MEET RBIS EMV MANDATE

Prelims:

- » PSB's in India.

Context:

- » Canara Bank has successfully rolled out major new functionality to support EMV card acquiring across its ATM network and Aadhaar Authentication. It is the first public sector bank to shift to EMV chip and PIN for card present transactions across the country's vast ATM network. The EMV shift is aimed at reducing lost and stolen card fraud and making counterfeit card fraud more difficult.

Background:

- » EMV stands for Europay, MasterCard, Visa, the three organisations that developed and established EMV as the global standard for chip-based credit and debit transactions.

- » The EMV standard helps to maximise security and global interoperability so that Visa cards can continue to be accepted around the world.

IMF AND WB LAUNCHED LEARNING COINS

Prelims:

- » What is Cryptocurrency, Bitcoin
- » Blockchain
- » What is 'learning coin'.

Context:

- » The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have together launched a private blockchain with a pseudo-token.
- » The new token, called 'Learning Coin' and only accessible within the IMF and World Bank, has a purpose to teach relevant individuals within the organizations about blockchain.
- » Though the coin has no real value, hence the description pseudo-t

FED UP WITH STATUS QUO, UKRAINIANS MAY ELECT COMEDIAN IN PRESIDENTIAL RUN-OFF

Context:

- » Ukrainians vote on Sunday (21/04/2019) in the second round of an election, First round of election was held on 31 March 2019.

About Election:

- » There were a total of 39 candidates for the election on the ballot.
- » Due to 2014 annexation of Crimea by Russia and the occupation of parts of Donetsk Oblast and Luhansk Oblast, around 12% of eligible voters were unable to participate in the election.
- » As no candidate received an absolute majority of the vote, a second round will be held between the top two candidates, Volodymyr Zelensky and Petro Poroshenko.

Background:

- » According to Ukrainian law, the election of the President of Ukraine must take place on the last Sunday of March of the fifth year of the term of the incumbent President.
- » Thus the 2019 Ukrainian presidential election should take place on 31 March 2019.
- » The Ukrainian parliament had to approve the date of the presidential election no later than 100 days before the Election Day.
- » On 26 November 2018 the parliament set the presidential vote for 31 March 2019.

Eligibility for candidates:

- » According to Ukrainian law, a presidential candidate must be a citizen of Ukraine who is at least 35 years old, can speak the (state) Ukrainian language and has lived in Ukraine for the last ten years prior to election day.
- » Candidates were nominated by a political party, or by self-nomination.
- » Candidates also had to submit a declaration of income for the year preceding the election year.
- » This document was then scrutinized by the National Agency for Prevention of Corruption, which subsequently published the results of the audit.
- » Nominations could be submitted from 31 December 2018 to 4 February 2019.
- » The end of the registration period was 9 February 2019.[1] After a potential candidate provided the required documentation to the Central Election Commission (CEC), this body had five days to register the candidate or to refuse to do so.
- » Candidates were required to pay a nomination deposit of 2.5 mln hryvnias (approx. 90,000 US dollars); only the two candidates that progress to the second round of voting will get this deposit returned (the other deposits will be transferred to the state budget).
- » Candidates could withdraw their candidacy, but not later than 23 days before the election.
- » This day was 7 March since on 8 March the CEC approved the final list of candidates for the presidency.

Opinion on Mr. Poroshenko:

- » Mr. Poroshenko was elected amid high hopes for change after the Maidan protests.
- » Ms. O'Hagan says he inherited a difficult situation in 2014 and implemented many reforms but has not convinced voters that he is serious about tackling corruption.
- » He has sought to portray Mr. Zelenskiy as a buffoonish populist whose incompetence would leave Ukraine vulnerable to Russia. Ukrainian troops have battled Kremlin-backed separatist fighters since 2014 in a conflict in the eastern Donbass region that has killed 13,000 people despite a notional ceasefire.

Opinion on MR. Zelenskiy:

- » He is an unorthodox campaign relied heavily on quirky social media posts and comedy gigs instead of traditional rallies and leafletting. A victory for Mr. Zelenskiy would be a drastic departure from previous presidential elections in independent Ukraine, which were won by experienced politicians including three former prime ministers.

Conclusion:

- » Public opinion has not regarded the current set-up as a sufficient step forward from what there was before, to justify the many sacrifices that people have made following the revolution, in terms of living standards, security, loss of life, displacement.

- » Just 9 % of Ukrainians have confidence in their national government, the lowest of any electorate in the world, according to a Gallup poll published in March.

IN SEEK ACCESS TO FRENCH BASE IN DJIBOUTI

Prelims:

- » India-French Defence ties.

Mains:

- » Explain the significance of Horn of Africa in global trade.

Context:

- » After operationalising the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA) signed with France, the Indian Navy is looking for access to French naval base in Djibouti.
- » Indian Navy Mig-29K fighters and French Navy Rafale-M fighters operating off their aircraft carriers will exercise together off Goa coast in May under the bilateral exercise Varuna.

Background:

- » India, to fortify its interests and ambitions across the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and Indo-Pacific, also signed the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) with the US, India is seeking similar agreements with five more countries. India is also all set to undertake a joint naval exercise with France named 'Varuna', next month. As part of Navy's foreign cooperation initiative, Varuna is expected to play a huge role with the aircraft carriers of both the countries taking part.

INDIA RANKED 140 IN WPFI 2019

Prelims:

- » Parameters of World Press Freedom Index.
- » WPFI under which organisation

Mains:

- » What are the Reasons for India's rank Slipping in freedom index

Context:

- » India's rank in the World Press Freedom Index 2019 dropped down to 140th from 138th in 2018, two points below the previous year. The Reporters Without Borders (RSF) on April 18, 2019, released the World Press Freedom Index 2019, reflecting growing animosity towards journalists. Norway topped the index, followed by Finland and Sweden.

Background:

- » Published annually by Reporters Without Borders since 2002, the World Press Freedom Index measures the level of media freedom in 180 countries.

- » It is based on an evaluation of media freedom that measures pluralism, media independence, the quality of the legal framework and the safety of journalists in 180 countries. It also includes indicators of the level of media freedom violations in each region.
- » The global indicator and the regional indicators show that there has been a deep and disturbing decline in respect for media freedom throughout the world.
- » It is compiled by means of a questionnaire in 20 languages that is completed by experts all over the world.
- » This qualitative analysis is combined with quantitative data on abuses and acts of violence against journalists during the period evaluated.

INDIAN-AMERICAN SCIENTIST IN HALL OF FAME

Prelims:

- » Cleveland International Hall of Fame.

Context:

- » An Indian-American scientist and social activist has been inducted into the Cleveland International Hall of fame for his contribution in applications in systems biology, global issues and sustainable development.
- » Prof Sree Sreenath was inducted into it, along with five other inductees Dr. Akram Boutros, Ingrida Bublys, Paul Burik, Richard Fleischman, and Marilyn Madigan.

Background:

- » The Cleveland International Hall of Fame was established in 2010 by clevelandpeople.com to permanently recognize those individuals who have made a valuable and lasting contribution to our multicultural city and region and to inspire a new generation of leaders.

UN REPORT ON MAJOR INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENTS

Prelims:

- » What are the parameters of the Report.

Mains:

- » How to take measure to avoid future tragedies.

Context:

- » The 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy is among the world's 'major industrial accidents' of the 20th century, as per a UN report.

Background:

- » It was released by the International Labour Organization (ILO).
- » 2.78 million workers die from occupational accidents and work-related diseases each year.

- » The report titled 'The Safety and Health at the Heart of the Future of Work Building on 100 years of experience'.

SAUDI INCREASED INDIA'S HAJ QUOTA TO 2 LAKHS

Context:

- » Saudi Arabia has issued a formal order increasing the Haj quota of India to 2 lakhs from 1,75,000.
- » The decision will ensure that all the Haj applicants from big states like Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, and Bihar can embark pilgrimage this year.
- » As many as 2,340 Indian Muslim women will go for the pilgrimage without a male companion or Mehram.

Background:

- » The Hajj is an annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, the holiest city for Muslims.
- » A mandatory religious duty for Muslims that must be carried out at least once in their lifetime by all adult Muslims who are physically and financially capable of undertaking the journey, and can support their family during their absence.

INDIA REBUILD KUNDELING MONASTERY IN NEPAL

Prelims:

- » List of all Buddhist monasteries in Nepal.
- » List of Monasteries in India.

Context:

- » India has rebuilt Chhyoiphel Kundeling Monastery in Nepal.
- » Shyalpa Tenzin Rinpoche inaugurated newly reconstructed Monastery at Lisankhu village in Sindhupalchok district on 19 April 2019.

Background:

- » Kundeling Monastery is one of the temples appointed by His Holiness the 5th Dalai Lama as a royal temple.
- » The monastery is also known for its Lamas who are often selected to be the Regent of Tibet in between successive incarnations of the Dalai Lamas.
- » The Chhyoiphel Kundeling Monastery was established in 1946 with the active initiation and contribution of Lisankhu villagers.

UN HONOURED INDIAN PEACEKEEPERS

Prelims:

- » Learn about UN peacemakers.

Context:

- » United Nations honoured 150 Indian peacekeepers serving with the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) with medals of honour for their dedicated service and sacrifice.

Background:

- » UNMISS is working to deter violence against civilians by providing a safe and secure environment for South Sudanese people.
- » UNMISS is committed to helping build durable peace in South Sudan.

HIGH PROPORTION OF ANTIBACTERIA AGENTS IN GANGA

Prelims:

- » Characteristics of bacteria.
- » Types of bacteria.

Mains:

- » Excessive use of anti bact agents is becoming threat for human survival.

Context:

- » A study found that the river water of Ganga contains a significantly higher proportion of organisms with antibacterial properties.
- » The study, ‘Assessment of Water Quality and Sediment To Understand Special Properties of River Ganga,’ began in 2016 and was conducted by the National Environmental Engineering and Research Institute.

Background:

- » Under the study, five pathogenic species of bacteria viz. Escherichia, Enterobacter, Salmonella, Shigella, Vibrio were selected and isolated from the Ganga, Yamuna and the Narmada.
- » Their numbers were then compared with the bacteriophages present in the river water. bacteriophages are a kind of virus that kill bacteria and are frequently found in proximity to bacteria.
- » The study has found that River Ganga particularly in its upper Himalayan stretches has more bacteriophages than other rivers. Samples drawn from the Ganga contained almost 1,100 kinds of bacteriophage.

GOLD IMPORTS DIPPED 3% IN FY19

Prelims:

- » What is trade deficit?
- » What is fiscal deficit

Mains:

- » What are the challenges for widening fiscal deficit in India.

Context:

- » The country's gold imports dipped about 3% in value terms to \$32.8 billion during 2018-19, which trend is expected to keep a lid on the current account deficit.
- » Total imports of the precious metal in 2017-18 had stood at \$33.7 billion, according to data from the Commerce Ministry.
- » After recording negative growth in February, the imports grew 31.22% to \$3.27 billion in March.

Background:

- » India is one of the largest gold importers in the world, and the imports mainly take care of demand from the jewellery industry.
- » Jump in imports during March helped gems and jewellery exporters push their exports. The outbound shipments dipped only marginally by 0.37 per cent to \$3.42 billion in March.
- » The country's current account deficit (CAD), or the difference between outflow and inflow of foreign exchange in the current account, widened to 2.5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in the third quarter of the fiscal, against 2.1 per cent in the year-ago period, mainly due to a large trade deficit.

ASIAN TEA ALLIANCE LAUNCHED IN CHINA

Prelims:

- » Significance of Asian Tea Alliance.

Context:

- » The Asian Tea Alliance, a union of 5 tea-growing and consuming countries, was launched in Guizhou, China on 19 April 2019.

Background:

- » The members of the alliance are the Indian Tea Association, China Tea Marketing Association, Indonesian Tea Marketing Association, Sri Lanka Tea Board and Japan Tea Association.
- » It plans to work towards enhancing tea trade, cultural exchanges and globally promoting tea.

INT. HOCKEY FED IMPOSED FINE ON PAKISTAN

Context:

- » The International Hockey Federation (FIH) imposed a fine of 1,76,000 Euros on Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) for not honouring the Pro League commitments.
- » The FIH has given the Pakistan sports body time until 20th June to pay the fine or else the penalty would be doubled.

Background:

- » PHF was fined for not sending the national team for the Pro League matches in Argentina, Australia, and New Zealand.
- » The FIH has given the Pakistan sports body time until 20th June to pay the fine or else the penalty would be doubled.

U.S. TO ANNOUNCE END TO SANCTIONS WAIVERS FOR IRAN OIL IMPORTS: SOURCE

Context:

- » The United States is expected to announce on Monday (22/4/2019) that all importers of Iranian oil will have to end their imports shortly or be subject to U.S. sanctions, a source familiar with the situation told Reuters.

What it is the Issue?

- » The U.S. reimpose sanctions in November on exports of Iranian oil after Mr. Trump unilaterally pulled out of a 2015 nuclear accord between Iran and six world powers.
- » Washington is pressuring Iran to curtail its nuclear program and stop backing militant proxies across the Middle East.
- » Along with sanctions, Washington has also granted waivers to eight economies that had reduced their purchases of Iranian oil, allowing them to continue buying it without incurring sanctions for six more months.
- » They were China, India, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Turkey, Italy and Greece.

US Sanctions Against Iran:

- » The United States applies economic, trade, scientific and military sanctions against Iran. U.S. economic sanctions are administered by the U.S. Office of Foreign Assets Control.
- » Currently, the U.S. sanctions against Iran include an embargo on dealings with the country by the U.S and a ban on selling aircraft and repair parts to Iranian aviation companies
- » In 1995, the United States Congress passed the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA). Under ILSA, all foreign companies that provide investments over \$20 million for the

development of petroleum resources in Iran will have imposed against them two out of seven possible penalties by the U.S.:

- » Denial of Export-Import Bank assistance,
- » Denial of export licenses for exports to the violating company,
- » Prohibition on loans or credits from U.S. financial institutions of over \$10 million in any 12-month period, Prohibition on designation as a primary dealer for U.S. government debt instruments, Prohibition on serving as an agent of the United States or as a repository for U.S. government funds, Denial of U.S. government procurement opportunities (consistent with WTO obligations), and a ban on all or some imports of the violating company.

IRAN US Relations:

- » Iran and the United States have had no formal diplomatic relations since 1980. Pakistan serves as Iran's protecting power in the United States, while Switzerland serves as America's protecting power in Iran.
- » Contacts are carried out through the Iranian Interests Section of the Pakistani Embassy in Washington, D.C. and the US Interests Section of the Swiss Embassy in Tehran. Iranian Supreme Leader Khamenei banned direct talks with the United States in 2018.

Nuclear Support:

- » The U.S. helped Iran create its nuclear program starting in 1957 by providing Iran its first nuclear reactor and nuclear fuel, and after 1967 by providing Iran with weapons grade enriched uranium. Iran's nuclear program was launched in the 1950s with the help of the United States as part of the Atoms for Peace program.
- » The participation of the United States and Western European governments in Iran's nuclear program continued until the 1979 Iranian Revolution that toppled the last Shah of Iran.
- » The United States reached a deal in 2015 to limit Iran's nuclear capabilities.
- » Sanctions relief under the terms of the deal freed over 100 billion dollars in frozen assets overseas for Iran and increased foreign access to the Iranian economy.
- » In return, Iran had to agree not to engage in activities, including research and development of a nuclear bomb. The United States withdrew from the deal in 2018.

CONCLUSION:

- » Removing the sanctions exemptions would reduce oil supply from a market that is already tight because of U.S. sanctions against Iran and fellow OPEC-member Venezuela.
- » JOGMEC's Nogami said OPEC's leading producers "Saudi (Arabia), the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait need to boost output to cover the shortfall" from Iran, warning Brent prices could rise to the mid-\$80 per barrel if no alternative supply was found.

LONGEST SPACEFLIGHT BY A WOMAN

Context:

- » A National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) astronaut is all set to set a record for the longest spaceflight by a woman.
- » NASA astronaut Christina Koch is going to have her mission on the International Space Station (ISS) extended to 328 days. This would set a record for the longest single spaceflight by a woman. Christina Koch will remain in orbit until February 2020.

PIO-LED TEAM'S CUBESAT TO BE LAUNCHED BY NASA

Prelims:

- » Features of cosmic rays.

Context:

- » A team led by Keshav Raghavan has been chosen by NASA to have their CubeSat flown into space on future missions of NASA. CubeSats are miniature satellites intended as a standard, inexpensive design that can easily fit alongside larger satellites aboard launch vehicles.
- » The team's CubeSat BLAST (Bouchet Low-Earth Alpha/Beta Space Telescope) is named for physicist Edward A Bouchet.

Background:

- » BLAST (Bouchet Low-Earth Alpha/Beta Space Telescope) will contribute to the ongoing search for the origins and nature of cosmic rays, which will provide an insight into the origins of the universe. CubeSats are built from a modular structure of 10x10x10cm cubes and feature a wide variety of commercially available off-the-shelf components, designed to fit the structure from various manufacturers. NASA Ames launched its first CubeSat, GeneSat, in December 2006. Since then Ames has launched 16 CubeSat spacecraft varying in size from 1U to 3U with an additional 12 CubeSats in development or awaiting launch.

BOM JOINS M1XCHANGE TREDs PLATFORM

Context:

- » Bank of Maharashtra (BoM) partnered with M1Xchange Trade Receivables Discounting System (TReDS) platform for MSME bill discounting.

Background:

- » TReDS is a digital platform to support micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to get their bills financed at a competitive rate through an auction where multiple registered financiers can participate.
- » TReDS platform facilitates a smooth flow of liquidity.

SAUDI ARABIA TO HOST G20 LEADERS' SUMMIT

Prelims:

- » Significance of G20 countries.

Mains:

- » After globalization, how G20 plays a role in Protectionism.

Context:

- » Saudi Arabia will host the annual G20 leaders' summit on 21-22 November 2020 in Riyadh.
- » The G20 is made up of 19 of the world's biggest economies, as well as the European Union.
- » It was formed in 1999 to discuss policy matters and financial stability.
- » Japan will host the 2019 G20 summit in Osaka.
- » In 2018, the conference was held in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

SRI LANKA'S 1ST SATELLITE 'RAAVANA-1' LAUNCHED

Prelims:

- » India- Sri Lanka bilateral relations.

Mains:

- » "Despite being an ally with India, Sri Lanka choose USA to launch its 1st Satellite." What are the reasons for Sri Lanka-India rift in recent times.

Context:

- » Sri Lanka's first satellite 'Raavana-1' was launched into space from NASA's Flight Facility on 18 April 2019.
- » 'Raavana 1' weights around 1.05 kg and the lifespan of the satellite is around one and a half years.
- » The launch marks Sri Lanka's entry into the global space age.
- » Its mission is to capture images of Sri Lanka and its neighbouring countries.

Background:

- » The launch marks Sri Lanka's entry into the global space race.
- » The satellite was designed and built at the Kyushu Institute of Technology in Japan by two Sri Lankan research engineers.
- » Its camera mission is to take pictures of Sri Lanka and its neighbouring countries.
- » Its Lora Demonstration Mission is to validate the module to be used to data download next satellites.
- » The Attitude Determination and Control Mission of 'Ravaana 1' will involve the team trying to reduce the angular velocity of the satellite using magnetic torquers.

UNIVERSE'S FIRST MOLECULE DETECTED IN SPACE

Prelims:

- » Sofia Observatory

Mains:

- » Difference between Airborne telescope and ground-based telescope.

Context:

- » Scientists have detected the most ancient type of molecule in our universe in space for the first time ever. Helium hydride ion (HeH^+) was the first molecule that formed almost 14 billion years ago. It was detected by NASA's flying observatory SOFIA towards a planetary nebula.
- » Helium combined first with free electrons to form the first ever neutral atom.

Background:

- » The Stratospheric Observatory for Infrared Astronomy (SOFIA) is an 80/20 joint project of NASA and the German Aerospace Center to construct and maintain an airborne observatory.
- » SOFIA is the successor to the Kuiper Airborne Observatory. It will observe celestial magnetic fields, star-forming regions, comets, nebulae, and the galactic centre.

CRISIL TO TRANSFER RATING BUSINESS

Context:

- » CRISIL Ltd, a diversified global analytics company, will transfer its rating business to its proposed new wholly-owned subsidiary.
- » The board of CRISIL gave the nod for the transfer, which is being done to comply with SEBI norms of last year. SEBI modified its regulations for credit rating agencies and mandated the segregation of rating and non-ratings businesses of credit-rating agencies.

Background:

- » CRISIL was formerly known as Credit Rating Information Services of India Limited.
- » It is a global analytical company providing ratings, research, and risk and policy advisory services.

ELECTION COMMISSION LAUNCHES VOTER TURNOUT APP

Context:

- » The Election Commission of India (ECI) has launched the Voter Turnout app on 19 April 2019.
- » The mobile app is for the voters across the country to see the real-time availability of voter turnout during the election season in the country.
- » The app captures the real-time information gathered by the Returning Officers following which it calculates the estimated totals.

ANTARES LAUNCHES CYGNUS ON ISS CARGO MISSION

Prelims & Mains:

- » Antares rocket, Cygnus cargo spacecraft- mission objectives

Context:

- » A Northrop Grumman Antares rocket successfully launched a Cygnus spacecraft on 17 April 2019 carrying 3.5 metric tons of cargo bound for the International Space Station (ISS).
- » The Antares lifted off from the Mid-Atlantic Regional Spaceport.
- » The Cygnus is scheduled to be captured by the ISS's robotic arm.
- » It will remain at the station for about 90 days.

Background:

- » The Spacecraft carried about 7,600 pounds of supplies and scientific experiments to the station. The mice aboard Cygnus are at the core of one such study, which aims to test the effectiveness of an anti-tetanus vaccine.
- » The rodents are split into two groups of 20; half will receive the vaccine in space and the other 20 will not receive the vaccine. Scientists will study the mice to see how the animals responded to the vaccine once they are back on Earth.

GUIDED MISSILE DESTROYER INS IMPHAL LAUNCHED

Prelims and Mains:

- » How Indian navy names the indigenously- constructed destroyers?

Context:

- » The Indian Navy launched its third guided missile destroyer 'INS Imphal' as part of its Project 15B on 20 April 2019.
- » The Navy had launched INS Vishakhapatnam, the first Project 15B ship, in April 2015, while the second ship, INS Mormugao, was launched in September 2016.
- » The INS Imphal was designed indigenously by the Indian Navy's Directorate of Naval Design.

Background:

- » Each ship under Project-15B spans 163-metre in length and 17.4-metre at beam, with a displacement of 7,300-tonne.
- » These ships, which can operate two multi-role helicopters each, are propelled by four gas turbines to achieve speed in excess of 30 knots.
- » These Guided missile destroyers incorporate new design concepts for improved survivability, sea keeping, stealth and manoeuvrability.
- » The Project 15B missile destroyers are modern warships equipped with latest weapons package in continuation of lineage of the highly successful Delhi and Kolkata Class ships.

WORLD'S FIRST ARMED AMPHIBIOUS DRONE BOAT

Prelims:

- » What is amphibious drone boat

Mains:

- » How China is becoming superpower in South China Sea? Comment

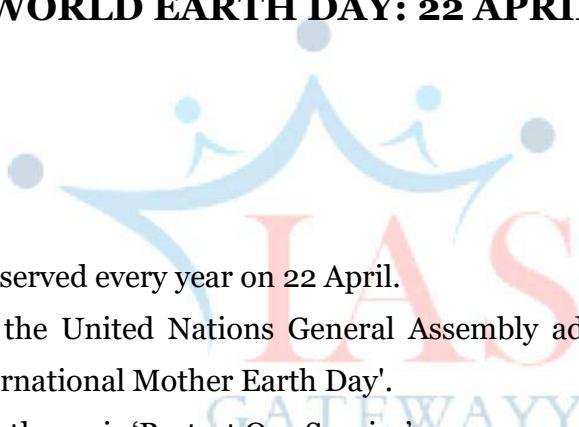
Context:

- » China has successfully tested the world's first armed amphibious drone boat.
- » It could be used in land assault operations and is capable of forming a combat triad with aerial drones and other drone ships.
- » The drone ship has been named Marine Lizard.
- » The Marine Lizard can be remotely controlled via satellites.
- » It can reach a maximum speed of 50 knots while maintaining stealth

WORLD EARTH DAY: 22 APRIL

Prelims:

- » Theme of Earth Day.
- » Significance



Context:

- » World Earth Day is observed every year on 22 April.
- » On 22nd April 2009 the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution declaring 22nd April as the 'International Mother Earth Day'.
- » World Earth Day 2019 theme is 'Protect Our Species'.
- » It will mainly focus on saving species which are on the verge of extinction due to climate change, deforestation, pollution and illegal poaching.

Background:

- » Polyethylene is one of the most polluting elements of the world. Plastic pollution is poisoning our land and oceans, injuring marine life, and affecting our health. The theme of the Earth Day- 2018 is also based on the plastic pollution "End Plastic Pollution".
- » Deforestation for commercial purposes
- » Lesser awareness in the mass about the environment protection around the world
- » Exploiting nature of the human being. The human want to fulfil his greed from nature, which is next to impossible.
- » Neutrality of the environment protection laws all over the world.

US TO END SANCTION WAIVERS TO INDIA

Prelims:

- » India-US Trade Relations.

Mains:

- » IMPACT OF THE WAIVER ON INDIAN OIL SUPPLIES
- » “Too much dependency on imports from overseas can make us cripplle.” Comment.

Context:

- » The United States announced that all buyers of Iranian oil will have to end their imports shortly or face sanctions. In November, the US reimposed sanctions on exports of Iranian oil after President Trump unilaterally pulled out of a 2015 nuclear accord between Iran and six world powers.

Background:

- » United States is expected to announce that all buyers of Iranian oil will have to end their imports shortly or face sanctions. This would increase the crude oil prices by about 3%
- » However, the US had granted exemptions to (a) China (b) India (c) Italy (d) Greece (e) Japan (f) South Korea (g) Taiwan and (h) Turkey from sanctions on Iran. The exemptions were meant to last six months and were due to expire in March, 2019.
- » However, US had not ended the waiver provided to these eight countries.
- » These countries were granted sanctions to give them time to find alternate energy sources but also to prevent a shock to global oil markets from the sudden removal of Iranian crude.

ESIC DATA SHOWS A DROP IN JOB CREATION

prelims and Mains:

- » ESI Act 1948.
- » ESIC Reforms.
- » What is Panchdeep Project?

Context:

- » In contrast, the EPFO's latest payroll data showed that net employment generation in formal sector trebled to 8.61 lakh in February compared to 2.87 lakh last year.

Background:

- » Job creation dropped by 1.73% from 15.30 lakh in February last year to 15.03 lakh this year, according to the latest payroll data of the Employees State Insurance Corporation (ESIC). The ESIC has released payroll data for April 2018, covering the period from September 2017.
- » The data also showed that from September 2017 to February 2019, nearly three crore new subscribers joined the ESIC scheme.

- » The gross new subscriber's addition remained the highest at 19.81 lakh in July 2018. It showed that 2.34 lakh women subscribers joined the scheme in February 2019 while around 12.69 men enrolled.

JAN DHAN BANK DEPOSITS TO CROSS RS 1 LAKH CR

- » The total deposits in bank accounts opened under the Jan Dhan scheme are set to cross Rs 1 lakh crore soon.
- » The cumulative balance in 35.29 crore accounts under the flagship programme of the Modi government reached Rs 97,665.66 crore as on April 3, 2019.
- » The Modi government launched the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) on August 28, 2014.

Background:

- » PM Jan Dhan Yojana is the biggest financial inclusion scheme in the entire World. Now the govt. wants to make scheme more open ended with more incentives keeping in view of its "runaway success".
- » Jandhan-Aadhaar-Mobile (JAM) linking will continue to provide the essential backbone to cover various activities. This includes Banking / Savings & Deposit Accounts, Remittance, Credit, Insurance, Pension in an affordable manner.
- » This decision to make Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana an open-ended scheme will accelerate the pace of digitised financially included and insured society.

NEW LEVEL OF COMPLEXITY IN DOLPHINS: STUDY

Prelims:

- » Types of Dolphins in India
- » Dolphin status in IUCN RedList

Mains:

- » What is Washington Convention and its Significance

Context:

- » A new study has found that there are hundreds of sounds that the dolphins use to communicate.
- » The study was published in the Journal 'PeerJ'.
- » The Araguaian dolphins, also called botos, are hard to find and difficult to study.
- » They identified 237 different types of sounds that the dolphins make.

Background:

- » Heaviside's dolphins are only found in the Benguela Ecosystem along the west coast of southern Africa and range from southern Angola to the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa.

- » They are found in shallow waters along the coast and are one of the smallest dolphin species on earth.
- » The acoustic adaptations are thought to reflect a type of acoustic crypsis, meaning that these adaptations decrease the dolphins' risk of being overheard by predatory killer whales.

INDIAN BATTLESHIPS ARRIVED IN CHINA

Prelims:

- » India, china trade relations.

Mains:

- » “Do you think China’s maritime parade is a Muscle show”? China has greatly expanded its naval capabilities in recent years. Critically Evaluate.

Context:

- » Battleships from India and countries like Singapore and Australia arrived in the eastern Chinese city of Qingdao on 21 April 2019.
- » They will be taking part in a maritime parade to mark the 70th anniversary of the People’s Liberation Army Navy.
- » China will display new warships, including nuclear submarines, destroyers, warplanes and the country’s first aircraft carrier, at the parade.

Background:

- » India, which has been at odds with China over their disputed land border and Beijing's support for Pakistan, has sent stealth guided-missile destroyer the INS Kolkata to take part accompanied by INS Shakti, along with a supply ship.
- » Pakistan, a very close Chinese ally, is not on the list of countries officials have provided which are sending ships to the parade.

NAVAL COMMANDERS CONFERENCE TO BEGIN

Prelims:

- » Significance of the conference.

Context:

- » The first edition of Naval Commanders’ Conference of 2019 is scheduled at New Delhi from 23 to 25 April 2019.
- » The Chief of the Naval Staff will review major activities undertaken during the previous 6 months.
- » The themes of 'Functional Reorganisation of Indian Navy towards improving Operational Efficiency' and 'Optimal Manning' will form the core of discussions.

HIMALAYAN EXPEDITION FLAGGED IN LEH

- » The 14 days, 11 members Himalayan Heights Motorcycle Expedition from Leh to Karakoram Pass was flagged in at Leh by Lt Gen YK Joshi.
- » The expedition began on 7 April 2019 and traversed over 1000 Km in the forbidding landscape of Eastern Ladakh.
- » The expedition team comprised six motorcyclists from the Army Service Corp.

LINE OF CAUTION: ON SUSPENSION OF CROSS-LOC TRADE

Context:

- » The Central government's decision to suspend trade across the Line of Control between Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir is bad in conception, and comes at a particularly fraught time.

What is POK and LOC?

- » The term Line of Control (LoC) refers to the military control line between the Indian and Pakistani controlled parts of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir—a line which does not constitute a legally recognized international boundary, but is the de facto border.

Borders Between India And Pakistan:

- » There are currently three types of Borders between India and Pakistan.
- » **Working boundary:** The line between state of Pakistan along Sialkot and Indian held Kashmir. It is called a working boundary because on one side is an internationally recognized land (Sialkot) while on the other is a disputed territory (J&K).
- » **Line Of Control:** Is the boundary between the Pakistani Azad Kashmir and Indian Jammu and Kashmir. It was demarcated after the Simla pact in 1972.
- » **International boundary:** The demarcated line between the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan recognized internationally. Sir Cyril Radcliffe Demarcated the land in 1947.

What is the issue?

- » Compared to the cross-LoC bus service that was flagged off with much fanfare in 2005, cross-LoC trade between Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir got off to a low-profile start, receiving little attention at the time in India or Pakistan.
- » In diplomatic parlance, these two measures are categorised as “Kashmir specific confidence building measures” and flowed out of backchannel negotiations between India and Pakistan on a resolution to Kashmir, in the belief that this would then give both sides leeway to “remake” India-Pakistan relations.

Four Point Proposal:

- » Four-point proposal for Kashmir that began to get regular airing from about 2005 from then military ruler General Pervez Musharraf.
- » The LoC will stay but Kashmiris on both sides will be allowed to move freely back and forth.
- » Self-governance or autonomy to the region, but not independence.
- » Gradual demilitarisation on both sides.
- » A joint supervision mechanism with India, Pakistan and Kashmir represented on it.

Way Forward:

- » Presumably a way to transfer funds.
- » To exploit the zero-tariff trade, something brought up by traders who operate via the Wagah border. The government's concerns may be well-founded, but the solution to violations of a trade agreement is to enforce the rules stringently, not stop exchange of goods and put at risk the livelihood of countless people on both sides of the LoC. At a protest in Srinagar against the trade suspension, for instance, a leader of the cross-LoC traders association argued that they had, in fact, themselves been seeking a "foolproof mechanism" to enforce the terms of the agreement.

Conclusion:

- » The benefits to the local economies from the cross-LoC trade are beyond doubt. It is estimated that since the barter trade commenced along two routes across the LoC in October 2008, employment to the order of more than 1.6 lakh days had been created. The government has sent unsettling signals by closing the National Highway between Udhampur and Baramulla to civilian traffic for two days a week to secure the movement of troop convoys. To now summarily suspend LoC trade is to invite suspicion that the step has been taken without careful consideration of the consequences and also for political reasons.
- » The suspension must be urgently revoked.

THE PERMANENCE OF ARAB UPRISENGS

Context:

- » As protests hit Sudan and Algeria, it's anybody's guess if they will go the Tunisia or the Egypt way. The Arab uprising was originally triggered by a combination of factors.
- » The economic model based on patronage was crumbling in these countries.
- » The rulers had been in power for decades, and there was popular longing for freedom from their repressive regimes.

ARAB SPRING 2.0?

- » Most Arab economies are beset with economic woes.
- » The investor system Arab monarchs and dictators built is in a bad shape.

- » Arab rulers for years bought loyalty of the masses in return for patronage, which was then buttressed by the fear factor. This model is no more viable.
- » If Arab countries were shaken by the 2010-11 protests, they would be thrown into another crisis in 2014, with the fall in oil prices. Having touched \$140 a barrel in 2008, the price of oil collapsed to \$30 in 2016. This impacted both oil-producing and oil-importing countries.
- » Producers, reeling under the price fall, had cut spending — both public spending and aid for other Arab countries.
- » Further, non-oil-producing Arab economies such as Jordan and Egypt saw aid that they were dependent on drying up. In May 2018, there were massive protests in Jordan against a proposed tax law and rising fuel prices. Demonstrators left the streets only after Prime Minister Hani Mulki resigned, his successor withdrew the legislation and King Abdullah II made an intervention to freeze the price hike.

REGIME CHANGERS:

- » In Sudan and Algeria, protesters have gone a step ahead, demanding regime change, like their comrades in Egypt and Tunisia did in late 2010 and early 2011.
- » Algeria, whose economy is heavily dependent on the hydrocarbon sector, took a hit after the post-2014 commodity meltdown. Further, while GDP growth slowed from 4% in 2014 to 1.6% in 2017, youth unemployment soared to 29%. This economic downturn was happening at a time when Mr. Bouteflika was missing from public engagement. A stroke had paralysed him in 2013. But when he announced candidacy for this year's presidential election, seeking another five-year term, it infuriated the public.
- » In a matter of days, protests spread across the country, which culminated in his resignation on April 2, 2019. Sudan's case is not different. The northeast African country is also battling a serious economic crisis. Mr. Bashir and his military clique ruled the country through fear for three decades.
- » However, the split of South Sudan in 2011, with three-fourths of the undivided country's oil reserves, broke the back of the junta. Post-2014, Sudan fell into a deeper crisis, often seeking aid from richer Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and even Qatar, the Saudi bloc's regional rival.
- » Inflation is at 73%. Sudan is also grappling with fuel and cash shortages.
- » Discontent first boiled over in the north eastern city Atbara in mid-December over the rising price of bread, and the protests soon spread into a nationwide movement.
- » Bashir tried everything he could to calm the streets from declaring a state of emergency to sacking his entire cabinet but protesters demanded nothing less than regime change. Finally the army stepped in, removing him from power.

Counter-Revolutionaries:

- » Like in the case of 2010-11, the 2018-19 protests are also transnational — they spread from Amman to Khartoum and Algiers in a matter of months.
- » The pan-Arabist anger against national governments remains the main driving force behind the protests, which should set alarm bells ringing across Arab capitals. But in all these countries, the counter-revolutionary forces are so strong that protesters often stop short of achieving their main goal a clear break with the past.
- » They manage to get rid of the dictators, but the system those dictators built survives somehow, and sometimes in a moral brutal fashion.
- » There are two main counter-revolutionary forces in these countries. The first are the main guardians of the old system, either the monarchy or the army. Tunisia is the only country where the revolutionaries outwitted the counter-revolutionaries. They overthrew Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's dictatorship, and the country transitioned to a multi-party democracy.
- » In Egypt, the army made a comeback and further tightened its grip on the state and society through violence and repression. In Jordan, the monarch always acts as a bulwark against revolutionary tendencies.
- » The second are geopolitical actors. In Libya, the foreign intervention removed Muammar Qaddafi, but the war destroyed the Libyan state and institutions, leaving the country in the hands of competing militias.
- » Libya is yet to recover from the anarchy triggered by the intervention.
- » In Syria, with foreign intervention, the protests first turned into an armed civil war and then the country itself became a theatre of wars for global players.
- » In Yemen, protests turned into a sectarian civil conflict, with foreign powers taking different sides. In Bahrain, Saudi Arabia made a direct military intervention, on behalf of its rulers, to violently end the protests in Manama's Pearl Square.
- » The same could happen in Algeria and Sudan as well. In both countries, the army let the Presidents fall, but retained its grip on power, despite pressure from protesters. They don't want regime change.
- » They are dressing up the fall of the dictator as a revolution and selling it to the protesters, just as the Egyptian military did eight years ago.

Conclusion:

- » Experts point out that currently, Sudan faces the heat of geopolitical intervention as well.
- » As soon as the military council directly took power, Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E. and Egypt offered support to the military, at a time when protests continue in Khartoum demanding an immediate handover of power to a civilian government.

- » The Saudis have also announced an aid package to the new junta, making it clear who they prefer. This is the challenge before the Arab protesters. They are angry. They want the system to be changed. But they are the multitudes. There's no vanguard of the revolution.
- » While they keep rising up against the system, they are constantly being pushed back by the counter-revolutionaries.

SRI LANKA DECLARED EMERGENCY

Context:

- » Sri Lanka enforced a state of emergency from 22 April 2019 in the wake of the deadly Easter blasts that killed 290 people and wounded more than 500 others, enhancing the counter terrorism powers of the security forces.
- » The decision was made during a meeting of the National Security Council (NSC) chaired by President Maithripala Sirisena.

KAU IPR CELL WON NATIONAL IP AWARD 2019

Context:

- » The Intellectual Property Rights Cell (IPR Cell) of Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) has been selected for the National Intellectual Property Award 2019.
- » The award, comprising a prize money of ₹1 lakh, will be presented at in New Delhi on World IP Day on April 26, 2019.

Background:

- » It is conferred on persons and organisations working in the field of patents, trademarks, and Geographical Indications. contribution of individual, company, R&D institutions, academic institutions and organizations for their creations and commercialization of IP which have contributed to harnessing the country's intellectual capital and creating IP eco-system that boosts creativity and innovation. Contribution of law enforcement agency in ensuring effective implementation of IP laws and creating a healthy IP ecosystem.

IRAN, PAKISTAN DECLARE JOINT BORDER REACTION

Prelims:

- » Iran, India Trade relations

Context:

- » Iran's President Hassan Rouhani announced that Iran and Pakistan will create a joint 'reaction force' on the border between the two countries, for combatting terrorism.
- » The announcement came during a two-day visit to Iran by Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, the first of his tenure.
- » Iran and Pakistan share a 959 km land border.

INDIA RANKED 17TH IN GLOBAL STARTUP ECOSYSTEM

Context:

- » According to data released by StartupBlink, India moved up to 17th position in 2018 from 37th spot last year in the Startup Ecosystem Ranking for 2019.
- » The top three spots remained unchanged with the United States, United Kingdom and Canada.
- » The cities with the most vibrant startup ecosystems in India are Bangalore, New Delhi, and Mumbai.

Background:

- » With a mission to educate, inspire and prepare startup communities for the digital age, creates an entire digital start-up ecosystem experience. Latin America and the Middle East with a focus in frontier tech industries such as Space Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain, and more.

AWC: JHILI WON SILVER

Context:

- » Youth Olympics gold medallist Jeremy Lalrinnunga went on a record-smashing spree at the Asian Weightlifting Championship. Jeremy secured second place in group B of the 67Kg men's event. During his record-smashing spree, he claimed three world marks.
- » Jhili Dalabehera opened India's medal account, claiming a silver medal in the women's 45kg category.

BENNY ANTONY WON NATIONAL IP AWARD

Context:

- » Benny Antony, Joint Managing Director, Arjuna Natural Ltd, has been conferred with the National Intellectual Property Award for 2019 in the category of Top Individual for Patents and Commercialization. Along with the National IP Award, the Intellectual Property Office India and the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) also conferred the 'WIPO Medal for Inventors' to Antony.

WORLD BOOK DAY: 23 APRIL

Prelims:

- » Theme and history of World Book Day and Copyright Day.

Mains:

- » Write the important provisions of Copyrights act in India?

Context:

- » World Book Day is celebrated by UNESCO and other related organisations every year on the 23rd of April.

- » Also called the World Book and Copyright Day, it is an occasion to promote the joy of books and the art of reading. The theme for this year is Share A Story. Sixth Sense Ventures invested in My Healthcare. My Healthcare, a digital integrated healthcare ecosystem has raised \$3 million from Sixth Sense Ventures, as part of its ongoing Series A fundraise. My Healthcare works with hospitals, diagnostics, and speciality health institutions in building their digital health business.

INDIA RANKED 19th IN ICP

Context:

- » The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) has released the 2019 Index of Cancer Preparedness (ICP) in which India's overall rank is 19th out of 28 countries, with a score of 64.9.
- » Australia topped the ICP, followed by the Netherlands and Germany. Saudi Arabia, Romania, and Egypt are at the bottom in Index.

Background:

- » The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) has created the Index of Cancer Preparedness (ICP).
- » It draws on a wide range of data relevant to cancer policy and control from 28 countries.
- » The aims of the ICP are to allow benchmarking of national efforts and identify best practice in addressing the cancer challenge.

ASIAN BADMINTON CHAMPIONSHIPS BEGAN

Context:

- » The Asia Badminton Championships began at Wuhan in China on 23 April 2019.
- » It will continue till 28 April 2019. India will be represented by Kidambi Srikanth and Sameer Verma in men's singles and P.V. Sindhu and Saina Nehwal in women's singles.

INDONESIA RELEASES SPECIAL STAMP ON THEME OF RAMAYANA

Prelims:

- » India, Indonesia diplomatic relations.

Mains:

- » What makes Indonesia vulnerable to deadly tsunamis and earthquakes?

Context:

- » Indonesia has released a special commemorative stamp on the theme of Ramayana to mark the 70th anniversary of the establishment of its diplomatic ties with India.

Background:

- » The Embassy of India in Jakarta yesterday said the stamp, designed by renowned Indonesian sculptor Padmashri Bapak Nyoman Nuarta, featured a scene from Ramayana in which Jatayu valiantly fought to save Sita.

- » A specially signed version of the stamp will be on display at the Philately Museum in Jakarta, it said. India's Ambassador Pradeep Kumar Rawat and Indonesia's Vice Foreign Minister Abdurrahman Mohammad Fachir attended the event.

US NOT TO EXTEND EXEMPTIONS TO ANY COUNTRY BUYING IRANIAN OIL BEYOND MAY 2

Prelims:

- India, US, Iran Trilateral Reations.

Mains:

- » What is Tehran Regime.

Context:

- » The US has decided to end exemptions from sanctions for countries still buying oil from Iran.
- » In a statement, White House said that five countries - India, China, Japan, South Korea and Turkey will no longer be exempt from US sanctions if they continue to import oil from Iran after their waivers end on May 2. After the announcement, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told reporters that there are no oil waivers that extend beyond that period, adding that there will be no grace period for those economies to comply. Iran has denounced US sanctions on its oil sector as illegal.

MOU SIGNED BETWEEN AYUSH AND CSIR

Prelims:

- » Role of CSIR in Human Resource Development.

Context:

- » A MoU was signed between the Ministry of AYUSH and Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), New Delhi on 22 April 2019. It was signed for cooperation in research and education in areas of traditional systems of medicine and its integration with modern science.
- » It was signed by Vaidya Rajesh Koticha, Secretary, Ministry of AYUSH and Dr. Shekhar C. Mande, Director General, CSIR.

29th ABU DHABI INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR: INDIA NOMINATED AS GUEST OF HONOUR

Prelims:

- » India, Middle East Trade relations.

MAINS:

- » How India reflecting and showcasing the diversity and richness of the country's culture? Evaluate.

Context:

- » India has been nominated as the “Guest of Honour” country at the 29th edition of the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair (ADIBF) which begins today.

Background:

- » Indian Ambassador to the UAE, Navdeep Singh Suri said that India's selection as the guest of honor reflects the strong relations between the leadership and the people of the UAE and India.
- » He added that 30 publishing houses from India will take part in the fair.
- » A three-member team from the Publications Division is also participating in the Fair. Books on the life and struggle of Mahatma Gandhi will be on display as part of the 150th birth anniversary celebrations. A special presentation will be made by the Publications Division on the 100-volume series of the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi in a bid to reach out to the international audience. An annual fair is a major event in the publishing sector in the Middle East and North Africa. It will conclude on the 30th of this month.

RUSSIAN PM SEES 'CHANCE' FOR BETTER TIES WITH NEW UKRAINE LEADER

Prelims:

- » India, Russia Military Relations.

Mains:

- » What is the role of Russia in India's Space technology.
- » What is Ukraine crisis? How it changed the world order?

Context:

- » Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev today said, Moscow has a chance of improving ties with Ukraine under the leadership of President-elect Volodymyr Zelensky.
- » There is a chance for improving cooperation between the two countries. Medvedev, in a Facebook post, said the result of the election shows a clear demand for a new approach to solving Ukraine's problems.
- » Ukraine and Russia have been at odds since a 2014 uprising ousted a pro-Kremlin leader.

BANGLADESH: ALL LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS TO BE HELD THROUGH EVMS

Mains:

- » What are the challenges in VVPAT in recent ties? How the technology is ensuring democracy in India?

Context:

- » In Bangladesh, all local government elections will be held through Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) from now on.
- » Stating this the Secretary to the Election Commission of Bangladesh, Helaluddin Ahmed said that the EVM is enriched with high technology and the government is confident of using it in the local body elections.
- » The Election Commission of Bangladesh has also decided to bring third gender people under voter list.
- » Mr Ahmed said that EC is not to allow any Rohingya or foreigner to get enlisted in the voter list.

BAJRANG PUNIA WINS GOLD IN ASIAN WRESTLING C'SHIP

Context:

- » India clinched one gold, one silver and bronze at the Asian Wrestling Championship in China's Xian on Tuesday.
- » World number one Bajrang Punia logged 10 points in a row in the gold medal bout to reclaim his Asian Championship crown. He defeated Kazakhstan's Sayatbek Okassov 12-7 in a nail-biting 65kg men's freestyle final. It is Bajrang's second gold at this championship, having won one in 2017. Another Indian Parveen Rana, lost to Bahman Mohammad Teymouri of Iran in the final 0-3 in 79kg category securing a silver medal. In 97 Kg category Satywart Kadian, picked a bronze medal defeating Haobin Gao of China by 8-2.

IMD ADVISORIES TO FARMERS RESULTED IN HIGH YIELD OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Mains:

- » How IMD is helpful for the farmers in producing high yield crops
- » What are high yielding crops? What are the pros and cons of such crops?

Context:

- » Weather-related advisories by the department to the farmers have resulted in the high yield of agricultural products across the country.
- » Over 40 million farmers are benefiting from the advisories in local language disseminated through SMS by the Met department and there has been an increase in the production of all 22 principal crops.
- The conference had deliberations on most advanced technologies and recent scientific explorations in agriculture.

SC DIRECTS CENTRE TO DISBURSE FUNDS FOR INFRASTRUCTURE IN SUBORDINATE JUDICIARY

Prelims:

- » Purpose of amicus curiae
- » Subordinate courts in India

Context:

- » The Supreme Court on Tuesday directed the Centre to disburse funds allocated for various state governments to develop infrastructure and filling up vacancies in the subordinate judiciary.
- » A bench of Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi and Justices Deepak Gupta and Sanjiv Khanna perused the report filed by senior advocate Vijay Hansaria, appointed as amicus curiae in the matter.
- » Taking note of the report, the bench directed that the compliance reports of the Centre, state governments and Union Territories be sent to the amicus curiae one who assists a court by offering information and expertise on the issues pertaining to a case.

ONE MILLION SPECIES RISK EXTINCTION DUE TO HUMANS: DRAFT U.N. REPORT

Prelims:

- » What are the measures taken for conservation of species.

Mains:

- » Why 21st century is critical phase for both environment and species.

Context:

- » A handout photo by the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation shows the Rodrigues Fruit Bat on Rodrigues in the Western Indian Ocean on April 23, 2018.
- » Animal and plant species are vanishing — sometimes before we know they exist — at an accelerating pace, but conservationists are pushing back against the juggernaut of mass extinction.

Background:

- Delegates from 130 nations meeting in Paris from April 29 will vet the executive summary line-by-line. Wording may change, but figures lifted from the underlying report cannot be altered.
- Up to one million species face extinction due to human influence, according to a draft U.N. report obtained by AFP that painstakingly catalogues how humanity has undermined the natural resources upon which its very survival depends.
- Indeed, biodiversity loss and global warming are closely linked, according to the 44-page Summary for Policy Makers, which distils a 1,800-page U.N. assessment of scientific literature on the state of nature

IN A FIRST, EAST ASIAN BIRDS MAKE ANDAMAN STOPOVER

Prelims:

- » Major Migratory Birds, What is Raptors MoU
- » Name the Bird flyways pass through Indian subcontinent.

Context:

- » Sighting of new species on the island chain has gone up since the 2004 Indonesian tsunami, say researchers of the ZSI.

Background:

- » Andaman and Nicobar Islands, with just about 0.25 % the country's landmass, is home to about 350 species of exotic birds, according to an official estimate.
- » Distinguished by the green and brown plumage on its back, the diminutive Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo (*Chalcites basalis*) is a native of Australia and New Guinea. The Javan Pond Heron (*Ardeola speciosa*), usually found in Thailand and Cambodia. Larger than Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo and Zappey's Flycatcher, it was spotted on August 26, 2018.
- » The three new records from India from the Andaman and Nicobar Island have been discussed in detail in a recent publication of journal Birding ASIA. The other contributors to the research paper are P.C. Rasmussen, Minakshi Dash and D. Sekar.

CHINA DRAWS UP TIGHTER RULES ON HUMAN GENE AND EMBRYO TRIALS

Prelims:

- » Human gene
- » Human embryo

Mains:

- » Moral values around gene editing in human embryo.

Context:

- » Last year, a Chinese scientist's announcement that he had made "gene-edited" babies sparked ethical concerns.

Background:

- » Gene editing would help protect the girls from infection with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.
- » Gene editing on human embryos for reproductive purposes was against the law and medical ethics of China. Medical and human tests would face closer scrutiny and stricter requirements
- » China's top legislature will consider tougher rules on research involving human genes and embryos, the first such move since a Chinese scientist sparked controversy last year by announcing he had made the world's first "gene-edited" babies.

BEYOND THE FREE TRADE IDEALISM

Context:

- » The U.S. has begun trade clash with India.
- » It objects to India increasing import duties on electronic goods and wants India to reduce duties on U.S.-made motorcycles.
- » Meanwhile the World Trade Organisation seems to be in the intensive care unit. It is time to apply fundamental principles to reshape a trade regime that is fair to all.

What is Free Trade?

- » Free trade is a policy to eliminate discrimination against imports and exports.
- » Buyers and sellers from different economies may voluntarily trade without a government applying tariffs, quotas, subsidies or prohibitions on goods and services.
- » Free trade is the opposite of trade protectionism or economic isolationism.

How does us trade clash works on?

- » For every unit of overall increase in global income, six or seven units of incomes will have to be shuffled around within.
- » Moreover, according to this theory, people should not start producing what others are already producing, because they will produce less efficiently until they learn to do it well.
- » According to this theory of free trade, Indians should not have bothered to learn how to produce trucks, buses and two-wheelers when the country became independent. They should have continued to import them from American, European and Japanese companies.
- » Free trade purists say that easy import of products from other countries increases consumer welfare. Consumers everywhere welcome a lowering of import barriers because it brings products into their shops they could only dream of before.
- » Milton Friedman had observed that, in international trade, exports help companies and imports help citizens.
- » Therefore, resistance to free trade does not come from consumers.
- » **It generally comes from companies which cannot compete:** companies in less developed countries which are not able to compete until their country's infrastructure is improved and they have acquired sufficient capabilities or even from companies in developed countries when producers in developing countries overtake them.

Benefits:

- » To benefit from easy imports, citizens need incomes to buy the products and services available.
- » Therefore, they need jobs that will provide them adequate incomes. Any government responsible for the welfare of its citizens has to be concerned about the growth of jobs in the country.

- » Domestic producers can provide jobs.
- » Ergo, a developing country needs a good ‘industrial policy’ to accelerate the growth of domestic production, by building on its competitive advantages; and by developing those capabilities; it can compete with producers in countries that ‘developed’ earlier.

Background:

- » When the ‘no barriers to free trade’ movement went into overdrive with the Washington Consensus in the 1990s, the concept of ‘industrial policy’, which had become associated with the idea of ‘protection’ of domestic industries, became a taboo.
- » India liberalised imports in the 1990s and Indian consumers have benefited greatly since then from the variety of products available to them from around the world.
- » However, by 2009, when the second United Progressive Alliance government was formed, the weakness of Indian manufacturing industries had become a great concern.
- » The manufacturing sector in India and China had comparable capabilities in 1990. By 2009, China’s was 10 times larger than India’s, and its capital goods production sector was 50 times larger. Not only was the Indian market being flooded with Chinese hand-tools and toys, China was also selling high-tech electrical and telecommunication equipment to India (and around the world too).

How does it affect India?

- » India’s impressive GDP growth was not generating enough employment for India’s large youth population. Whereas India’s economy should have been a powerful job generator, the employment elasticity of India’s growth—the numbers of jobs created per unit of GDP growth—was among the lowest in the world. Some people in government recommended the need for an ‘industrial policy’ to stimulate the growth of domestic production.
- » However, many Indian economists, along with others from the World Bank and the U.S., pushed back. ‘Industrial policy’ was a backward idea associated with Soviet-era planning, they argued. If Indian industry was not growing, it was because India had not ‘reformed’ enough: India should reduce trade barriers further and government should get further out of the way of industry.

What India can learn from its own history?

- » The government’s insistence in the pre-liberalisation era that production and technology must be indigenised in phased manufacturing programmes, India’s automobile sector was able to provide Indian consumers with good products.
- » It now provides millions of people with employment and incomes in widespread domestic supply chains. Moreover, Indian auto-component producers and commercial vehicle producers export to the world’s most competitive markets.

- » In contrast, the Indian electronics sector has languished, while China's has flourished. India signed the Information Technology Agreement of WTO in 1996 and reduced import duties on IT-related manufactured products to zero. China withheld for some time until its electronic sector was stronger.
- » Now the U.S. and Europe are trying to prevent China's telecom and electronic goods in their markets.

Way Forward:

- » India's policy-makers must find a way for economic growth to produce more income-generating opportunities for Indian citizens.
- » Employment and incomes are the most pressing issues for Indian citizens according to all pre-election surveys of what citizens expect from the next government.
- » All parties are responding in panic with schemes for showering various versions of unearned 'universal basic incomes' on people who are not able to earn enough.
- » This approach is unlikely to be economically sustainable. Therefore, an ambitious 'Employment and Incomes Policy' must be the highest priority for the next government.
- » While India seeks to capture larger shares of global markets, India's own billion-plus citizens' economy can become a stimulus for growth of millions of enterprises.
- » If citizens earn more, they can spend more.
- » The 'Employment and Incomes Policy' should guide the Industrial Policy to where investments are required, and also what is expected from those investments to produce more income-generating opportunities for young Indians.
- » The scope of 'industry' must be broadened to include all sectors that can build on India's competitive advantages.
- » For example, the tourism and hospitality industry, taking advantage of India's remarkable diversity of cultures and natural beauty, has the potential to support millions of small enterprises in all parts of the country.

Conclusion:

- » The WTO's governance needs to be overhauled to promote the welfare of citizens in all countries, especially poorer ones, rather than lowering barriers to exports of companies in rich countries in the guise of free trade idealism.
- » And Indian economists, distracted by the mathematics of universal basic incomes, should return to the fundamentals of economic growth more opportunities to earn incomes from productive work with development of new capabilities.
- » A robust 'Incomes and Employment Policy', supported by an imaginative Industrial Policy, must guide India's trade policy.

INT. DAY OF MULTILATERALISM AND DIPLOMACY FOR PEACE

Mains:

- » What are the advantages of multilateralism and diplomacy for peace through educational and public awareness-raising activities? Evaluate.

Context:

- » April 24 is observed as the International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace every year.
- » It was officially approved on 12 December 2018 through resolution A/RES/73/127.
- » The day is a reaffirmation of the UN Charter and its principles of resolving disputes among countries through peaceful means.

Background:

- » The UN General Assembly convened a one-day high-level plenary meeting to commemorate and promote the day.
- » The Assembly proclaimed the day while considering that preserving the values of multilateralism and international cooperation is fundamental to promote and support the three pillars of the UN - Peace and Security, Development and Human Rights.

SC CONSTITUTES THREE-JUDGE PANEL TO PROBE CASE AGAINST CJI

Prelims & Mains:

- » Impeachment procedure of the CJI.

Context:

- » The Supreme Court on April 23, 2019 constituted a three-judge panel headed by Justice SA Bobde, the senior-most judge in apex court after the Chief Justice of India (CJI), to inquire into the sexual harassment complaint by a former junior court assistant against CJI Ranjan Gogoi.
- » Besides Justice SA Bobde, the inquiry panel comprises Justice NV Ramana, the next senior most judge, and Justice Indira Banerjee, who was elevated to the Supreme Court on August 7, 2018.

Background:

- » Following its constitution, the inquiry committee issued notices to the complainant and SC secretary general Sanjeev Kalgaonkar and asked them to be present during the first hearing of the complaint, which is scheduled for April 26.
- » The panel would be conducting an in-camera proceeding. It is expected to hear the complainant in person and analyze the evidence put forward by her.

- » The panel has asked SC secretary general Kalgaonkar to come with all records relating to the dismissed woman employee and her places of posting during her four-year employment in the apex court. It will then seek the version of the CJI against whom the allegation is made and then come to its conclusion. The panel can even appoint a lawyer to assist them.
- » This is the first in-house inquiry on a sexual harassment complaint conducted in the Supreme Court and it is the first-ever time ever such an inquiry is being conducted against the CJI.

PHARMA EXPORTS ROSE TO 11% IN 2018-19

Mains:

- » Why pharma industries located on western side on the nation?
- » What is the role of NRA in accessing of good health for sustainable development.

Context:

- » The country's pharmaceutical exports rose by 11% to USD 19.2 billion in 2018-19, mainly driven by higher demand in regions such as North America and Europe. The pharma exports in 2017-18 stood at USD 17.3 billion and USD 16.7 billion in the previous fiscal. North America constitutes about 30% of Indian pharma exports, followed by Africa and the European Union with 19% and 16% share.

FARMERS RECEIVED 1ST TRANCHE UNDER PM KISAN

Prelims:

- » PM Kisan scheme

Mains:

- » How the credit facilities to farmers can be improved?

Context:

- » Around 3.10 crore small farmers have so far received the first tranche of Rs 2,000 each under the PM-Kisan scheme. 2.10 crore peasants have got the second installment as well, costing Rs 10,500 crore to the exchequer. The government had announced that 12 crore farmers would be covered under the Rs 75,000- crore Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme.

Background:

- » Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) is a new income support scheme announced by the Union government.
- » Under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN), every family owning not more than two hectares of cultivable land is entitled to receive Rs 6,000 per year via direct benefit transfer. It is likely to cover 12 crore small and marginal farmers and has annual budgetary allocation of Rs 75,000 crore. Each smallholder is entitled to receive the amount in a bank account in three tranches of Rs 2,000 each.

INDIA WILL STOP IMPORTING CRUDE OIL FROM IRAN

Prelims:

- » Iran geography

Mains:

- » “Oil dependency is always a threat. There is a need to develop alternative energy sources”.
What could be done in this regard?

Context:

- » India will stop importing crude oil from Iran following the US move to end sanction waivers and will use alternate supply sources such as Saudi Arabia.
- » The Trump administration decided not to renew waiver that let countries like India buy Iranian oil without facing US sanctions.
- » India was the second biggest buyer of Iranian crude oil after China.

AUTHORIZED CAPITAL OF ALLAHABAD BANK RAISED

Context:

- » State-owned Allahabad Bank said the government has increased its authorized capital by ₹5,000 crore to ₹8,000 crore.
- » The central government increased the authorized capital of the bank from ₹3,000 to ₹8,000 through Gazette Notification. The increase in authorized capital will help enable the bank to raise further fund up to a maximum ceiling of ₹8,000 crore.

GUJARAT GOVT TO PAY Rs. 50 LAKH TO BILKIS BANO

Mains:

- » Why Do Courts Take So Long to Deliver Justice? Comment.

Context:

- » The Supreme Court directed the Gujarat government to make a payment of ₹50 lakh as compensation to Bilkis Bano, who was gang-raped during the 2002 Gujarat riots.
- » She was 21 years old when the horrific incident happened with her.

Background:

- » On March 3, 2002 Bilkis Bano's family was attacked by a mob at Randhikpur village near Ahmedabad during the Godhra riots. Fourteen members of her family were killed.
- » She filed a case and trial began in Ahmedabad. Supreme Court transferred the case to Mumbai in August 2004.
- » A special court had on 21 January, 2008 convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment 11 men for raping Bilkis and murdering seven of her family members.

- » The high court, on May 4, 2017, convicted seven people under charges of not performing their duties and tampering of evidence.
- » The Supreme Court had on July 10, 2017 dismissed the appeals of two doctors and four policemen.

IMPORT OF MILK PRODUCTS FROM CHINA BANNED

Context:

- » The government extended the ban on import of milk and its products, including chocolates, from China.

Background:

- » Food regulator FSSAI had recommended extending the ban until all labs at ports are modernised to test the chemical.
- » The ban was first imposed in September 2008 and extended subsequently from time to time.
- » India is world's largest producer and consumer of milk.
- » It produces around 150 million tonne milk annually.
- » UP is leading state in milk production followed by Rajasthan and Gujarat.

PAK NAVY SUCCESSFULLY TEST FIRED MISSILE

Context:

- » Pakistan Navy successfully test-fired an indigenous cruise missile in the Arabian Sea on 23 April 2019.

Background:

- » According to Pakistani Navy, the missile accurately hit its target on land signifying the impressive capabilities of the indigenous missile system.
- » The indigenously developed cruise missile has anti-ship missile and land attack capability.
- » Vice Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Kaleem Shaukat witnessed the live firing, which was conducted by the Navy's fast attack craft.

UAE'S MARS PROBE 'HOPE' 85 PERCENT COMPLETE

Context:

- » The UAE Space Agency and Mohammed bin Rashid Space Centre (MBRSC) have announced 85 percent completion of the gulf nation's 'Hope Probe' project.
- » The probe is an ambitious dream project of the UAE to send a mission to Mars.
- » The two space organizations confirmed in a joint statement that most of the main parts of the project have been completed and are currently undergoing intensive testing to ensure every aspect of the Probe is ready for activation a few months before the launch date.

Background:

- » The probe is scheduled to be launched in July 2020. With its successful launch, UAE hopes to become the first Arabic and Islamic country to make the Mars Mission dream a reality.
- » Mars exploration project will be able to take a global picture of the Martian atmosphere.
- » The probe is planned to reach Mars by 2021 to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the founding of the UAE.

WB GOVT'S SCHEME WON UN AWARD

Prelims:

- » Skill development schemes in India.

Mains:

- » What is the purpose of enhancing skills? Also highlight the challenges in ensuring skilled growth in India.

CONTEXT:

- ⊕ West Bengal government's 'Utkarsh Bangla' scheme was awarded the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) award of the United Nations. Out of 1062 nominations in 18 categories from all over the world, #UtkarshBangla emerged No 1 in the Capacity Building category. The WB government had received another UN award in 2017 for its 'Kanyashree' project. 'Utkarsh Bangla' is to provide skilled courses for unemployed youth in Bengal.

JADHAV BAGGED BRONZE: AAC

- » Asian Games gold medallist heptathlete Swapna Barman and the 4x400m mixed relay team clinched a silver each on the 3rd day of the Asian Athletics Championships.
- » Sanjivani Jadhav won a bronze in 10000m race on 23 April 2019. Barman logged 5993 aggregate points from the seven events to finish second behind Ekaterina Vornina (6198 points) of Uzbekistan.

J&K: CAMPAIGN SWEEP INAUGURATED

Prelims:

- » Important rivers in J and K and their tributaries

Context:

- » In J&K, under a unique Initiative under SVEEP, District Election Officer Kargil Baseer Ul Haq inaugurated the Campaign Sweep for voter's education and awareness from TFC Kargil.
- » Under the initiative, more than 1000 employees conducted a sanitation drive along the banks of River Suru covering an area of more than 4 Km.
- » The campaign will continue till 5th of May 2019.

AIR RECEIVE SWACCHTA PAKHWADA AWARD 2019

Context:

- » All India Radio, Publication Division and Children's Film Society of India were given Swacchta Pakhwada Awards-2019 in New Delhi on 23 April 2019.
- » Secretary in the Information and Broadcasting Ministry Amit Khare gave away the awards.
- » Director General of All India Radio F. Sheheryar and Director General (News) Ms. Ira Joshi received the Award for All India Radio.

OPERATION NIGHT RIDERS BEGAN

Mains:

- » Why is it important to look for road safety? What are the measures taken by govt to ensure road safety?

Context:

- » The Motor Vehicles Department's Operation Night Riders began on 24 April 2019.
- » It will keep tabs on 500 tourist omnibuses operating from key cities in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh to the State.
- » State Transport Commissioner Sudesh Kumar asked all Enforcement Regional Transport Officers (RTOs) to form 3-member squads under a Motor Vehicles Inspector.

IRAN BRANDS US MILITARY AS TERRORIST

Context:

- » Iranian lawmakers approved a Bill that labels U.S. military forces as terrorist.
- » 173 out of 215 lawmakers at the Parliament session in Tehran voted for the new Bill.
- » The Bill also demands the Iranian government take unspecified action against other governments that formally back the U.S. designation.
- » Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Israel have all supported the Trump administration's designation.

RBI SWAP AUCTION GOT BID MORE THAN THREE

Context:

- » The second dollar-rupee buy/sell auction saw healthy demand with the RBI getting 255 bids worth \$18.65 billion compared with the notified amount of \$5 billion.
- » The cut-off premium was 838 paisa compared with 776 paisa the last time.
- » The liquidity injected in the first leg was Rs. 34,874 crore.

LEATHER EXPORTS ROSE 8% IN FY19

Context:

- » India registered about 8% growth in export of leather, leather products and footwear during 2018-19 and is aiming to achieve 9% to 10% growth during the current fiscal.
- » In rupee terms, exports during 2018-19 grew to Rs. 36,562.34 crore from Rs. 33,894.71 crore in the corresponding year-earlier period.
- » For the current year, CLE is aiming to achieve 9% to 10% growth.

SEBI TWEAKED NORMS FOR REITS, INVITS

Prelims:

- » Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) and Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs).

Context:

- » SEBI has reduced the minimum subscription requirement as well as defined trading lots for Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) and Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs).
- » REITs have to offer their units in lots worth at least Rs. 50,000 in initial and follow-on public offers. The minimum value of a single lot should be Rs. 1 lakh in the case of InvITs.

ARMY TO BUILD TUNNELS TO STORE AMMUNITION

Context:

- » Indian Army is planning to construct underground tunnels for storage of ammunition along the border with China and Pakistan and Public Sector Undertaking NHPC Limited is being roped in for the purpose.

Background:

- » Underground storage offers improved safety, easier camouflage from enemy observation and satellite imagery and protection from enemy strikes like those seen during the aerial engagement.
- » These tunnels will be built-in high-altitude areas in the Northern and Eastern borders. Initially, four pilot projects would be taken up at four different locations along the Northern border and in Jammu and Kashmir.
- » As the conditions in the caverns are controlled, it ensures better safety of sensitive ammunition minimising accidental explosions. As part of the project, a number of caverns with storage capacity of 200 metric tonnes will be built in mountain folds in identified areas.

JAPAN CREATED 1ST ARTIFICIAL CRATER

Prelims:

- » Asteroid Ryugu
- » Types of Asteroids.
- » What is artificial crater.

Mains:

- » “Could we survive asteroid rain? Because now we are poking even space objects by digging craters” Critically Analyze.

Context:

- » Japanese scientists succeeded in creating the first-ever artificial crater on an asteroid.

Background:

- » It is a step towards shedding light on how the solar system evolved.
- » The crater from images captured by the probe is located 1,700 metres (5,500 feet) from the asteroid's surface. NASA's Deep Impact probe succeeded in creating an artificial crater on a comet in 2005, but only for observation purposes.

2.9 MN CHILDREN MISSED MEASLES VACCINE

Prelims:

- » Symptoms of measles and how it affects the children.

Mains:

- » What are the effective preventive tools taken by the govt to prevent measles.

Context:

- » India has 2.9 million children who have missed out on the first dose of measles vaccine between 2010 and 2017 despite over 80% of immunisation coverage.
- » India, with its large annual birth cohort of 25 million, is followed by Pakistan and Indonesia - 1.2 million each.
- » In 2017 Nigeria had the highest number of children under 1 year of age who missed out on the 1st dose of vaccine.

ADVANI WON ASIAN SNOOKER TOUR TITLE

- » India's ace cueist Pankaj Advani defeated Ehsan Heydari Nezhad of Iran 6-4 to claim the inaugural Asian Snooker Tour title.
- » Advani, a 21-time world snooker and billiards champion, beat Nezhad 52-40, 66(58)-0, 1-63(62), 78-4, 35-47, 0-51, 47-35, 38-39, 53(49)-35, 51(50)-20 in the final.
- » Advani had earlier won the second leg of the Tour in China.

IIT-KGP, JINDAL STAINLESS TIE UP

Mains:

- » What change do we need in our education system? Comment.

Context:

- » IIT-Kharagpur (IIT-KGP) and Jindal Stainless have come together to introduce a 3-credit course on stainless steel and advanced ferrous alloys.
- » This is a part of IIT-KGP's post-graduate curriculum for the Department of Metallurgical and Materials Engineering. The course shall comprise the study of stainless steel and the uniqueness of its various grades.

US ENVOY LAUNCHED INITIATIVE

Mains:

- » What is National Strategic Plan for Tuberculosis Elimination? Explain.
- » Explain Tamil Nadu Pilot Model to control TB infection?

Context:

- » US envoy to India Kenneth I Juster launched a new initiative designed to help India's corporate sector in the fight against tuberculosis (TB).
- » The initiative supports the Indian government's goal of eliminating TB by 2025, which would be 5 years ahead of the UN's Sustainable Development Goal.
- » It creates a shared platform for corporations committed to ending TB in India.

Background:

- » In 1978, the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) began, giving BCG to all babies soon after birth and achieving more than 90% coverage.
- » In 1993, the Revised National TB Control Programme (RNTCP) was launched, offering free diagnosis and treatment for patients, rescuing them from otherwise sure death.
- » However, treatment is not prevention. Prevention is essential for control.

MEGHALAYA TO AUGMENT FISH PRODUCTION

Context:

- » The Meghalaya government will invest Rs 378 crore in fish production for meeting a supply deficit of 15,000 metric tonnes.
- » The state has been able to produce 12,000 MT of fish annually against the demand of over 27,000 MT
- » An investment of Rs 161 crore was made in the first edition of the Meghalaya State Aquaculture Mission (MSAM) that had benefited 21,000 persons in 2012.

ZOOLOGISTS DISCOVERED TWO NEW BIRD SPECIES IN INDONESIA

Context:

- » Zoologists from Trinity College with partners from Halu Oleo University (UHO) and Operation Wallacea, have discovered two new bird species in the Wakatobi Archipelago of Sulawesi, Indonesia.

Background:

- » The two new white-eye species found by Trinity and UHO; they are both found on the Wakatobi Islands, just off mainland South-east Sulawesi. However, the two species could not be more different.
- » Another bird, Wangi-wangi white-eye, remained unnoticed until the beginning of the 21st century when Professor Marples' research group visited the island from which it takes its name.
- » These white eyed birds are adaptable and can have wide variety of fruits, flowers and insects.
- » The Wakatobi white-eye is found throughout the Wakatobi Islands and split from its mainland relatives in the last 800,000 years.
- » Wangi-wangi white-eye is a much older species found on only one tiny island, with its closest relatives found more than 3,000 km away.

US LISTS GIRAFFES AS THREATENED SPECIES

Prelims:

- » Giraffe Status in UCN RedList.

Context:

- » The Trump administration on April 25, 2019 initiated its first move towards extending protection for giraffes under the Endangered Species Act.
- » The decision comes after legal pressure from environmental groups.

Background:

- » The group, which designates endangered species, added giraffes to its "Red List" in 2016.
- » It determined that the species as a whole is "vulnerable" to extinction and classified two subspecies as "critically endangered."
- » There are now only about 68,000 mature giraffes left in the wild, with their number falling each year.
- » A coalition of environmental and conservation groups petitioned the Fish and Wildlife Service in early 2017 to protect giraffes under the Endangered Species Act.

ARCHAEOLOGISTS UNCOVERED AN ANCIENT TOMB

Context:

- » In Egypt, archaeologists have uncovered an ancient tomb with mummies believed to date back about 2,000 years in the southern city of Aswan.
- » The tomb is from the Greco-Roman period, which began with Alexander the Great in 332 B.C.
- » Archaeologists found artefacts, including decorated masks, statuettes, vases, coffin fragments and cartonnages- chunks of linen or papyrus glued together.

UN, EU SIGNED JOINT FRAMEWORK

Mains:

- » What is Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism (PCVE) Action plan?

Context:

- » The UN and the European Union (EU) have signed a joint framework aimed at strengthening partnership in counter-terrorism efforts.

Background:

- » The framework was enacted on the occasion of the second EU-UN high-level political dialogue on Counter-Terrorism that was held in New York. The UN-EU initiative will focus on terrorism and violent extremism prevention in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

ABU MEDIA SUMMIT UNDERWAY IN NEPAL

Prelims:

- » Functions of UNFCCC.

Mains:

- » What are the initiatives taken by UNFCCC for Climate Change Action Plan.

Context:

- » 5th Asia Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU) Media Summit on Climate Action and Disaster Preparedness began in Kathmandu on 25 April 2019. The theme of the two-day summit is 'Media Solutions for Sustainable Future: Saving Lives, Building Resilient Communities'.
- » Nepal's Minister for Communication and Information Technology Gokul Prasad Baskota inaugurated the summit.

RANA DASGUPTA WON LITERARY PRIZE

Context:

- » Author Rana Dasgupta was awarded the Rabindranath Tagore Literary Prize 2019 for his 2010 novel Solo.

Background:

- » It is the second edition of the Rabindranath Tagore Literary Prize.
- » The Prize aims to revive poetry and books that can change lives.
- » The prize consists of an amount of \$10,000, a Tagore statue and a certificate for contribution to literature will be given to the awardee.

DIVYA, MANJU WON BRONZE MEDALS IN AWC

- » In Wrestling, India's Divya Kakran and Manju Kumari bagged bronze medals for the country in the women's competition of the Asian Championships in Xi'an, China.
- » It was double delight for India as Manju also secured a bronze medal earlier in the day by beating Vietnam's Thi Huong Dao 11-2.
- » Kakran defeated Battsetseg Soronzonbold of Mongolia via fall in the playoffs of the 68-kilogram category.

CENTRE INVESTED IN CELL BASED MUTTON PROJECT

Prelims:

- » Significance of Ahimsa Mutton.

Mains:

- » "Humans are habituated to real meat, how can they welcome Ahimsa meat in their lives"? Critically Evaluate.

Context:

- » The Centre has approved a Rs. 4.5 crore grant to two premier Hyderabad-based institutions for research into technology that involves growing animal cells in a laboratory to produce slaughter-free meat.
- » The grant, from the Department of Biotechnology, is for an 18-month project, which will look into developing methods to cultivate stem cells from tissue samples of sheep, to produce mutton.

ARMY TO INDUCT WOMEN AS MILITARY POLICE

Prelims:

- » What are the areas allocated for the women in the army.

Context:

- » In a historic first, the Army began the process to induct women in the military police, nearly two years after Army Chief Gen. Bipin Rawat said women will be recruited as jawans.
- » The Army started the online registration for recruitment in the Corps of military and the last date for filing application has been fixed as June 8.

Background:

- » The recruitment for 'Soldier General Duty (Women Military Police)' was mooted by the Army Chief General Bipin Rawat soon after he took over the post.
- » The approval for the creation of the post came recently by the Defence Ministry.
- » The move comes three months after the Government announced that women would be inducted into the force in the "Personnel Below Officer Rank" (PBOR) category in a graded manner to eventually comprise 20 percent of total Corps of Military Police

COMPLAINTS TO RBI OMBUDS INCREASED 25% IN FY18

Context:

- The number of complaints by bank customers to the RBI's banking ombudsman increased by 24.9% in the financial year 2017-18 as compared to the previous year.
- The major grounds of complaints received during the year were non-observance of fair practices code (22.1%), ATM and debit card issues (15.1%), credit card issues (7.7%), failure to meet commitments (6.8%).

INDIA BAGGED 2 GOLD AT ISSF WORLD CUP

Context:

- » In Shooting, India opened its medal account with gold each in 10 m Air Rifle Mixed Team and 10 m Air Pistol Mixed team events on the 3rd day of ISSF World Cup in Beijing.
- » Manu Bhaker and Saurabh Chaudhary took the top spot in the 10 m Air Pistol Mixed Team.
- » Anjum Moudgil and Divyansh Singh Panwar opened the country's gold account in the 10 metres Air Rifle Mixed Team event.

INTERNATIONAL HOCKEY TOURNAMENT 2019 HELD

Context:

- » 2nd Marshal of the Indian Air Force Arjan Singh Memorial International Hockey Tournament was held at Astro Turf Hockey Ground, Chandigarh from 15-25 April 2019.
- » A Total of 16 teams participated in this tournament.
- » Air Force teams from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka also participated in this edition, making it truly an international event.

NATIONAL PANCHAYATI RAJ DAY: 24 APRIL

Prelims:

- » Committee's related to Panchayat Raj.
- » Procedure and qualification for the panchayat members,

Mains:

- » Evolution of Panchayat Raj system in India.

Context:

- » The National Panchayati Raj Day is celebrated every year in India on 24th April.
- » The Constitution of India recognizes Panchayats as 'Institutions of self-government'.

Background:

- » Due to the high population and large area in many states, the person sitting at the highest post in the state does not get actual scenario of the problems faced by the people of rural areas.
- » So it was decided that the power of democracy should be decentralised.
- » In order to fulfil this requirement a committee was constituted in 1957 under the chairmanship of Balwantrai Mehta.
- » The Committee recommended democratic decentralization of the power. Hence the concept of Panchayati Raj was constituted in India for the first time in the history.
- » This day marks the passing of Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 that came into force with effect from 24 April 1993.
- » The first National Panchayati Raj Day was celebrated in 2010.

WORLD MALARIA DAY: 25 APRIL

Prelims & Mains:

- » What are the causes and challenges for spread of Malaria? Mention the efforts by India to control the spread of the disease.
- » What is DaMan initiative? What is its significance?

Context:

- » World Malaria Day is observed every year on 25 April, to spread awareness about malaria disease globally and to promote efforts to prevent malaria around the world.
- » The theme of World Malaria Day 2019 is 'Zero malaria starts with me'.
- » World Malaria Day was developed from Africa Malaria Day which was first held in 2008.

ALL PUBLIC PAYMENTS DIGITAL: RBI PANEL

Prelims:

- » How Digital payments work in India?

Mains:

- » What are the technologies involved in digital payments?
- » What do you mean by Digital Inclusion? What are the steps taken by the Govt for Digital Bharat?

Context:

- » A RBI committee may recommend that all government payments to citizens should be made digitally. The move seeks to ensure higher adoption of digital payments among the masses. The 5-member panel called Committee on Deepening of Digital Payments was led by former Unique Identification Authority of India chairman Nandan Nilekani.

JALAN PANEL REPORT IN JUNE

Prelims:

- » Various types of reserves maintained by RBI?

Mains:

- » “High NPA’s leading to increased reserves” How it is affecting?

Context:

- » A 6-member panel looking into the appropriate capital reserves the RBI should maintain is likely to submit its report by June.
- » The committee, headed by former RBI governor Bimal Jalan, was appointed on December 26, 2018, to review the RBI’s economic capital framework (ECF). It was to submit its report in 90 days from the first day of its meeting held on January 8.

DARK MATTER SEARCH: XENON UNSTABLE

Prelims:

- » XENON and its applications

Context:

- » In a spectacular discovery, the XENON collaboration publicly announced the discovery. that xenon-124, an isotope of the element Xenon, is fundamentally unstable. Its half-life is 1.8×10^{22} years: more than 1 trillion times the present age of the Universe. It’s the longest half-life humanity has ever measured directly, and its implications for the nature of reality couldn’t be more profound.

AGRICULTURE PRICES TO FALL 2.6%

Prelims:

- » Bio fertilizers and types of crops

Mains:

- » What are the affects of artificial fertilizers on India’s sustainable developmental goals.

Context:

- » Agriculture prices are projected to fall 2.6% this year but are estimated to rebound in 2020 due to lower crop production and higher costs for energy and fertilisers. Agricultural and food prices are expected to remain stable over the medium term. The outlook by the bank also adds that in 2020, agricultural prices are expected to rise by 1.7%.

RBI SOLD ENTIRE STAKE IN NHB

Prelims:

- » NABARD and its functions; RIDF fund

Context:

- » RBI has exited the National Housing Bank (NHB) and the National Bank for Agriculture & Rural Development (Nabard), by selling its entire stakes to government for Rs 1,450 crore and Rs 20 crore. With this divestment, the government now holds 100 percent stake in both these financial institutions.

US RECORDED 695 MEASLES CASES IN 2019

Prelims:

- » Symptoms of Measles and causes

Context:

- » The United States has recorded 695 cases of measles in 2019, the most of any year since the disease was declared eliminated in 2000. The high number of cases in 2019 is primarily the result of a few large outbreaks in Washington State and in New York that started late 2018.
- » Outbreaks in the US have been confined to tight-knit communities where vaccination rates are lower.

MALAWI TO UNDERTAKE THE RTS

Context:

- » Malawi, the African Nation, is to undertake large scale pilot tests for the world's most advanced experimental malaria vaccine in a bid to prevent the disease.
- » The RTS, S vaccine, the first to give partial protection to children, trains the immune system to attack the malaria parasite. RTS, S vaccine under the trade name Mosquirix has been developed by GlaxoSmithKline.

ARAB LEAGUE PLEDGED \$100 MN TO PA

Prelims:

- » Arab League and its members

Context:

- » The Arab League has pledged \$100 million per month to the Palestinian Authority (PA) to make up for funds withheld by Israel. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas addressed the Arab League in Cairo, as part of a diplomatic effort to rebuff the Trump administration's Middle East peace plan.
- » Israel collects taxes on behalf of the PA but withheld \$138m in transfers in February.

RBI HAS RS.3 LAKH CR IN EXCESS RESERVE

Context:

- » Bank of America Merrill Lynch (BofAML) notified the excess reserves that RBI holds could be up to Rs.3 lakh crore (\$43 billion) or 1.5% of the GDP (Gross Domestic Product).
- » This also includes the excess capital in contingency reserves and revaluation reserves.
- » The BofAML report stated that capping overall reserves at 20% from 25.5% will release Rs. 1.96 lakh crore.

INDONESIA'S MOUNT AGUNG ERUPTED AGAIN

Prelims:

- » Indonesia Geography and list of volcanoes
- » How volcanoes erupts?

Context:

- » The active volcano of Indonesia Mount Agung has erupted again to a height of 2km.
- » Two other volcanoes popular with tourists Mount Bromo in East Java and Mount Merapi in Yogyakarta also continues to erupt. Mount Agung is an active volcano in Bali of Indonesia.

FIEO JOINED HANDS WITH WELINGKAR INSTITUTE

Context:

- » Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) inked an agreement with Welingkar Institute of Management Development and Research in order to support startups engaged in the export sector.
- » Under the MoU, FIEO launched a post-graduate programme in foreign trade management (PGP-FTM) at Mumbai.
- » The aim of this partnership is to attract new entrepreneurs in exports.

NEW COMMUNITY IN GOLAN BE NAMED AFTER TRUMP

Context:

- » Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced a new community in the Golan Heights would be named after US President Donald Trump.
- » Israel has also stated it intends to name a proposed train station near Jerusalem's Western Wall after him.
- » Israel captured the Golan from Syria in a 1967 war and annexed it, in a move not recognized internationally.

INDIAN COAST GUARD VESSEL COMMISSIONED

Context:

- » A new Coast Guard vessel was commissioned by Chief Secretary, Government of Kerala Sri Tom Jose at Vizhinjam harbour, on 24 April 2019. Indian Coast Guard Ship C-441 is capable to undertake multifarious tasks such as close coast surveillance, and interdiction. The ship is commanded by Assistant Commandant Amit K Choudhary and has 13 crew onboard with specialisation in various fields.

ICRA ESTIMATED 7-7.5 GW SOLAR POWER ADDITION

Prelims:

- » Photovoltaic cells

Mains:

- » What are the challenges for solar technology in India?

Context:

- » Rating agency ICRA has estimated 7-7.5 GW solar power capacity addition during the current financial year, which includes 1 GW of rooftop solar power. Solar capacity addition is estimated to have remained subdued at around 6 GW to 6.5 GW in the financial year 2018-19. Tendered project awards for solar PV (photovoltaic) projects during CY 2018 stood at about 11 GW against 4.5 GW in CY 2017.

MONEY LOJI LAUNCHED APP TO OFFER LOANS

Context:

- » Money Loji, has launched its App, which offers quickest and the most secure loans to salaried professionals for an immediate requirement. It has flexible repayment options starting from 7 days to a maximum of 90 days. The eligibility criterion is a minimum in-hand salary of Rs 20,000 per month and a minimum age of 23 years.

MERCURY HAS SOLID INNER CORE

Prelims:

- » Solar system and latest discoveries
- » Learn about Mercury and its applications

Context:

- » The smallest planet in our solar system, Mercury, has a massive solid inner core. Mercury has a solid inner core about 2,000 kilometers in diameter, making up about half of Mercury's entire core. The planet has a weak magnetic field generated by circulation of molten metal in that liquid core. The solid inner core makes up about half of the total core. The entire core is 85% of the planet.

AN ILLUSTRATIVE CASE

Context:

- » The Supreme Court lacks the conventional legitimacy derived from securing membership to its judges through elections.
- » The court's command is derived from, and grounded in, a general acceptance of its status as an impartial referee of disputes and as an unbiased interpreter of the law.

Issue:

- » Currently, the explicit threat that the Supreme Court faces is that the Chief Justice of India (CJI) faces allegations of sexual harassment.

Why this issue now?

- » One who complained joined work in the Supreme Court in May 2014 as a Junior Court Assistant, and who worked in the court of the present CJI, Ranjan Gogoi, from October 2016, alleges not only that she is a survivor of sexual harassment, but also that she was unfairly dismissed from service.
- » What is more, on her dismissal, she claims that she and her family were foisted with a series of false criminal cases and were subjected to abuse at the hands of the police.
- » She sent her complaint, in the form of a sworn affidavit, to 22 judges of the Supreme Court on recently, and on the same day, four magazines, Scroll, The Wire, Caravan and The Leaflet, sent a questionnaire to the CJI. In response, the court's Secretary General denied the allegations, terming them "scurrilous", and claimed that it was "also very possible that there are mischievous forces behind all this, with an intention to malign the institution". Minutes after the story was published online, the CJI convened an extraordinary hearing by a Bench comprising himself and two other judges to hear what was termed "In Re: Matter Of Great Public Importance Touching Upon The Independence Of Judiciary".
- » These proceedings were initiated suo motu, i.e. on the court's own motion, without awaiting a formal prompting from a party. Critics opine that this hearing disregarded every ordinary precept of due process; not only was no notice given to the complainant, calling upon her to appear, but her allegations were effectively dismissed outright as a product of a larger conspiracy.

Order issued after hearing:

- » Order that was issued at the end of the hearing (which, critics allege, bizarrely, wasn't signed by the CJI, despite his participation in the proceeding), the court said it was leaving it to the "wisdom of the media to show restraint", to decide what should or should not be published, since "wild and scandalous allegations undermine and irreparably damage" the judiciary's independence.

- » The CJI withdrew himself from the case, but a new Bench that he assembled has now ordered a probe by a former Supreme Court judge, to examine whether these allegations spring out of a plot to overthrow the judiciary.

Hewart's Dictum:

- » That justice should not only be done but should manifestly and undoubtedly be seen to be done is an aphorism often attributed to Lord Chief Justice Hewart of the King's Bench.
- » It is important to note that natural justice, has always stood on delicate ground. But as principles go, it is so axiomatic to the rule of law that courts around the world have repeatedly stressed on Hewart's dictum. That justice should be open has also been immortalised in Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which states that "all persons shall be equal before the courts and tribunals," that everyone "shall be entitled to a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law".
- » Not only is India a party to this treaty, but its Constitution also guarantees to every person equality before the law.
- » Critics assert that much as the Supreme Court has relied on these codes to invigorate its own sense of power, as it has repeatedly shown in recent times, it's just as capable of renouncing its grand declarations when one of its own is in a difficult situation.

Conclusion:

- » Given the absence of a proper, institutional mechanism, it's likely that any mode adopted to judge the charges made will prove indiscriminate.
- » It needs to show that the principles of due process that it holds applicable to all of us are just as applicable to one of its own. That due process isn't merely a poetic homily, to be discharged on convenience, but that is integral to the court's foundations and to the Constitution's guarantee of equal protection.

BACKSTOP OPTION: ON BREXIT MODALITIES

Context:

- » Brexit vision are putting pressure on the fragile peace in Northern Ireland.

Why it is in News?

- » Recently, Journalist Lyra McKee's gruesome murder in Londonderry has brought into focus the fragile Irish peace process, more than 20 years after Britain and Ireland signed the historic Good Friday accord.

Background:

- » The 1998 Good Friday Agreement, signed by Prime Ministers Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern, conferred dual nationality on every resident of Northern Ireland.

- » As part of the Good Friday agreement, which put an end to the insurgency in Northern Ireland two decades ago, the border between the two countries was opened, and the Republic gave up its claim to the northern counties of the island. Ireland, along with the rest of the EU, is insistent that this agreement is not compromised by Brexit. However, this opens up an irreconcilable problem for UK administration. It is important to note that the protestant majority, Northern Ireland (which is a UK Territory) and the catholic majority, Irish Republic (which is an independent country in the south), have had serious ethnic tensions within and between them. Since the UK plans to leave the EU, the Irish question has come to haunt all concerned governments as there is a fear that a new era of violence might start again.

What does an Open-Border Imply?

- » An open border in Ireland would imply either that Britain continues to abide by EU trading rules, or that another customs border be set up between Northern Ireland and Great Britain.
- » But the latter is unacceptable to many in UK parliament and particularly to the hardliners from Northern Ireland in the Democratic Unionist Party, which Ms May depends on for her parliamentary majority.

Let's look at some of the main arguments in favour of britain leaving the EU:

Migration:

- » There is a rising fear among Britons towards losing jobs, social security welfare benefits etc. with the migration of people from both within as well as outside the EU. What exacerbates this issue are the repeated requests from some countries such as Germany towards sharing migrants across Europe. This is something that is disliked by a section of Britons.

Contributions towards the EU Budget:

- » The UK contributes a significant share towards the EU Budget. According to some studies, the contributions made by the EU is not proportionate to the benefits that it receives in return.

Failure of the EU:

- » The European Economic Community (EEC) had 6 members, 4 languages and a population of roughly 177 million people when it was founded. However, currently, the EU has 28 members, 24 languages and a population of well over 500 million people. People allege that the EU has failed on many fronts in creating one community and one identity. Some sections of people feel that jobs, living standards, were better during the earlier days of nation-states when compared to now.

Issue of Sovereignty:

- » Some Britons feel that they are being controlled by the diktats from Brussels instead of having the power to make their own decisions.
- » They do not want the bureaucracy of Brussels to dictate the laws which the U.K. should follow.

The Influential Role of Germany:

- » Germany has started playing an influential role in dictating much of the policies which the EU is adopting.
- » In a sense, it has indirectly translated towards Britain feeling marginalized within the EU.
- » Britons are unwilling to tolerate an EU dominated by a German leadership.

Issues with the Economic Model:

- » Some Britons are not happy with the manner in which the EU central bank had responded to the 2008 financial crisis which resulted in an economic recession.
- » According to some studies, UK's economy is losing around 600 million Euros every week because of the burdensome regulations of the EU.

Arguments against Britain Leaving the EU:

- » **Allowing Immigrants Presents an Opportunity:** Majority of the immigrants are young and thus would give a boost to economic growth. They would also help pay for public services, and widen the tax base.
- » **Trade:** Trade gets a major boost if Britain stays within the EU. Selling products to other EU member nations becomes easier with EU membership. Foreign companies may not be willing to invest in the UK if it is not a part of the EU. As a matter of fact, they may also move their bases out of the UK.
- » **Issues of Security** Some Brexit critics raise the point that leaving the EU may affect the ability of the UK to fight cross-border crime and terrorism. They believe that Britain would be more secure as a part of the EU.

Implications on India:

- » India-UK trade may get a boost. This is because the stringent regulations of the EU is a big obstacle and with the UK leaving the EU, this obstacle can be done away with.
- » It is important to note that the EU had banned Alphonso mangoes from India after it had reportedly found fruit flies in the consignments. Moreover, the weakening of the pound would also prove to be advantageous for Indian imports. It would also benefit Indian tourists visiting the UK and Indian students studying in the UK. On the flipside however, there may be a decrease of tourists from the UK visiting India.
- » However, Indian businesses based in the UK would find it harder to access markets in the EU. This is because their products might become uncompetitive if they are asked to pay import duties upon entering the EU.
- » After Brexit, it is believed that there would be more restrictions placed on Indian immigrants.
- » Brexit would also affect the flow of FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) into India.

Conclusion:

- » The DUP, which props up the Conservative government in London, has consistently opposed the backstop, despite the promise it holds to protect the open border between Northern Ireland and the Republic. But the party could yet play a constructive part in breaking the Brexit stalemate by backing Prime Minister Theresa May's withdrawal agreement. This prospect has gained strength following the Conservative hardliner's suggestion that they could support Ms. May's deal if the DUP were also to come on board. A meeting of minds on this question would save the U.K. from the grave danger of crashing out of the EU without an agreement. It would equally guarantee peace in Northern Ireland.

NEW RS. 20 NOTES TO BE ISSUED SOON

Context:

- » The RBI would soon issue new Rs 20 notes in greenish-yellow colour.
- » The banknote in the Mahatma Gandhi (New) series will have a motif of Ellora Caves on the reverse, depicting the country's cultural heritage.
- » The dimension of the new Rs 20 note will be 63 mm x 129 mm.

15th FC MET MINISTRY OF PANCHAYATI RAJ

Prelims:

- » Finance Commission, its powers and functions

Mains:

- » Write about the 14th FC recommendations about stronger local self govt in India? Do you think that those recommendations are adequate enough? If not, give some suggestions to 15th FC.

Context:

- » The Ministry of Panchayati Raj made a presentation to the Chairman of 15th Finance Commission, Shri N.K. Singh, its Members and senior officials of the Commission. The Ministry has proposed an allocation of Rs. 10,00,000 crores to Panchayats by the 15th Finance Commission. It is a hike of 399% from that given by the 14th Finance Commission.

BEPICOLOMBO MISSION COMPLETED TESTS

Prelims:

- » BepiColombo mission

Context:

- The European Space Agency (ESA) and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA)'s BepiColombo mission has successfully completed a series of test. It has completed its near-Earth commissioning phase. It is now ready for the operations that will take place eventually for its scientific investigations at Mercury.

ETIHAD: 1st TO OPERATE PLASTIC-FREE FLIGHT

Mains:

- » Suggest some alternatives for plastic usage?

Context:

- » Etihad Airways has become the 1st airline in the Gulf region to operate a flight EY484 without any plastics on board, in a bid to raise awareness about pollution on Earth Day (April 22).
- » Etihad identified that over 95 single-use plastic products are used across its aircraft cabins
- » By the end of 2019, it will have removed 100 tonnes of single-use plastics from its inflight service.

SBI LAUNCHED GREEN CAR LOAN

Mains:

- » What are the challenges for electric vehicles implementation in India? What can be done?

Context:

- » State Bank of India (SBI) launched 'Green Car Loan' to encourage customers to buy electric vehicles (EVs) in the country. The interest rates on the loan will be 20 basis points (0.2%) lower than SBI's existing auto loans. Thus, the equated monthly instalment (EMI) per Rs 1 lakh will be lower at Rs 1,468 for 96 months. The scheme comes with the longest repayment period of up to 8 years.

WHO ISSUED SCREENTIME GUIDELINES FOR CHILDREN

Mains:

- » What are the constitutional provisions ensured for holistic development of children in India?

Context:

- » World Health Organisation (WHO) has released new guidelines on physical activity, sedentary and sleep for children under 5 years of age. It also issued its first-ever guidance for how much screen time children should be allowed - limited and none at all for one-year-olds. Kids under 5 should not spend more than one-hour watching screens every day - and that less is better.

CYRIL ALMEIDA WON IPI'S AWARD 2019

Context:

- » Dawn editor and Columnist Cyril Almeida from Pakistan won the IPI's (International Press Institute) World Press Freedom Hero award in 2019. He was awarded for his critical and tenacious coverage of the civil-military relations in Pakistan. Mada Masr, an Egyptian news site, has won Free Media Pioneer Award 2019 of the IPI and International Media Support (IMS).

AEGON LIFE INS. COLLABORATED WITH MOBIKWIK

Mains:

- » What are the challenges for insurance sector penetration in India?

Context:

- » MobiKwik, digital financial services company collaborated with the Aegon Life Insurance.
- » Aegon Life Insurance planned to launch a Rs 20 smart digital insurance product in order to protect its wallet users from death and accident-related disability cover for up to Rs 2 lakh.
- » The main objective for this initiative is to improve the insurance penetration in India (this is currently at 3.7%).

WORLD INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY DAY: 26 APRIL

Prelims:

- » Types of IPR and their protection

Mains:

- » WIPO
- » Write about the IPR affects on bilateral relations with an illustration?

Context:

- » World Intellectual Property Day is observed annually on 26th April.
- » The theme for 2019 is Reach for Gold: IP and Sports. The event was established by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in 2000. The aim is to raise awareness of how patents, copyright, trademarks and designs impact on daily life.

REGIONAL LANGUAGE ON THE MEDICINE LABELS

Context:

- » The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare recommended that the government should take necessary steps to include the regional language in the medicine labels.
- » The aim is to curb fake, sub-standard and expired drugs.
- » Initially, the proposal will be implemented for Iron tablets and polio drops as they are the drugs most commonly administered to children at government centres.

RUSSIA AND NORTH KOREA HELD FIRST SUMMIT

Prelims:

- » Geography of North Korea and Russia

Mains:

- » Effects of Russia-North Korea on USA and its allies

Context:

- » Russia's Vladimir Putin and North Korea's Kim Jong Un held first summit talks in Vladivostok.
- » Its aim was to strengthen ties that date back to the Soviet Union's support for the founder of North Korea, Kim's grandfather Kim Il Sung.

SRI LANKA BANNED DRONES AFTER EASTER BOMBINGS

Context:

- » Sri Lanka banned the use of drones and unmanned aircraft following the Easter bombings that killed over 350 people and injured more than 500.
- » The ban will be in effect until further notice. o Ranil Wickremesinghe is the PM of Sri Lanka, while Maithripala Sirisena is its President.

SKYROOT TO TEST VIKRAM SERIES OF ROCKETS

Context:

- » Skyroot Aerospace, a Hyderabad start-up, is gearing up to test-launch its 'Vikram' series of rockets to send satellites into space by mid-2021.
- » The aerospace company is betting big on the proposed Space Activities Bill-2017 which is under discussion at the Cabinet-level.
- » Once the Bill is passed, it would enable and regulate the activities related to space by the private players.

UAE'S SEWAGE PLANT INAUGURATED

Context:

- » The UAE's biggest sewage treatment plant, Jebel Ali STP, built by Larsen and Toubro (L&T) has been inaugurated.
- » The 3,75,000 cum/day Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) Jebel Ali (Phase 2) is the biggest in the UAE, built by L&T for the Dubai Municipality.
- » The Jebel Ali treatment facilities have a total treatment capacity of 675 MLD which includes existing 300 MLD of Phase - 1.

DPIIT PROPOSED STARTUP INDIA VISION 2024

Context:

- » The Commerce and Industry Ministry has proposed a host of measures such as tax incentives to promote budding entrepreneurs as part of the 'Startup India Vision 2024'.
- » The vision document aims at facilitating setting up of 50,000 new start-ups in the country by 2024 and creating 20 lakh direct and indirect employment opportunities.

SC ASKED RBI TO DISCLOSE INFORMATION

Prelims:

- » RTI Act

Context:

- » The Supreme Court directed the RBI to disclose information pertaining to its annual inspection report under the Right to Information (RTI) Act. A bench headed by Justice L Nageswara Rao also directed it to review its policy to disclose information relating to banks under RTI. In January 2019, SC had issued contempt notice to RBI for not disclosing annual inspection report of banks under RTI.

ANTARCTIC PENGUINS SUFFER HUGE BREEDING FAILURE

Prelims:

- » Dolphins status in IUCN REDLIST.

Mains:

- » “Penguins starving to death is a sign that something’s very wrong in the Antarctic?” Critically Evaluate.

Context:

- » The second largest Emperor penguin colony in the world has suffered a “catastrophic” breeding failure after nearly all chicks born over three years died as their icy Antarctic habitat shrinks. The British Antarctic Survey (BAS) used satellite imagery to study the behaviour of the Halley Bay colony in the Weddell Sea due south of Cape Hope, which normally sees up to 25,000 penguin pairs mate each year. They found that in 2016, when abnormally warm and stormy weather broke up the sea-ice on which the penguins normally raise their young, almost all the chicks died.

FLOATING NUCLEAR POWER PLANT LAUNCHED

Prelims:

- » Nuclear plants in India.
- » Thorium Reserves in India.

Mains:

- » Despite the fact that we are having 30% of Global Thorium reserves, we are still generating electricity of 5% from Nuclear Energy.

Context:

- » A floating nuclear power plant that is also known as 'Chernobyl on ice' is ready to begin supplying the electricity in Russia. The Akademik Lomonosov is reportedly destined to provide power for a region in Russia's far east. The ship's 70-megawatt reactors could power a city of 200,000 people.

Background:

- » A floating nuclear power plant is a site with one or more nuclear reactors, located on a platform at sea. It is an autonomous site that can provide electricity and heat to areas with difficult access, such as the cold Northern territories. It can also provide drinking water to dry areas, via desalination techniques. China is constructing a similar floating power station.

HELEN GET DEENANATH MANGESHKAR AWARD

Context:

- » Filmmaker Madhur Bhandarkar, scriptwriter Salim Khan, and Helen were honoured with the prestigious Master Deenanath Mangeshkar Award on 25 April 2019.
- » The award has been instituted by Master Deenanath Mangeshkar Smruti Pratishthan, a charitable trust. The award is given to legends from the fields of music, drama, art and social work.

INDIAN SUBCONTINENT'S COLLISION WITH ASIA BOOSTED OXYGEN IN WORLD'S OCEANS

Prelims & mains:

- » Explain formation of continents, continental drift and plate tectonics.

Context:

- » This record is an enormous contribution to the field of global climate studies.
- » When the landmass that is now the Indian subcontinent slammed into Asia about 50 million years ago, the oxygen in the world's oceans increased, altering the conditions for life.
- » The collision was already known to have changed the configuration of the continents, the landscape, global climate and more.

Background:

- » In addition to being the most abundant gas in the atmosphere, nitrogen is key to all life on Earth.
- » Every organism on Earth requires “fixed” nitrogen – sometimes called “biologically available nitrogen.”
- » Oxygen controls the distribution of marine organisms, with oxygen-poor waters being bad for most ocean life.
- » Many past climate warming events caused decrease in ocean oxygen that limited the habitats of sea creatures, from microscopic plankton to the fish and whales that feed on them.
- » The collision of India with Asia closed off an ancient sea called the Tethys, disturbing the continental shelves and their connections with the open ocean.

SOCIAL MEDIA FRAUD ROSE 43% IN 2018: REPORT

Mains:

- » Recent initiatives taken by the government to eliminate cyber fraud.

Context:

- » In a sign that platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp are emerging as new public square for criminal deception, a study has found that social media fraud increased 43% in 2018.
- » The results suggest that cybercriminals are increasingly relying on Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and other legitimate social media and messaging platforms to communicate with each other and sell stolen identities, credit card numbers and other ill-gotten gains.

Background:

- » According to the researchers, fraud in the mobile channel has grown significantly over the past several years, with 70% of artifice originating in the mobile channel in 2018.
- » In particular, fraud from mobile apps increased 680% between 2015 and 2018, said the study, adding that the use of rogue mobile applications to defraud consumers was on the rise.

SCIENTISTS PRINT FLEXIBLE ELECTRONICS

Prelims:

- » 3d technology in india.

Mains:

- » How 3d Printing technology increases the connectivity of Rural areas.

Context:

- » Scientists have developed a process to 3D-print transparent and flexible electronic circuits, paving the way for improved wearable devices in the future.

Background:

- » The electronics consists of a mesh of silver nanowires that can be printed in suspension and embedded in various flexible and transparent plastics. This technology can enable new applications such as printable light-emitting diodes, solar cells or tools with integrated circuits.
- » The aim of this study was to functionalise 3D-printable polymers for different applications.

AS TEMPERATURES RISE, PRE-MONSOON RAINFALL RECORDS 27%

DIP: IMD

Prelims:

- » Seasons in India.

Mains:

- » How Global Warming forcibly shifting our farmers to other sectors? Critically Evaluate.

Context:

- » The Southern peninsula division comprising all five States of the South India and the Union Territory of Puducherry, Goa and coastal Maharashtra recorded a deficiency of 31%.
- » East and northeast India division recorded 23% deficiency.
- » Pre-monsoon rainfall from March to April, a phenomenon critical to agriculture in some parts of the country, has recorded 27% deficiency, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

Background:

- » The IMD recorded 43.3 millimetres of rainfall across the country from March 1 to April 24 as against the normal precipitation of 59.6 millimetres. This was 27% less of the Long Period Average (LPA).
- » The highest deficiency of 38% was recorded in the northwest India division of the IMD, which comprises States of Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh.
- » This was followed by the Southern peninsula division comprising all five States of the South India and the Union Territory of Puducherry, Goa and coastal Maharashtra, where the deficiency recorded was 31%.

500-YEAR-OLD WELL FOUND IN KARTARPUR

Context:

- » A 500-year-old well, believed to have been built during the lifetime of the founder of Sikhism Guru Nanak Dev, has been discovered at the enclosure of a gurdwara on the Kartarpur corridor, which will facilitate easy passage of Sikh pilgrims to the historic Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Pakistan.
- » The 20-foot well, made of small red bricks, was discovered while digging the enclosure of Gurdwara Dera Sahib Kartarpur, some 125 km from Lahore, on the Kartarpur corridor, caretaker of the gurdwara, Sardar Gobind Singh.

Background:

- » The well (Khu sahib) is a boon for the Sikh pilgrims who would flock to the place on Baisakhi and other occasions and take away its sweet water. The water of the well had healing quality.
- » It will also be a great attraction for the Indian Sikhs due here on the 550th birth anniversary of Baba Guru Nanak.
- » The year 2019 marks the 550th birth anniversary year of Sikhism founder Guru Nanak Dev, whose birthplace is Sri Nankana Sahib in Pakistan.

XI JINPING MEETS IMRAN KHAN, CALLS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF INDO-PAK RELATIONS

Prelims:

- » Indo-Sino-Pak trilateral relations.
- » BRI Forum

Mains:

- » How BRI hits the Global Infrastructure.
- » How BRI is severe threat to World's Security.

Context:

- » China's President Xi Jinping shakes hands with Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan before a meeting in Beijing on April 28, 2019.
- » He expressed hope that Pakistan and India can meet each other halfway to improve their strained relations following the Pulwama terror attack by a JeM suicide bomber.
- » The India-Pakistan relations reportedly figured prominently in the meeting. Mr. Xi expressed hope that Pakistan and India can meet each other halfway and promote the stabilisation and improvement of India-Pakistan relations
- » Mr. Khan arrived in China on April 25 and attended China's 2nd Belt and Road Forum (BRF) held on April 26-27.

Background:

- » Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) started by Mr. Xi in 2013 in which \$60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is an important component. India skipped the meeting for the second time, protesting over the CPEC which is being laid through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). Mr. Khan's meeting with Mr. Xi took place when China is under pressure at the United Nations over its repeated attempts to block efforts to declare Pakistan-based JeM leader Masood Azhar as a global terrorist.

SC: FILTHY LANGUAGE NOT CRIMINAL INTIMIDATION

Prelims:

- » Recent Supreme court verdicts.

Context:

- » Abusing a person with filthy language alone does not constitute the offence of criminal intimidation. The threat must be with intention to cause alarm to the complainant to cause that person to do or omit to do any work. Mere expression of any words without any intention to cause alarm would not be sufficient to bring in the application of this section.
- The Bench was hearing an appeal filed by an insurance claim surveyor in Uttar Pradesh, who was accused of criminal intimidation by a factory owner in Mathura district.

DELHI HC LIFTS CENTRE'S CURBS ON GI TAG FOR BASMATI RICE

Prelims:

- » GI tags in India.

Context:

- » The Delhi High Court has struck down the decision of the Central government restricting the famously aromatic basmati rice production to only seven States in the Indo-Gangetic plains.
- » The High Court's verdict came on the Madhya Pradesh government's plea to include 13 districts in the State under the Geographical Indications (GI) category for basmati rice.

Background:

- » The Ministry of Agriculture had through two Office Memorandums (OM) of May 2008 and February 2014 confined the GI certification for basmati to rice grown in the Indo-Gangetic plains in the States of Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and parts of Uttar Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir.
- » GI certification gives recognition and several protections to a basmati rice producer and help in maintaining the specific qualities of the rice grown in that particular region.
- » The Madhya Pradesh government contended that the two OMs were outside the scope of the Seeds Act, 1966. It additionally argued that the OMs encroach upon its power to pass laws in relation to agriculture, which is a State subject.
- » The 2008 OM of the Ministry set forth the standards of the 'basmati' variety of rice.

COMFORT FOOD LEADS TO MORE WEIGHT GAIN DURING STRESS:

STUDY

Prelims & mains:

- » Is obesity a growing concern in India? Comment.

Context:

- » At the centre of this weight gain, the scientists discovered, was a molecule called NPY, which the brain produces naturally in response to stress to stimulate eating in humans as well as mice.
- » The brain produces a molecule which stimulates eating. Indulging in high-calorie 'comfort' foods when you are stressed can lead to more weight gain than usual.

Background:

- » Researchers from the Garvan Institute of Medical Research in Australia discovered a molecular pathway in the brain, controlled by insulin, which drives the additional weight gain.
- » Using an animal model, the team showed that a high-calorie diet when combined with stress resulted in more weight gain than the same diet caused in a stress-free environment.

- » The study showed that these prolonged, high levels of insulin in the amygdala caused the nerve cells to become desensitised to insulin, which stopped them from detecting insulin altogether.
- » In turn, these desensitised nerve cells boosted their NPY levels, which both promoted eating and reduced the bodies' normal response to burn energy through heat.

DAYS AND EVENTS

- » World Day for Animals in Laboratories (WDAIL) (also known as World Lab Animal Day) is observed every year on 24 April. International Girls in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Day was observed on 25 April 2019.
- » World Immunization Week 2019 is observed from 24 to 30 April 2019 and the theme of this year's campaign is 'Protected Together: Vaccines Work!'.

NATIONAL FIRE SERVICE DAY OBSERVED

- » The Fire Service Week (FSW) was observed nation-wide from 14 to 20 April 2019.
- » FSW is observed under the guidance of the Fire Adviser, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.
- » This is in remembrance of the lives lost in the devastating fire that erupted and the explosions that followed on 14 April 1944 at the Victoria Dock in the Bombay Port and also to prevent fire in all industries.

KONKANI VERSION OF CONSTITUTION RELEASED

- » A Konkani translation of the Indian Constitution was released by the Mangaluru Bishop Peter Paul Saldanha. The translation has been done by Professor Stephen Quadros Permude, author of several books in Konkani.
- » The book was brought out by the Mangaluru Diocesan Commission, led by its convener Father J.B. Crasta.

USA SECURE ODI STATUS FOR FIRST TIME

- » The United States secured the One-Day International (ODI) status.
- » There will be 20 ODI nations after the end of the tournament, with the top four sides to join Scotland, the United Arab Emirates, Nepal, and the Netherlands in having temporary status.
- » Oman has also secured their ODI status, leaving Namibia, Papua New Guinea, Canada, and Hong Kong to fight it out for the remaining two places.

INDUSIND BANK & BFI MERGER APPROVED

Prelüms:

- » Recently merged banks in India.

Context:

- » National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) approved the merger of IndusInd Bank with Bharat Financial Inclusion (BFIL).
- » The merger will be completed within 2-4 weeks.
- » Post-merger, BFIL will become a subsidiary of the Bank.
- » Bharat Financial Inclusion Limited BFIL is a non-banking finance company, licensed by the Reserve Bank of India.

PLATFORM FOR CRYPTOCURRENCY TRADING LAUNCHED

Context:

- » BuyUcoin, the second oldest Cryptocurrency Exchange in India, has announced the launch of a new and unique platform for wholesale cryptocurrency trading.
- » The platform allows its users to trade on a large scale with low price fluctuations.
- » It currently works on free trading model i.e. charges zero fees on any trade.
- » The platform is aptly described and known as OTC (Over-the-counter) desk.

RBI FIRST TO BEGIN INTEREST RATE EASING CYCLE

Context:

- » The Reserve Bank of India is the first central bank in the Asia-Pacific region to begin an explicit interest rate easing cycle buoyed by benign food inflation and easier global financial condition. The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has cut rates in February and April 2019.
- » The RBI has cut policy interest rates twice by 0.25% each to a one-year low of 6%.

KOTAK BANK LAUNCHES DEBIT CARD-BASED E-MANDATE

Context:

- » Kotak Mahindra Bank launched a debit card-based authentication solution on NPCI's e-Mandate API platform.
- » With this, the bank has become the first Destination Bank to go live with Net Banking and Debit Card-based e-mandate authentication.
- » It will enable its customers to create electronic mandates via both the Debit Card and Net Banking channels.

GLOBAL WARMING SHRANK ECONOMY BY 31%

Mains:

- » How Global Warming seriously affecting global economy? Critically Evaluate.

Context:

- » According to a Stanford study, global warming has caused the Indian economy to be 31% smaller than it would have been.
- » The study shows how Earth's temperature changes have increased inequalities.
- » It showed that growing concentrations of greenhouse gases in Earth's atmosphere since the 1960s have enriched cool countries like Norway and Sweden.

ANTI-HIJACK PANEL REVAMPED

Context:

- » The government of India has revamped its high-level anti-hijack panel to include top officials of the Prime Minister's Office, especially National Security Advisor Ajit Doval.
- » He will be empowered to coordinate any immediate military response.
- » The panel will be called the Committee of Secretaries on Aircraft Hijack (COSAH).
- » The panel will be headed by Cabinet Secretary P K Sinha.

FABIO FOGNINI WON ROLEX MONTECARLO MASTERS

Context:

- » Fabio Fognini became the first Italian to win an ATP Masters 1000 title at the Rolex Monte-Carlo Masters. He defeated Dusan Lajovic 6-3, 6-4 in one hour and 38 minutes.
- » Fognini is the eighth player to win his first Masters 1000 title over the past 17 events at the elite level.
- » In the 92 ATP Masters 1000 events prior to 2017 Rome, only eight players won their first Masters 1000 crown.

CAUTION, FMPS TOO CAN GO ASTRAY

Context:

- » HDFC Mutual Fund sought investors' consent for extending the term of its 2016 FMP series 1168D by another 380 days and told them that it could either defer returns or seek a roll-over for other FMPS due later. Its note details 22 other FMPS that feature exposures to the Essel group. In all, over 50 FMPS from seven fund houses due to mature between 2019 and 2021 feature Essel exposures that expose them to similar risks.

What are Fixed Maturity Plans?

- » FMPs are closed-end debt funds with a maturity period that can range from one month to five years. Because debt funds enjoy long-term capital gains tax after three years, typically three-year FMPs are now popular. FMPs are predominantly debt-oriented, and their objective is to provide steady returns over a fixed-maturity period, thereby protecting investors from market fluctuations.

How Does FMPs Work?

- » An FMP portfolio consists of various fixed-income instruments with matching maturities. Based on the tenure of the FMP, a fund manager invests in instruments in such a way that all of them mature around the same time. During the tenure of the plan, all the units of the plan are held until they mature on a specified date. Thus, investors get an indicative rate of return of the plan.

Where Do FMPs Invest?

- » FMPs usually invest in certificates of deposits (CDs), commercial papers (CPs), money market instruments, non-convertible debentures over a defined investment tenure. Sometimes, they also invest in bank fixed deposits.

Are FMPs liquid?

- » Since FMPs are closed-end funds, they can only be traded on the stock exchange where they are listed. However, trading in these units is negligible which makes FMPs illiquid.
- » Compared to this, open-ended debt funds can be bought or sold on a daily basis.

Lessons from the Fiasco:

- » The FMP crisis highlights three hitherto hidden risks in this product for investors. One, even FMPs that promise to maintain high-quality portfolios with AAA or A1 rated instruments aren't immune to default risks. The IL&FS default has shown that even AAA or A1 ratings from Indian rating agencies can be fallible. Therefore, ratings do not completely insulate you against credit risks. Two, FMPs can expose one to higher risks than open-end debt schemes by owning concentrated exposures in corporate bond Three, since they are close-ended and attract more retail than institutional investors, there is less scrutiny into the investing decisions of FMPs than into open-end funds. In open end-debt funds, institutional investors tend to protest risky exposures by exiting the fund, a facility which close-ended FMPs don't allow.

Conclusion:

- » It is a lesson for investors to stop thinking of FMPs as substitutes for bank deposits. Investors in ongoing FMPs must immediately check the portfolios of their schemes and watch out for any email communication from their fund houses on troubled bonds. Rolling over the fund, if given the choice, is your best bet though you may have to wait longer for your money.

BANGLADESH-CHINA-INDIA-MYANMAR (BCIM) ECONOMIC CORRIDOR NO LONGER LISTED UNDER BRI UMBRELLA

Context:

- India's decision to skip the Belt and Road Forum (BRF) may have led to the exclusion of the Bangladesh- China- India- Myanmar (BCIM) Economic corridor from the list of projects covered by the China-led Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) umbrella.

Purpose of this Economic Corridor:

- South Asia is covered by three major undertakings—the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), the Nepal-China Trans-Himalayan Multi-dimensional Connectivity Network, including Nepal-China cross-border railway, as well as the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).
- The 2800 km BCIM corridor proposes to link Kunming in China's Yunnan province with Kolkata, passing through nodes such as Mandalay in Myanmar and Dhaka in Bangladesh before heading to Kolkata.

China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC):

- The CMEC will run from Yunnan Province of China to Mandalay in Central Myanmar. From there it will head towards Yangon, before terminating at the Kyaukpyu Special Economic Zone (SEZ) on the Bay of Bengal.
- The 1,700-km corridor provides China yet another node to access the Indian Ocean.
- Last September, the BRI had got a high-octane boost when Myanmar — facing the heat from the West because of the Rohingya refugee crisis — inked an agreement with Beijing to establish the CMEC.
- The CMEC will also reduce Beijing's trade and energy reliance on the Malacca straits — the narrow passage that links the Indian Ocean with the Pacific.
- Chinese planners worry that the military domination over the Malacca straits of the United States — a country with which it is already engaged in a trade war — can threaten one of China's major economic lifeline.

Nepal-China Trans-Himalayan Connectivity Network:

- The Nepal-China Trans-Himalayan connectivity network starts from Chengdu, from where it is linked to Tibet by the Sichuan-Tibet Highway, or the Sichuan-Tibet Railway.
- The Nepal-China Trans-Himalayan connectivity network is listed by the annex.
- It is proposed that the railway from Tibet will be further extended to Kathmandu, via Ya'an, Qamdo, Lhasa and Shigatse.
- Chinese planners visualise that that railway will be eventually connected with the Indian railway network, linking China and India across the Himalayas.

Conclusion:

- » It is better for China to go for bilateral cooperation with Myanmar and simultaneously wait for India's participation.

WORLD DAY FOR SAFETY AND HEALTH: 28 APRIL

Context:

- » World Day for Safety and Health at Work is a UN international day that is celebrated every April 28. It is an annual international campaign to promote safe, healthy and decent work.
- » It has been observed by the International Labour Organization (ILO) since 2003.

WORLD VETERINARY DAY: 28 APRIL

Context:

- » The World Veterinary Day is observed on 28th April.
- » It celebrates the contributions of veterinarians to the health of animals and society.
- » The theme for 2019 is Value of Vaccination. The day was initiated by the World Veterinary Association.

INTERNATIONAL DANCE DAY: 29 APRIL

Context:

- » April 29 is celebrated as International Dance Day annually. It aims to bring people together with a common language - dance. In 1982, the Dance Committee of International Theatre Institute founded International Dance Day & theme for 2019 is Dance and Spirituality.

CPWD SET UP COMMITTEE

Context:

- » The Central Works Public Department (CPWD) constituted an expert committee to formulate a design policy for building construction and infrastructure development.

Background:

- » The committee has been set up under the chairmanship of CPWD's Additional Director General M K Sharma. The move is aimed at reviving building construction and infrastructure development at all levels in the CPWD.

DENTISTS CAN PRACTICE AS GEN. PHYSICIANS

Context:

- » Niti Aayog has agreed to the proposal of the Dental Council of India which had sought to allow dentists to practice as general physicians after a bridge course.

- » The proposal was made to explore unconventional methods to address the shortage of doctors in the country, particularly in rural areas. Indian Medical Association vehemently opposed the proposal.

US PRESIDENT TRUMP ANNOUNCES TO WITHDRAW FROM UN ARMS TRADE TREATY

Prelims & Mains:

- » Significance of 2013 Arms Trade Treaty.

Context:

- » US President Donald Trump on April 26, 2019 rejected the United Nations' 2013 Arms Trade Treaty aimed at regulating the global arms trade.

Background:

- » Trump announced to “unsign” the United Nations Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), describing it as a misguided document and an intrusion on US sovereignty.
- » Trump states, “We will never allow foreign bureaucrats to trample on your Second Amendment freedom”. Trump said that the US Senate never ratified the 2013 Arms Trade Treaty despite his predecessor Barack Obama having endorsed it. The US President also made it clear that he will never ratify the treaty.

ICMR LAUNCHED MERA INDIA

Prelims:

- » Significance of MERA India.



Mains:

- » What is NVBDCP's National Strategic Plan. What is role in research and its malaria elimination efforts.

Context:

- » The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has launched the Malaria Elimination Research Alliance (MERA) India. It is a conglomeration of partners working on malaria control in order to eliminate the disease from India by 2030.
- » The National Vector Borne Diseases Control Program (NVBDCP) of India has also developed a framework to achieve the target of Malaria free India by 2030.

Background:

- » Declining Trend: Malaria burden has declined in India by over 80% from 2.03 million cases in 2000 to 0.39 million in 2018, and Deaths caused by malaria also declined by over 90% from 932 deaths in 2000 to 85 in 2018.

- » This success of India in malaria control cases, provided foundation for leadership commitment towards this success of India in malaria control cases, provided foundation for leadership commitment towards.

NEW SPECIES OF CRAB FOUND

Prelims:

- » Crab varieties in india.
- » Status in IUCN RedList.

Context:

- » Scientists have discovered a new species of crab that swam the sea 95 million years ago.
- » The small, pocket-size crab, named Callichimaera perplexa, was very different from its modern-day cousins. The crab fossils were discovered in 2005 in the Andes Mountains in Colombia.

PEPSICO SUES INDIAN FARMERS OVER THE FC5 POTATO ROW

- » PepsiCo Inc has sued four Indian farmers on April 29, 2019 for cultivating a potato variety that the snack food and drinks maker claims infringes its patent.

Background:

- » PepsiCo has sued the farmers for cultivating the FC5 potato variety, grown exclusively for its popular Lay's potato chips. The FC5 variety has a lower moisture content required to make snacks such as potato chips. Farmers believe that section 39 of the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights (PPV&FR) Act, 2001 allows farmers to grow and sell any variety of crop or even seed as long as they don't sell branded seed of registered varieties.

OLDEST HUMAN FOOTPRINT FOUND IN CHILE

Context:

- » Scientists in Chile has recently found oldest single footprint at the paleo-archaeological site Pilauco (Osorno, Chile).

Background:

- » It is a single footprint, discovered in Chile, dates back 15,600 years. Researchers claimed that fossil can reveal new findings about human colonisation of Patagonia.
- » New discoveries were published in the latest edition of the peer-reviewed scientific journal PLOS One. It was originally excavated in year 2010, after long research researchers have now ruled out animals and have confirmed that it belongs to a male adult human.
- » The footprint was found at the Pilauco excavation site in the city of Osorno in south-central Chile where scientists have been digging since 2007.

HIMA DAS INCLUDED IN WORLD RELAYS TEAM

Context:

- » Hima Das was named in India's women 4x400m relay team for the World Relays to begin in Yokohama, Japan next month. Hima made the cut despite pulling out of the Asian Athletics Championships in Doha earlier this month due to lower back pain. She was dropped out midway through her 400- metres heats and was later ruled out of the Women's 4x400m relay and Mixed 4x400m relay races.

ISSF WORLD CUP: INDIA WON 3 GOLDS, 1 SILVER

Context:

- » India topped the standings at the International Shooting Sport Federation, ISSF World Cup on the final day in Beijing, bagging four medals- 3 Gold and a Silver.
- » Anjum Moudgil and young Divyansh Singh Panwar won a gold in the 10m Air Rifle Mixed Team competition. Abhishek Verma won India's third gold in men's 10m Air Pistol event.
- » Kento Momota won Badminton Championship. World number one Kento Momota retained his Badminton Asia Championships title in Shanghai. He defeated Shi Yuqi of China 21-12, 11-11, 21-18. Yamaguchi, a silver medallist two years ago, won the women's crown with a victory over He Bingjiao 21-19, 21-9.

SUMATRA FLOODS KILLED 17: INDONESIA

Context:

- » In Indonesia, at least 17 people have been killed and nine are missing after days of heavy rain triggered floods and landslides on the island of Sumatra.
- » Some 12,000 people have been evacuated, and hundreds of buildings, bridges and roads damaged. The severe weather has affected nine districts across Bengkulu province.

DEFENCE MINISTER VISITED BISHKEK

Context:

- » Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman attended the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Defence Ministers' meeting in the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek on 29 April 2019.
- » She is on a three-day visit to Kyrgyzstan.
- » Mrs. Sitharaman will also hold bilateral meetings with her counterparts from some SCO member countries on the sidelines of the conclave.

INDONESIA PLANS TO RELOCATE ITS CAPITAL FROM JAKARTA

Mains:

- » Why don't we move our capital from New Delhi due to amid Environmental concerns and overcrowding issues? Comment.

Context:

- » Indonesia announced its plans to move its capital away from Jakarta.

Background:

- » President Joko Widodo's government plans to establish a new Capital out of the crowded Java Island to ensure more equitable development of the country amid environmental concerns and overcrowding issues. The new location is yet unknown. President Widodo-led government looks forward to form the Capital similar to Washington D.C. and letting Jakarta sustain as the business, trade and financial hub, similar to New York in the United States.
- » The announcement regarding the same was made by Planning Minister Bambang Brodjonegoro after the Indonesia's National Development Planning Agency (Bappenas) presented its initial study on the capital relocation plan during a Cabinet meeting led by President Widodo.

CYCLOONE FANI LIKELY TO INTENSIFY

Prelims:

- » Naming of the cyclones.

Context:

- » The Cyclone Fani in South East Bay of Bengal is expected to intensify into a severe cyclonic storm. India Meteorology Department said it will further intensify into a very severe cyclonic storm by tomorrow morning. It is moving in a north westwards direction at a speed of 21 kilometres per hour.

INDIA ENDED WITH 16 MEDALS AT AWC

CONTEXT:

- » India wrapped up their campaign at the Asian Wrestling Championships at Xi'an, China, on a resounding note with 16 medals.
- » Men's freestyle wrestlers bagged eight medals comprising one gold, three silver and four bronze. Women wrestlers claimed four bronze.
- » These included Harpreet Singh's silver in 82kg and bronze by Gyanender in 60kg on the final day of the competitions.

INDIA ENDS WITH 13 MEDALS AT ABC

Context:

- » India has won 13 medals, including two gold, four silver and seven bronze at the Asian Boxing Championships. Boxer Amit Panghal picked up his second successive gold medal of the year, claiming the top honours in the 52-kilogram category.
- » National champion Deepak Singh and Kavinder Singh Bisht in 56-kilogram category signed off with silver medals after close losses.

INDIAN ARMY SIGNED MOU WITH NHPC

Prelims:

- » Length of International Border
- » Border sharing countries.

Mains:

- » How migration poses threat to Internal security? Critically Evaluate.

Context:

- » Indian Army signed a MoU with National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC) Limited.

Background:

- » The agreement is to build four underground tunnels along China and Pakistan borders for storage of ammunition and other war-related equipment.
- » 3 tunnels will be built along the Chinese border and one tunnel will be built along the Pakistan border. The tunnel can store 175-200 metric tonnes of ammunition. NHPC shall be responsible for design and engineering, civil construction, project management and execution of the projects.

NO GOOD OPTIONS IN AFGHANISTAN

Context:

- » Trouble by a growing Taliban insurgency, peace today remains elusive. Reconciliation with the Taliban is increasingly projected as the way forward. But ‘reconciliation’ means different things to different players and to different groups of Afghans.

Background:

- » Experts opine that during the last 50 years, Afghanistan has been through different governance systems — monarchy till 1973; communist type rule, initially home-grown and then imposed by the U.S.S.R. with its 1979 intervention; jihadi warlordism in the early 1990s; shariat-based Taliban rule; and a democratic republic based on a presidential system since 2004.

- » Further, wracked by a growing Taliban insurgency, peace today remains elusive.
- » Reconciliation with the Taliban is increasingly projected as the way forward.
- » However, ‘reconciliation’ means different things to different players and to different groups of Afghans.

Negotiating A U.S. Exit:

- » It is important to note that the U.S. began its operations in Afghanistan, primarily against the al-Qaeda, 18 years ago.
- » As it set about creating new institutional structures in Afghanistan, supported by the international community, U.S. troop presence began to grow.
- » From a few thousand in 2002, the numbers increased and stabilised around 20,000 between 2004 and 2006 when they started climbing.
- » However, by 2010, it had spiked to 1,00,000, dropping to 10,000 in 2016 and currently numbers around 15,000.

The Costs Incurred by the U.S.:

- » The cumulative cost has been over \$800 billion on the U.S. deployments and \$105 billion on rebuilding Afghanistan, with nearly 2,400 American soldiers dead.

Donald Trump's policy:

- » It is important to note that S. President Donald Trump's policy announced in August 2017 was aimed at breaking the military stalemate by authorising a small increase in U.S. presence, removing operational constraints, putting Pakistan on notice, improving governance and strengthening the capabilities of Afghan security forces.
- » However, experts opine that within a year, the policy failure was apparent.
- » Afghan government continued to lose territory and today controls less than half the country. Since 2015, Afghan security forces have suffered 45,000 casualties with over 3,000 civilians killed every year. Last year (2018), U.S. senior officials travelled to Doha to open talks with the Taliban, followed by the appointment of Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad as Special Representative for Afghan Reconciliation. Five rounds of talks have been held and a sixth is likely soon.
- » Khalilzad (who is a US diplomat and the Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation at the Department of State) is seeking guarantees that the Taliban will not provide safe haven to terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and Afghan territory will not be used to launch strikes against the U.S., while the Taliban have demanded a date for U.S. withdrawal along with the release of all Taliban detainees in Guantánamo and Afghanistan.
- » Khalilzad has also sought a ceasefire in Afghanistan and engagement in an intra-Afghan dialogue in return.

- » The Taliban have responded with their new spring offensive, al-Fath, and refuse to engage with the Afghan government.
- » An intra-Afghan dialogue with political and civil society leaders planned for around the third week of the month of May, 2019 in Doha was called off on account of the presence of Afghan officials.
- » Experts opine that it is clear that Mr. Khalilzad is not negotiating peace in Afghanistan; he is negotiating a managed U.S. exit.
- » Given the blood and treasure expended, the optics of the exit is important.
- » As former U.S. Defence Secretary J. Mattis said, “The U.S. doesn’t lose wars, it loses interest”.

Increasing Polarisation: A Brief Look at The Political History:

- » It is important to note that there is growing polarisation in Afghanistan along ethnic and even sectarian divides.
- » With three presidential elections (in 2004, 2009 and 2014) and three parliamentary elections (in 2005, 2010 and 2018), faith in the electoral process and the election machinery has eroded.
- » The 2009 presidential election showed the growing mistrust between then President Hamid Karzai and Washington.
- » The U.S. kept pushing Mr. Karzai to agree to a second round between him and his rival Abdullah Abdullah despite Mr. Karzai’s insistence that he had won more than 50% votes in the first round.
- » After months of wrangling when Mr. Karzai agreed, Dr. Abdullah backed out and Mr. Karzai felt that his second term had been tarnished.
- » The 2014 election yielded a disputed result with neither Ashraf Ghani nor Dr. Abdullah willing to concede. Despite an audit, results were never declared.

Instead, the U.S.-backed political compromise produced a National Unity Government (NUG) with Ashraf Ghani as President and Dr. Abdullah as CEO, a position never legitimised by the promised constitutional amendment. The NUG has aggravated polarisation and has often found itself paralysed.

The 2019 presidential election, due in April 2019, has been postponed twice, to July and now to September 28th, 2019. This may have been pushed by the U.S. to give time to Mr. Khalilzad for his talks, but any further postponement will not be accepted by the people in view of the eroding legitimacy of the NUG. It is important to note that parliamentary elections due in 2015 were finally held in October 2018 even though the promised electoral reforms remained unimplemented.

- » Under the circumstances, the results have yet to be declared six months later, further delegitimising the process.

- » Experts opine that together with the deteriorating security situation, the prospects for a credible and legitimate election in September, 2019 seem remote.
- » This is why there is growing support among certain Afghan sections for an interim government. Such an arrangement would prepare the ground for fresh elections after constitutional amendments and electoral reforms using the Loya Jirga process (a grand assembly of tribal elders) over the next two years.
- » As a matter of fact, recently, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani opened a Loya Jirga, which is a grand assembly of tribal elders, to discuss the on-going peace talks between the Taliban and the United States.
- » Expectedly, this is strongly opposed by the more secular and liberal Afghan groups, including women, which see any such move as a step back from the democratic principles of the 2004 constitution.
- » The real risk is that as Western funding for salaries and equipment dries up and political legitimacy of Kabul erodes, the cohesiveness of the Afghan security forces will be impacted.

Elusive peace:

- » Just as there is no domestic consensus on the terms of reconciliation with the Taliban, there is a breakdown of regional consensus too.
- » Khalilzad met with his Russian and Chinese counterparts in Moscow where the three reiterated support for “an inclusive Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace process”.
- » However, there is no common understanding of what it means or which Afghans should own and lead the process.
- » The NUG feels abandoned and has blamed Mr. Khalilzad of betraying the Afghan government; the U.S. has demanded an apology from the Afghan NSA, Hamdullah Mohib, for his outburst against the U.S.

Viewpoints of Russia and China:

- » Moscow has its own format for talks and is convinced that the U.S.-backed experiment of the NUG needs to end — the sooner the better.
- » Chinese interest is primarily with securing its Xinjiang province and the Belt and Road Initiative projects in the region.

The Pakistan Factor:

- » Pakistan is once again centre-stage as the country with maximum leverage.
- » To demonstrate its support, Pakistan released Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, a leader and founder of the Taliban, after keeping him in custody for nearly nine years.
- » Ironically, he was picked up because he had opened direct talks with the Karzai government a decade ago and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) was furious when it learnt about it.

- » The ISI's investment in providing safe haven to the Taliban for 18 years is finally paying off as the U.S. negotiates its exit while the Taliban negotiate their return.
- » A sense of triumphalism was visible in Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's recent statement suggesting the formation of an interim government in Kabul to overcome the hurdles in the Doha talks provoking a furious backlash from Afghanistan from the government and the opposition figures. Even Mr. Khalilzad dubbed the statement as 'inappropriate'.
- » Pakistan has since backtracked but it shows that old habits die hard.
- » Even without getting into details of why the post-Bonn order in Afghanistan is fraying, there is agreement that peace in Afghanistan cannot be restored by military action.
- » It is also clear that a prolonged U.S. military presence is not an answer.
- » The problem is that a U.S. withdrawal will end the U.S. war in Afghanistan but without a domestic and regional consensus, it will not bring peace to Afghanistan.
- » Unfortunately, today there are no good options in Afghanistan.

Conclusion:

- » It is also clear that a prolonged U.S. military presence is not an answer.
- » The problem is that a U.S. withdrawal will end the U.S. war in Afghanistan but without a domestic and regional consensus, it will not bring peace to Afghanistan.
- » Sadly, today there are no good options in Afghanistan.