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1.INDIAN SOCIETY & POLITY

J &K RESERVATION (SECOND AMENDMENT) BILL

Why in News?

- Cabinet has approved J&K Reservation (Second Amendment) Bill to provide 10 percent reservation to the poor in higher education and government jobs.

Highlights:

- The bill will pave the way for the extension of 10 percent reservation for the poor in educational institutes and government offices of Jammu and Kashmir.
- The 10 percent reservation for the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) will be in addition to the existing reservations in the state.

Background:

- The Supreme Court had earlier refused to order a stay on the government's decision to grant 10 percent quota to economically weaker sections in jobs and admissions. The court had, however, agreed to examine the validity of the law and issued a notice to the Centre on the pleas.
- The Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha passed the reservation bill on January 8 and 9 respectively and it was later signed by President Ram Nath Kovind.

Extension of Reservation:

- The Act provides for the reservation in appointment and promotions in certain state government posts to persons belonging to socially and educationally backward classes.
- It defines socially and educationally backward classes to include persons living in areas adjoining the Actual Line of Control.
- The Bill amends this to include those persons living in areas adjoining the International Border, within the ambit of this reservation.
- Further, the Act states that any person who has been appointed on the basis of residence in an area adjoining the Line of Control must serve in such areas for at least seven years.
- The Bill extends this condition to persons living in areas adjoining the International Border as well.

Exclusion from Reservation:

- The Act states that any person whose annual income exceeds three lakh rupees or other amounts as notified by the state government, would not be included within socially and educationally backward classes. However, this exclusion does not apply to persons living in areas adjoining the Actual Line of Control.
- The Bill states that in addition, this exclusion will not apply to persons living in areas adjoining the International Border also.

BYE ELECTIONS TO THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCILS

Why in News?

- There are casual vacancies created in the Legislative Council of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

Casual Vacancy:

- When the seat of a member elected to a legislative house becomes vacant, due to resignation, death, etc. Then this causes casual vacancy and a bye-election is held within six months from the date of the occurrence of the vacancy.

Legislative Councils:

- Our constitution does not force a bicameral legislature on states.
- It gives states the option of having a second House. As of today, seven states have Legislative Councils. These are Jammu and Kashmir, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.
- Under Article 169 of the constitution, Parliament may by law create or abolish the second chamber in a state if the Legislative Assembly of that state passes a resolution to that effect by a special majority.

Election to Legislative Councils:

- Membership may vary, but the Legislative Council must not have more than a third of the total membership of the Assembly of that state, and in no case fewer than 40 members.
- The exception is J&K, where the Legislative Council has 36 members vide Section 50 of the constitution of the state.
- About 1/3rd of members are elected by members of the Assembly
- another 1/3rd by electorates consisting of members of municipalities, district boards and other local authorities in the state
- 1/12th by an electorate consisting of teachers and 1/12th by registered graduates
- The remaining members are nominated by the Governor from among those who have distinguished themselves in literature, science, art, the cooperative movement, and social service. Legislative Councils are permanent Houses, and like Rajya Sabha, one-third of their members retire every two years.

WATER STRESS INDEX

Why in News?

- The sub-national Water Stress Index is formulated by London-based risk analytics firm Verisk Maple croft.
- It lists India as the 46th highest risk country in the world.

Water Stress Index:

- 11 of India's 20 largest cities face an 'extreme risk' of water stress and seven are in the 'high risk' category.
- According to the index, Delhi, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Nashik, Jaipur, Ahmedabad and Indore are among the cities facing 'extreme risk'.
- The index measures the water consumption rates of households, industries and farm sectors and the available resources in rivers, lakes and streams.

Other Indian Cities at Risk:

- According to the report the average population growth rate among the 11 extreme risk cities is 49%; more than 127 million people will call them home by 2035.
- The UN estimates that Delhi's population will grow from 28 million people to above 43 million by 2035, a 52% rise while Chennai will grow by 47% to top 15 million over the same period.
- The study says Chennai is the tip of the iceberg for India's water stressed cities.

PARLIAMENT PASSES PROTECTION OF CHILDREN FROM SEXUAL OFFENCES (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2019

Why in News?

- Members of the Lok Sabha have passed the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill, 2019, providing for the death penalty for aggravated sexual assault on children.
- The Bill amends Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), 2012 which provides legal framework to protect children from offences such as sexual assault, sexual harassment, and pornography.

Features of Bill:

- **Penetrative Sexual Assault:** The bill increases minimum punishment for this offence from 7 years to 10 years. It also provides for with imprisonment between 20 years to life, with fine if person commits penetrative sexual assault on child below age of 16 years.
- **Aggravated Penetrative Sexual Assault:** The Bill adds two more grounds to definition of aggravated penetrative sexual assault. These include: (i) assault resulting in death of child and (ii) assault committed during natural calamity or in any similar situations of violence. It also increases minimum punishment from 10 years to 20 years, and maximum punishment to death penalty.
- **Aggravated Sexual Assault:** The Bill adds two more offences to definition of aggravated sexual assault. These include: (i) assault committed during natural calamity and

(ii) administrating or help in administering any chemical substance or any hormone to child for the purpose of attaining early sexual maturity.

- **Child Pornography:** The Bill defines child pornography as any visual depiction of sexually explicit conduct that involves child such as photograph, video, digital or even computer-generated image indistinguishable from actual child. It also enhances punishments for certain offences related to child pornography.

- **Storage of Pornographic Material:** It increases punishment for storage of pornographic material with imprisonment between three to five years, or fine, or both. In addition, it also adds two other offences for storage of pornographic material involving children.

- These include: (i) transmitting, displaying, distributing such material except for the purpose of reporting it and (ii) failing to destroy or delete or report pornographic material involving child.

RESOLUTION TO REPEAL ARTICLE 370 OF THE CONSTITUTION

Why in News?

- Union Minister for Home Affairs, Shri Amit Shah, introduced two bills and two resolutions regarding Jammu & Kashmir (Js&K)

Bills and Resolutions:

- Constitution (Application to Jammu & Kashmir) Order, 2019 {Ref. Article 370(1) of Constitution of India} – issued by President of India to supersede the 1954 order related to Article 370.

- Resolution for Repeal of Article 370 of the Constitution of India {Ref. Article 370 (3)}

- Jammu & Kashmir (Reorganisation) Bill, 2019 {Ref. Article 3 of Constitution of India}

- Jammu & Kashmir Reservation (2nd Amendment) Bill, 2019

Significance:

- Announcing a path-breaking decision by the Government, the Government is moving a resolution which would repeal the provisions under Article 370 of the Constitution of India, which granted a special status to the state of J&K.

- The provisions of Article 370 would cease to exist from the date President of India issues a notification in this regard, after the recommendation of the Parliament.

- Under Article 370(3), there is a provision that President, on the recommendation of the Parliament, has the power to amend or cease the implementation of article 370, through a public notification.

- Consequently, the Constitution of India would get applicable to J&K, on par with other states/UTs of the country.

RAJYA SABHA CLEARS 32 BILLS IN 35 SITTINGS IN A SINGLE SESSION

Why in News?

- The Upper House passed 32 Bills in the Budget session, making it the best performance in the past 17 years.

Highlights:

- The productivity of the Upper House has been under criticism for the low number of bills being passed.
- With 35 sittings, the 249th session was the longest in the past 14 years.
- A total duration of 195 hours was spent on transacting different kinds of business.
- During the past five sessions, only a total of 173 hours and 33 minutes were spent on transacting business. A total of 151 starred questions orally answered, the best in last 14 years.
- In all, 194 special mentions and 326 Zero Hour mentions (the best in the past 20 years) were made.

Other Good Precedents that Happened:

- The Council of States stood up for the interests of the States in a number of bills.
- The amendment made by the House to the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Bill, by changing the initial provision of 'Consultations with the States' to 'Concurrence of the States'.
- There was an attempt to ensure a substantially enhanced representation of the States by passing an amendment to the National Medical Commission Bill.
- The house gained about 28 hours by sitting beyond the scheduled hours.
- The House lost 19 hours and 12 minutes due to disruptions.
- Proper scrutiny of several bills were ignored by not handing them over to Standing Committees.

ARTICLE 371 SPECIAL PROVISIONS FOR OTHER STATES

Why in News?

- The central government has revoked the 'special status' granted to Jammu and Kashmir by the Constitution. However, a range of "special provisions" for as many as 11 other states continue to be part of the Constitution.

Highlights:

- Part XXI of the Constitution, 'Temporary, Transitional and Special Provisions', includes, apart from Article 370 (Temporary Provisions with respect to the State of Jammu and Kashmir) Articles 371, 371A, 371B, 371C, 371D, 371E, 371F, 371G, 371H, and 371J, which define special provisions with regard to other states of the Indian Union.

- All these provisions take into account the special circumstances of individual states, and lay down a wide range of specific safeguards that are deemed important for these states.
- In these range of Articles from 371 to 371J, Article 371I, which deals with Goa, stands out in the sense that it does not include any provision that can be deemed "special". Article 371E, which deals with Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, too, is not that "special".
- Existence of the provisions described in Articles 371, 371A-H, and 371J shows that other princely states, too, negotiated the terms and conditions of their entry into the Union, or sought special constitutional protections in view of their unique needs and conditions.
- There is, however, one important difference between Articles 370 and 371 on the one hand, and Articles 371A-H and 371J on the other.
- Articles 370 and 371 have been part of the Constitution from the time of its commencement on January 26, 1950.
- Articles 371A-H and 371J, however, were incorporated into the Constitution by Parliament through amendments under Article 368. This Article describes the "power of Parliament to amend the Constitution and procedure therefor".

Maharashtra and Gujarat (Article 371):

- The Governor has a "special responsibility" to establish "separate development boards" for "Vidarbha, Marathwada, and the rest of Maharashtra", and Saurashtra and Kutch in Gujarat; ensure "equitable allocation of funds for developmental expenditure over the said areas", and "equitable arrangement providing adequate facilities for technical education and vocational training, and adequate opportunities for employment" under the state government.

Nagaland (Article 371A, 13th Amendment Act, 1962):

- Parliament cannot legislate in matters of Naga religion or social practices, the Naga customary law and procedure, administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Naga customary law, and ownership and transfer of land and its resources, without the concurrence of the Legislative Assembly of the state.
- This provision was inserted in the Constitution after a 16-point agreement between the Centre and the Naga People's Convention in 1960, which led to the creation of Nagaland in 1963.
- Also, there is a provision for a 35-member Regional Council for Tuensang district, which elects the Tuensang members in the Assembly. A member from the Tuensang district is Minister for Tuensang Affairs.
- The Governor has the final say on all Tuensang-related matters.

Assam (Article 371B, 22nd Amendment Act, 1969):

- The President of India may provide for the constitution and functions of a committee of the state Assembly consisting of members elected from the tribal areas of the state.

Manipur (Article 371C, 27th Amendment Act, 1971):

» The President of India may provide for the constitution and functions of a committee of elected members from the Hill areas of the state in the Assembly, and entrust "special responsibility" to the Governor to ensure its proper functioning. The Governor has to file a report every year on this subject to the President.

» Andhra Pradesh and Telangana (Article 371D, 32nd Amendment Act, 1973; substituted by the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014):

» The President must ensure "equitable opportunities and facilities" in "public employment and education to people from different parts of the state".

» He may require the state government to organise "any class or classes of posts in a civil service of, or any class or classes of civil posts under, the State into different local cadres for different parts of the State", and allot them.

» The President has similar powers vis-à-vis admissions in any university or state government-run educational institution. Also, he may provide for setting up of an administrative tribunal outside the jurisdiction of the High Court to deal with issues of appointment, allotment or promotion in state civil services.

» Article 371E allows for the establishment of a university in Andhra Pradesh by a law of Parliament. But this is not really a 'special provision' in the sense of the other provisions in this part of the Constitution.

Sikkim (Article 371F, 36th Amendment Act, 1975):

» The members of the Legislative Assembly of Sikkim shall elect the representative of Sikkim in the House of the People.

» To protect the rights and interests of various sections of the population of Sikkim, Parliament may provide for the number of seats in the Assembly, which may be filled only by candidates from those sections.

» The Governor shall have "special responsibility for peace and for an equitable arrangement for ensuring the social and economic advancement of different sections of the population". All earlier laws in territories that formed Sikkim shall continue, and any adaptation or modification shall not be questioned in any court.

Mizoram (Article 371G, 53rd Amendment Act, 1986):

» This provision lays down that Parliament cannot make laws on "religious or social practices of the Mizos, Mizo customary law and procedure, administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Mizo customary law, ownership and transfer of land unless the Legislative Assembly by a resolution so decides".

Arunachal Pradesh (Article 371H, 55th Amendment Act, 1986):

▸ The Governor has a special responsibility with regard to law and order, and "he shall, after consulting the Council of Ministers, exercise his individual judgment as to the action to be taken".

▸ Should a question arise over whether a particular matter is one in which the Governor is "required to act in the exercise of his individual judgment, the decision of the Governor in his discretion shall be final", and "shall not be called in question…"

Karnataka (Article 371J, 98th Amendment Act, 2012):

▸ There is a provision for the establishment of a separate development board for the Hyderabad-Karnataka region, the working of which will be reported annually to the Assembly.

▸ There shall be "equitable allocation of funds for developmental expenditure over the said region", and "equitable opportunities and facilities" for people of this region in government jobs and education.

▸ An order can be made to provide for reservation "of a proportion" of seats and jobs in educational and vocational training institutions and state government organisations respectively in the Hyderabad-Karnataka region for individuals who belong to that region by birth or domicile.

RS CLEARS BILL TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF JUDGES IN THE SUPREME COURT

Why in News?

▸ The Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill, 2019 was passed by the Rajya Sabha.

Highlights:

▸ The Bill amends the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act, 1956.

▸ The Act fixes the maximum number of judges in the Supreme Court at 30 judges (excluding the Chief Justice of India).

▸ The Bill increases this number from 30 to 33.

▸ Lok Sabha had already passed the Bill.

Number of Judges in the Supreme Court:

▸ Initially the Constitution of India provided for a supreme court with a chief justice and 7 judges.

▸ In the early years, a full bench of the Supreme Court sat together to hear the cases presented before them.

- As the work of the court increased and cases began to accumulate, parliament increased the number of Judges (including the CJI) from the original 8 in 1950 to 11 in 1956, 14 in 1960, 18 in 1978, 26 in 1986 and 31 in 2009.

Eligibility to become a Judge of the Supreme Court:

- Article 124 of the constitution describes the following qualifications for a Judge of the Supreme Court:
- A citizen of India not exceeding 65 years age.
- He must be a judge of one high court or more (continuously), for at least five years, or
- An advocate there, for at least ten years, or
- A distinguished jurist, in the opinion of the President

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLES/ WORLD ADIVASI DAY

Why in News?

- The International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples is observed on 9 August each year to protect the rights of the world's indigenous population.

Highlights:

- This event also recognizes the achievements and contributions that indigenous people make to improve world issues such as environmental protection.
- It was first pronounced by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1994.
- The day is observed as the international day of Indigenous people across the world and World Adivasi Day in India, to promote and safeguard the interest, culture, customs and traditions of Indigenous people.
- There are 370 million indigenous people in the world.
- In Indian the indigenous people are recognised constitutionally as scheduled tribes under Article 342 and the word 'scheduled tribe' is defined in Art 366(25) of the of Indian Constitution.
- The forums like world tribals day have to be used as platform for intellectual debates, discussions, policy advises, vision and resolutions.
- There is a need to take up massive awareness creation activities among the tribal to make them realise their development potential.

AADI MAHOTSAV READY FOR A START AT Leh-Ladakh

Why in News?

- Aadi Mahotsav (National Tribal Festival) is all set for a colourful start on 17th August, 2019 in Leh-Ladakh.

Highlights:

- Aadi Mahotsav is a joint initiative of Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India & Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED).

- The theme of the festival is : "A celebration of the spirit of Tribal Craft, Culture and Commerce". The event will see around 160 Tribal artisans from more than 20 states across the country, actively participating and showcasing their masterpieces.

- The product range will comprise of Tribal Textiles from Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Odisha, West Bengal; Tribal Jewellery from Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and North East; Tribal Paintings like Gond art from Madhya Pradesh, Warli art from Maharashtra; Metal craft from Chhattisgarh; Black pottery from Manipur, and Naturals and Organic products from Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka.

Mahotsav will also cover to Identify:

- Food and Forest Produces, which can be processed, value added and marketed under the Van Dhan Scheme of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

- Artisans and master craftsmen and women of Ladakh for empanelling them as suppliers of TRIBES India.

Showcasing Digital Skills of the Tribes:

- The Mahotsav apart from exotic handicrafts will also show case the electronic and digital skills of the tribals as a special attraction.

- In line with the national aspiration to go cashless, for the first time the tribal artisans will be accepting payment through major credit/debit cards for which Point of Sale (POS) machines are provided. The Mahotsav will display the rich digital commerce and e-commerce being promoted by Tribes India.

- TRIBES India proudly informs the signing of MOUs with Amazon, Snapdeal, Flipkart, PayTM and GEM, a Government of India Portal for e-commerce of the tribal products.

- TRIBES India has also has its own e-com portal tribesindia.com.

Ladakhi folk dances:

- The Troupes will perform
- **Jabro Dance:** a nomadic dance and song of people inhabiting eastern Ladakh.
- **Spawo Dance:** a heroic song and dance associated with a legendary hero of Himalayan region called K'sar.

MAHARSHI BADRAYAN VYAS SAMMAN

Why in News?

- The President of India has awarded this year's Maharshi Badrayan Vyas Samman to various dignitaries.

Highlights:

- The distinction is conferred on persons once a year on the Independence Day (15 August) in recognition of their substantial contribution in the field of Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, Pali, Prakrit, Classical Oriya, Classical Kannada, Classical Telugu and Classical Malayalam.
- The award introduced in the year 2002, is given to selected young scholars in the age group of 30 to 45 years.
- The Presidential award carries a certificate of honour, a memento and a onetime cash prize of Rs.1 lakh.

Maharshi Badrayan Vyas:

- Badarayana was an Indian philosopher about whom almost no personal details are reliably known. He wrote the foundational philosophical treatise Vedanta school of philosophy.
- Badarayana is regarded as having written the basic text of the Vedanta system, the Vedāntasūtra a.k.a. Brahmasūtra. He is thus considered the founder of the Vedānta system of philosophy.
- The date of Badarayana and his Brahma Sutras is uncertain. Different scholars have dated the Brahma Sutras variously from 500 BCE to 450 BCE.

PHUPGAON

Why in News?

- The recent excavation carried out by Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) at Maharashtra's Phupgaon has revealed evidence of an Iron Age settlement in the Vidarbha region. The excavation at the site was taken up between December, 2018 and March, 2019.

Excavation & Site:

- The site is situated in the vast meander of the river Purna, a major tributary of Tapi, which used to be a perennial river, but at present is completely dried-up due to the dam construction in the upper stream.
- The site is situated about 20 m away from the river bed and its one-third portion has been subjected to frequent erosion during the heavy water current in the earlier times.
- The excavation exposed antiquities like beads of agate-carnelian, jasper, quartz and agate were collected in large quantity. Iron, Copper objects have also been collected from all the trenches. Large quantity of graffiti marks had been observed on the potsherds.

- The river Purna, a major tributary of the river Tapi, has witnessed several archaeological sites on its either side of the banks.
- A number of cultural remains in the form of various antiquities and pottery have unraveled the nature of those settlements ranging from Paleolithic to late medieval period.

Significance:

- The excavation is significant as it indicates the presence of sedentary (permanent) settlement, belonging to the Iron Age of Vidarbha.
- The settlement comes under the category of a small village with evidence of a small agro-pastoral community with evidences of craftsmanship in the form of beads of agate-carnelian, jasper, quartz and also usage of other artefacts like hopscotch, wheel and barrel shaped beads. The finding from Phupgaon indicates its contemporaneity with other Iron Age settlements of Vidarbha like Naikund, Mahurjhari, Bhagimori and Thakalkat.
- ASI is of the view that the excavation at Phupgaon has provided important insights into Iron Age people of Purna river basin. Chronologically, the site could be placed between 7th C BCE and 4th C BCE.
- However, further detailed study of the site with chronometric dating is being taken up to reveal further aspects of Iron Age of Vidarbha.

2. GOVERNANCE

TechEx 2019

Why in News?

▸ Union Human Resource Development Minister, Shri Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' inaugurated theTechEx – technology exhibition at IIT Delhi

TechEx:

▸ TechEx was organized to demonstrate products and prototypes developed under the two flagship schemes of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) namely IMPacting Research, INnovation and Technology (IMPRINT) and UchhatarAvishkar Yojana (UAY).

▸ TechEx is a unique effort, which offers an excellent platform to the researchers to showcase their work and inspire them to do their best in their respective domains.

▸ some prominent among the exhibits were non-invasive and low-cost rapid TB diagnostics, artificial pancreas for closed loop blood glucose control of type-I diabetic patients, affordable cancer diagnosis/treatment, electric vehicle charger, etc.

IMPRINT Scheme:

▸ MPRINT scheme was launched in November, 2015 with a view to providing solutions to the most relevant engineering challenges by translating knowledge into viable technology (products or processes) in 10 selected technology domains.

▸ The domains are namely health care, energy, sustainable habitat, nano-technology hardware, water resources and river systems, advanced materials, Information and Communication Technology, manufacturing, security and defence, and environmental science and climate change.

UchhatarAvishkar Yojana (UAY):

▸ UchhatarAvishkar Yojana (UAY) was announced in 2015 with a view to promoting innovation of a higher order that directly impacts the needs of the Industry and thereby improves the competitive edge of Indian manufacturing.

▸ UAY projects are funded jointly by MHRD, participating Ministries and the Industry

▸ The scheme focusses on a viable industry-academic collaboration where industry shares a part of the cost of research.

SANKALP SCHEME

Why in News?

- Minister of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship has reviewed the World Bank loan assisted "Skills Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Promotion (SANKALP) programme.

Highlights:

- All 36 States/ UTs across country have submitted their consent for participation in SANKALP.
- In addition to these State grants of Rs 10 lakh each also released to 117 aspirational districts under Aspirational Skilling Abhiyaan.
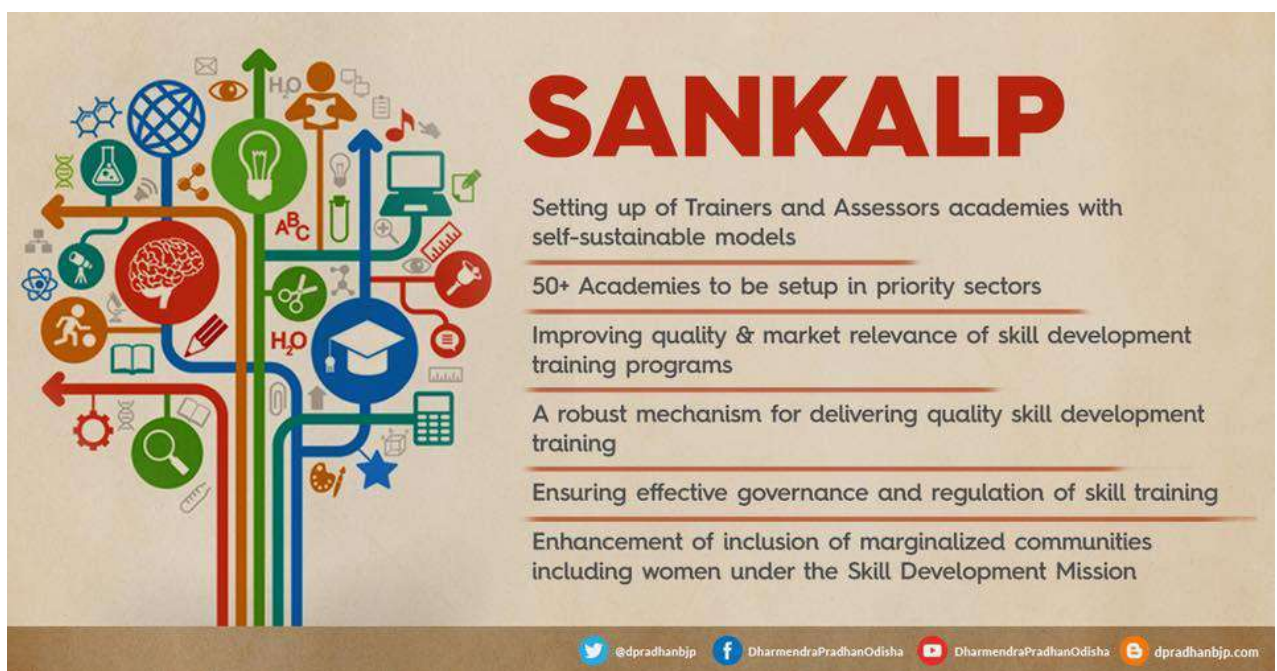
SANKALP Scheme:

- SANKALP is an outcome-oriented centrally sponsored programme of Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE) with a special focus on decentralized planning and quality improvement.
- The project is implemented with the support of World Bank monetarily in line with the objectives of National Skills Development Mission (NSDM).
- It focuses on the overall skilling ecosystem covering both Central & State agencies.
- Under SANKALP four key result areas have been identified viz:
- Institutional Strengthening (at National, State & District level)
- Quality Assurance Quality Assurance of skill development programs
- Inclusion of marginalized population in skill development and
- Expanding Skills through Public Private Partnerships (PPPs)

NATIONAL POPULATION REGISTER (NPR)

Why in News?

⟫ The government has decided to prepare a National Population Register (NPR) by September 2020 to lay the foundation for rolling out a citizens' register across the country.

Highlights:

⟫ NPR is different from both the decennial census and the NRC.

⟫ It will be in pursuance of the Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003.

⟫ The objective of the NPR is to create a comprehensive identity database of every usual resident in the country. It is mandatory for every usual resident of India to register in the NPR.

⟫ The decision exempts the state of Assam from NPR-2020.

⟫ For the purpose of the NPR, a usual resident is defined as a person who has resided in a local area for six months or more or a person who intends to reside in that area for the next six months or more. The database would contain demographic as well as biometric particulars.

⟫ It will be the next round of recording biometric and family tree details of Indian citizens.

⟫ The exercise was conducted earlier in two phases in 2010 and 2015.

⟫ Earlier, the roll out of NPR had slowed down due to overlapping with that of Aadhaar.

IMPRINT & UAY

Why in News?

⟫ Union Human Resource Development Minister, Shri Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' inaugurated the TechEx – technology exhibition at IIT Delhi

Tech Ex:

⟫ TechEx was organized to demonstrate products and prototypes developed under the two flagship schemes of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) namely IMPacting Research, INnovation and Technology (IMPRINT) and UchhatarAvishkar Yojana (UAY).

⟫ TechEx is a unique effort, which offers an excellent platform to the researchers to showcase their work and inspire them to do their best in their respective domains.

IMPRINT:

⟫ IMPRINT scheme was launched in November, 2015 with a view to providing solutions to the most relevant engineering challenges by translating knowledge into viable technology (products or processes) in 10 selected technology domains, namely health care, energy, sustainable habitat, nano-technology hardware, water resources and river systems, advanced materials, Information and Communication Technology, manufacturing, security and defence, and environmental science and climate change.

- 142 projects at a total cost of Rs.313.30 cr. were approved under the IMPRINT-I. These projects are funded jointly by MHRD and the participating Ministry in the ratio of 50:50.

UAY:

- UchhatarAvishkar Yojana (UAY) was announced on October 6, 2015 with a view to promoting innovation of a higher order that directly impacts the needs of the Industry and thereby improves the competitive edge of Indian manufacturing.
- A total of 142 projects, including 83 in Phase-I and 59 in Phase-II) have been approved under UAY at a total cost of Rs.388.86 cr.
- UAY projects are funded jointly by MHRD, participating Ministries and the Industry in the ratio of 50:25:25.
- The scheme focusses on a viable industry-academic collaboration where industry shares a part of the cost of research.

BIOMETRIC TOKEN SYSTEM

Why in News?

- The Western and Central Railways have introduced a new Biometric Token System (BTS) that seeks to streamline the process of boarding unreserved coaches.

Biometric Token System (BTS):

- The Western and Central Railways have introduced a new system by which passengers travelling in the general coach, where seats are not reserved, are given a token roughly three hours before the train's departure.
- These tokens are given on a first-come, first-served basis, and carry a serial number on them, which governs the order in which passengers will board the train.
- Passengers with valid tickets are required to place their fingers on a scanner, and are issued a token with a serial number against their biometric data.
- Passengers must queue up and enter the compartment in the order of their serial numbers.
- The tokens are issued three hours before a train's departure. The use of biometrics cuts out the touts, and helps genuine passengers.

Why Such Move?

- Boarding 'general' compartments — in which seating is not reserved — especially in long-distance trains leaving major cities, has always been an ordeal for passengers.
- The massive mismatch between the numbers of travellers and the available seats drives people to queue up on platforms up to 10 hours in advance.
- Chaos at the time of boarding has led to stampedes and even deaths in the past.
- Gangs of touts 'reserve' seats for a price, and those who can't pay suffer.

Significance:

- The use of biometrics (fingerprint) rules out touts and ensures only bonafide travellers receive a token.
- The data (captured in the machines) will be used to analyse the pattern of crowds and the patronage of trains.
- In case of a mishap, officials will have details of the passengers, and with the help of this (biometric information) they can prevent black marketing of unreserved tickets.

NATIONAL HANDLOOM DAY

Why in News?

- The 5th National Handloom Day will be celebrated tomorrow across the country. Union Minister of Textiles and Women and Child Development, SmritiZubinIrani, will preside over a function at VigyanBhawan in New Delhi to mark the occasion.

Significance:

- The main event will be held in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. Bhubaneswar has been chosen as the venue for the main event due to its rich tradition of Handlooms.
- More than fifty percent of total weavers population of India resides in Eastern and North Eastern Regions and most of them are women.
- The prime objective of holding the National Handloom Day in Bhubaneswar is to empower women and girls.
- National Handloom Day seeks to focus on the contribution of handloom to the socio-economic development of the country and also increase the income of weavers.
- August 7 was chosen as the National Handloom Day to commemorate the Swadeshi Movement which was launched on this day in 1905 in Calcutta Town Hall to protest against the partition of Bengal by the British Government.
- The movement had aimed at reviving domestic products and production processes.

NHRC NATIONAL LEVEL REVIEW MEETING ON MENTAL HEALTH

Why in News?

- A day-long NHRC National Level Review Meeting on Mental Health concluded at India International centre, New Delhi, highlighting several issues to bridge the gap between the legislation and its implementation.
- It was necessary to evaluate the ground realities post-implementation of Mental Healthcare Act, 2017.

Mental Healthcare Act, 2017.:

- This ensures every person shall have a right to access mental health care and treatment from mental health services run or funded by the appropriate government.
- The act assures free treatment for such persons if they are homeless or belong to Below Poverty Line, even if they do not possess a BPL card.
- Every person with mental illness shall have a right to live with dignity and there shall be no discrimination on any basis including gender, sex, sexual orientation, religion, culture, caste, social or political beliefs, class or disability.
- A person with mental illness shall have the right to confidentiality in respect of his mental health, mental healthcare, treatment and physical healthcare.
- A person who attempts suicide shall be presumed to be suffering from mental illness at that time and will not be punished under the Indian Penal Code.
- The government shall have a duty to provide care, treatment and rehabilitation to a person, having severe stress and who attempted to commit suicide, to reduce the risk of recurrence of attempt to commit suicide.

SAMAGRA SHIKSHA-JAL SURAKSHA' DRIVE - WATER CONSERVATION

Why in News?

- Union HRD Minister Shri Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' will launch 'Samagra Shiksha-Jal Suraksha' drive to create awareness about Water Conservation among all school students in the country.

Five Major Objectives:

- To educate students learn about conservation of water
- To sensitize Students about the impact of scarcity of water
- To empower Students to learn to protect the natural sources of water
- To help every Student to save at least one litre of water per day
- To encourage Students towards judicious use and minimum wastage of water at home and school level

Highlights:

- It is a time bound campaign with a mission mode approach.
- This concept of water conservation is essential for students so that they can understand the importance of water and how it is shaping their lives meaningfully, thereby enabling them to participate in water conservation activities in their day to day lives.

➤ MHRD has launched the 'Samagra Shiksha-Jal Suraksha' drive to promote water conservation activities for School Students, so that they can become competent, conscientious and committed water citizens of our nation.

PM Kisan Maan Dhan Yojana

Why in News?

➤ Registration for the PM Kisan Maan Dhan Yojana begins.

Scheme Highlights:

➤ It aims to improve the lives of small and marginal farmers of the country.

➤ The scheme is voluntary and contributory for farmers in the entry age group of 18 to 40 years.

➤ A monthly pension of Rs. 3000/– will be provided to them on attaining the age of 60 years.

➤ The farmers will have to make a monthly contribution of Rs.55 to Rs.200, depending on their age of entry, in the Pension Fund till they reach the retirement date i.e. the age of 60 years.

➤ The Central Government will also make an equal contribution of the same amount in the pension fund.

➤ The spouse is also eligible to get a separate pension of Rs.3000/- upon making separate contributions to the Fund.

➤ The Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) shall be the Pension Fund Manager and responsible for Pension pay out.

➤ In case of death of the farmer before retirement date, the spouse may continue in the scheme by paying the remaining contributions till the remaining age of the deceased farmer.

➤ If the spouse does not wish to continue, the total contribution made by the farmer along with interest will be paid to the spouse.

➤ If there is no spouse, then total contribution along with interest will be paid to the nominee.

➤ If the farmer dies after the retirement date, the spouse will receive 50% of the pension as Family Pension. After the death of both the farmer and the spouse, the accumulated corpus shall be credited back to the Pension Fund.

➤ The beneficiaries may opt voluntarily to exit the Scheme after a minimum period of 5 years of regular contributions.

➤ On exit, their entire contribution shall be returned by LIC with an interest equivalent to prevailing saving bank rates.

➤ The farmers, who are also beneficiaries of PM-Kisan Scheme, will have the option to allow their contribution debited from the benefit of that Scheme directly.

➤ In case of default in making regular contributions, the beneficiaries are allowed to regularize the contributions by paying the outstanding dues along with prescribed interest.

MUKHYA MANTRI KRISHI ASHIRWAD YOJNA

Why in News?

▸ The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu has called for introducing structural reforms in the agricultural sector along with financial assistance schemes like Direct Benefit Transfer to make agriculture profitable and sustainable.

▸ He inaugurated the Mukhya Mantri Krishi Ashirwad Yojna of the Jharkhand Government.

Highlights:

▸ Under the scheme, all the small and marginal farmers of the state, who have arable land up to a maximum of 5 acres, will be given a grant-in-aid at the rate of Rs. 5000 / – per acre per year, which will also reduce their dependence on loans.

▸ This amount would be given in two installments through Direct Benefit Transfer to the beneficiary's bank account.

▸ This is in addition to PM Kisan Nidhi Yojana under which each small & marginal farmer's family having combined landholding/ ownership of up to two hectares is paid Rs. 6, 000 per year.

▸ Direct Benefit Transfer would eliminate middlemen and ensure that every penny of the financial assistance given by the government reaches the beneficiaries.

▸ Government of India has taken a firm resolve to double the income of farmers by 2022.

SWACHH SURVEKSHAN 2020

Why in News?

▸ Shri Hardeep Singh Puri, Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Housing & Urban Affairs launched the Swachh Survekshan 2020 (SS 2020), the fifth edition of the annual cleanliness survey conducted by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA).

Focus areas of Swachh Survekshan 2020:

1. Collect segregated waste and maintain till processing site
2. Utilising capacity of wet waste processing facilities
3. Treat and reuse waste water
4. Curtail solid waste-based air pollution
5. Uplift social condition of informal waste pickers
6. Promote procurement through GeM
7. Assess Ganga Towns separately to accelerate action
8. Engage technology driven Monitoring

How is Swachh Survekshan League 2020 different.
...Ek kadam sustainability ki ore

Swachh Survekshan 2019	Swachh Survekshan League2020
Annual Survey : Conducted once a year ,on cumulative progress made by the ULBs	**Quarterly Survey :** Continuous assessment through quarterly survey followed by final assessment in 2020
Data capture through Online MIS with **multiple data fields** for Service Level Progress and Certifications	**Integrated tech enabled data capture** for reliable data driven analytics and decision making
Citizen Centric Engagement through indicators and feedback i.e. citizens can directly contribute to the city's performance	**Citizens Validation** of the progress claimed by ULB to ensure continuous and sustained progress.
Sustainability through Star Rating for Garbage Free City Protocol and ODF, ODF+ and ODF++ protocols for sustainable sanitation	**Institutionalizing Sustainability** through Garbage Free City, ODF++ and Water+ protocols for holistic solid & liquid waste management and environmental sustainability

from 'Sustainability' to 'Institutionalizing Swachhata'

NATIONAL YOUTH AWARDS ON INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY

Why in News?

⍈ Kiren Rijiju, the Union Minister for Youth Affairs & Sports conferred the National Youth Awards on the occasion of International Youth Day on 12th August 2019.

Highlights:

⍈ The award has been conferred on individuals (aged between 15-29 years) and organizations for their contribution to areas of social service and development like health, community service, etc.

⍈ The Objective of the award is to encourage young people to develop responsibility to the community, inspire them towards national development and social service and improve their own personal potential as good citizens.

⍈ During the event, Kiren Rijiju also inaugurated a Photo Exhibition on "China through Eyes of Indian Youth - 2019" which showed a collection of photos taken by youth delegates who participated in the Youth Exchange Program to China.

⍈ A cash prize of Rs. 50,000/-, a medal and, a certificate is given to individuals, a youth organization includes a medal, a certificate and a cash prize of Rs. 2,00,000/-.

⍈ 3 awards were also given to individuals for the Photo Exhibition on "China through Eyes of Indian Youth - 2019".

THE CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT 2019

Why in News?

⍈ The Consumer Protection Act 2019 will be more holistic and stringent once the rules are framed to protect the interest of the Consumer.

Definition of Consumer:

➤ A consumer is defined as a person who buys any good or avails a service for a consideration.

➤ It does not include a person who obtains a good for resale or a good or service for commercial purpose.

➤ It covers transactions through all modes including offline, and online through electronic means, teleshopping, multi-level marketing or direct selling.

Rights of Consumers:

1. Be protected against the marketing of goods and services which are hazardous to life and property;

2. Be informed of the quality, quantity, potency, purity, standard and price of goods or services;

3. Be assured of access to a variety of goods or services at competitive prices; and

4. Seek redressal against unfair or restrictive trade practice

Central Consumer Protection Authority:

➤ The central government will set up a Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) to promote, protect and enforce the rights of consumers.

➤ It will regulate matters related to violation of consumer rights, unfair trade practices, and misleading advertisements. The CCPA will have an investigation wing, headed by a Director-General, which may conduct an inquiry or investigation into such violations.

➤ CCPA will carry out the following functions, including:

1. Inquiring into violations of consumer rights, investigating and launching prosecution at the appropriate forum;

2. Passing orders to recall goods or withdraw services that are hazardous, reimbursement of the price paid, and discontinuation of the unfair trade practices, as defined in the Bill;

3. Issuing directions to the concerned trader/ manufacturer/ endorser/ advertiser/ publisher to either discontinue a false or misleading advertisement, or modify it;

4. Imposing penalties, and;

5. Issuing safety notices to consumers against unsafe goods and services.

Penalties for Misleading Advertisement:

➤ The CCPA may impose a penalty on a manufacturer or an endorser of up to Rs 10 lakh and imprisonment for up to two years for a false or misleading advertisement. In case of a subsequent offence, the fine may extend to Rs 50 lakh and imprisonment of up to five years.

➤ CCPA can also prohibit the endorser of a misleading advertisement from endorsing that particular product or service for a period of up to one year. For every subsequent offence, the period of prohibition may extend to three years. However, there are certain exceptions when an endorser will not be held liable for such a penalty.

- ◈ Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission:
- ◈ Consumer Disputes Redressal Commissions (CDRCs) will be set up at the district, state, and national levels. A consumer can file a complaint with CDRCs in relation to:
    1. Unfair or restrictive trade practices;
    2. Defective goods or services;
    3. Overcharging or deceptive charging; and
    4. The offering of goods or services for sale which may be hazardous to life and safety.
- ◈ Complaints against an unfair contract can be filed with only the State and National Appeals from a District CDRC will be heard by the State CDRC. Appeals from the State CDRC will be heard by the National CDRC. Final appeal will lie before the Supreme Court.

Jurisdiction of CDRCs:

- ◈ The District CDRC will entertain complaints where the value of goods and services does not exceed Rs one crore.
- ◈ The State CDRC will entertain complaints when the value is more than Rs one crore but does not exceed Rs 10 crore. Complaints with value of goods and services over Rs 10 crore will be entertained by the National CDRC.

Product liability:

- ◈ Product liability means the liability of a product manufacturer, service provider or seller to compensate a consumer for any harm or injury caused by a defective good or deficient service.
- ◈ To claim compensation, a consumer has to prove any one of the conditions for defect or deficiency, as given in the Bil.

PARTIAL CREDIT GUARANTEE OFFERED BY GOVERNMENT OF INDIA (GoI) TO PUBLIC SECTOR BANKS (PSBs) FOR PURCHASING HIGH-RATED POOLED ASSETS

Why in News?

- ◈ In pursuance of the announcement made in the Union Budget 2019-20 presented by the Union Minister of Finance & Corporate Affairs Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman, the Government has issued a scheme regarding partial credit guarantee on 10.8.2019.

Scheme Highlights:

- ◈ The Scheme would enable the public sector banks (PSBs) to purchase pooled assets of financially sound NBFCs amounting to Rs. one lakh crore.
- ◈ It is expected that this measure would provide liquidity to the NBFC Sector and, in turn, enable them to continue to play their role in meeting the financing requirements of the productive sectors of economy including MSME, retail and housing.

Details of the Scheme:

- **Name of the Scheme:** 'Partial Credit Guarantee offered by Government of India (GoI) to Public Sector Banks (PSBs) for purchasing high-rated pooled assets from financially sound Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs)/Housing Finance Companies (HFCs)'.
- **Objective:** To address temporary asset liability mismatches of otherwise solvent NBFCs/HFCs without having to resort to distress sale of their assets for meeting their commitments.
- **Validity of the scheme:** The window for one-time partial credit guarantee offered by GoI will open from the date of issuance of the Scheme by the Government for a period of six months, or till such date by which Rupees One lakh crore assets get purchased by banks, whichever is earlier.

DOCUMENT Identification Number (DIN)

Why in News?

- Every communication to be issued by the Income-Tax Department will now have a Document Identification Number (DIN). This intends to insure proper audit trail of such communication.

Document Identification Number:

- The CBDT has now laid down parameters specifying the manner in which any communication issued by any income-tax authority relating to assessment, appeals, orders, statutory or otherwise, exemptions, enquiry, investigation, verification of information, penalty, prosecution, rectification and approval to the assessee will be dealt with.
- All such communication issued on or after the 1st of October, 2019 shall carry a computer-generated Document Identification Number (DIN) duly quoted in the body of such communication.
- Any communication which is not in conformity with the prescribed guidelines shall be treated as invalid and shall be deemed to have never been issued".
- CBDT also specifies exceptional circumstances where communication may be issued manually, only after recording reasons in writing & with prior written approval of Chief Commissioner/Director General of Income-Tax concerned," the Income Tax Department tweeted on its official Twitter handle.
- The exceptional circumstances include situations where there are technical difficulties in generating/allotting/quoting the DIN or issuing the communication electronically or the PAN of the assessee is not available or is lying with a non-jurisdictional Assessing Officer due to delay in PAN migration.

COMPETITION LAW REVIEW COMMITTEE

Why in News?

- Shri Injeti Srinivas, Secretary (Corporate Affairs) presented the Report of the Competition Law Review Committee

Highlights:

- The Government constituted a Competition Law Review Committee on 1st October, 2018 to review the existing Competition law framework and make recommendations to further strengthen the framework to inter alia meet new economy challenges.
- The Committee was chaired by Shri Injeti Srinivas

Recommendations:

- Introduction of a 'Green Channel' for combination notifications to enable fast-paced regulatory approvals for vast majority of mergers and acquisitions that may have no major concerns regarding appreciable adverse effects on competition. The aim is to move towards disclosure-based regime with strict consequences for not providing accurate or complete information.
- Combinations arising out of the insolvency resolution process under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code will also be eligible for "Green Channel" approvals.
- Introducing a dedicated bench in NCLAT for hearing appeals under the Competition Act.
- Introduction of express provisions to identify 'hub and spoke' agreements as well as agreements that do not fit within typical horizontal or vertical anti-competitive structures to cover agreements related to business structures and models synonymous with new age markets.
- Additional enforcement mechanism of 'Settlement & Commitments" in the interests of speedier resolution of cases of anti-competitive conduct.
- Enabling provisions to prescribe necessary thresholds, inter alia, deal-value threshold for merger notifications.
- CCI to issue guidelines on imposition of penalty to ensure more transparency and faster decision making which will encourage compliance by businesses.
- Strengthening the governance structure of CCI with the introduction of a Governing Board to oversee advocacy and quasi-legislative functions, leaving adjudicatory functions to the Whole-time Members.
- Merging DG's Office with CCI as an 'Investigation Division' as it aids CCI in discharging an inquisitorial rather than adversarial mandate. However, functional autonomy must be protected.
- Opening of CCI offices at regional level to carry out non-adjudicatory functions such as research, advocacy etc. and interaction with State Governments and State regulators.

EC KICKS OFF DELIMITATION PROCESS

Why in News?

➤ The Election Commission (EC) held its first meeting for the delimitation exercise, necessitated under the new Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act.

What is Delimitation?

➤ The Delimitation commission or Boundary commission of India is a commission established by the Government of India under the provisions of the Delimitation Commission Act.

➤ The main task of the commission is redrawing the boundaries of the various assembly and Lok Sabha constituencies based on a recent census.

➤ The representation from each State is not changed during this exercise.

➤ However, the number of SC and ST seats in a state is changed in accordance with the census.

➤ The present delimitation of constituencies, across the country has been done on the basis of 2001 census under the provisions of Delimitation Act, 2002.

History of delimitation in Jammu and Kashmir:

➤ The Constitution of Jammu and Kashmir, enacted in 1957, was based on the Maharaja's Constitution of Jammu and Kashmir of 1939.

➤ After accession to India, the State Constituent Assembly was constituted under the 1939 Constitution, but Sheikh Abdullah's administration arbitrarily carved out 30 seats for Jammu region and 43 seats for Kashmir region and two seats for Ladakh region. This regional disparity became entrenched thereafter: Kashmir (46), Jammu (37) and Ladakh (four).

➤ The last time a delimitation exercise took place in the state was also under President's Rule, as far back as 1995 in extremely difficult circumstances by the Justice (retd) KK Gupta Commission. Incidentally, the Constitution provides for delimitation every 10 years, the next delimitation of assembly constituencies should have logically taken place in 2005.

➤ However, in 2002, the Farooq Abdullah government chose to freeze delimitation until 2026 by amending the Jammu & Kashmir Representation of the People Act 1957 and Section 47(3) of the Constitution of Jammu & Kashmir.

➤ At the moment there are seven seats reserved for SC in the assembly, all in the Jammu division which haven't been rotated since 1996 — Chamb, Domana, Ranbir Singh Pura, Samba, Hiranagar, Chenani and Ramban (separate) in Jammu, Kathua and Udhampur district, respectively.

Highlights:

➤ Though the home ministry is yet to provide any formal instruction or information on the reorganization and delimitation of Jammu and Kashmir, the EC discussed how it will deal with the issue after receiving the notification.

- The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019, provides for increasing the number of assembly seats in the newly formed Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir from 107 to 114.
- Ladakh will be a Union territory without a legislative assembly.
- Of the 114 seats, 24 have been kept aside for areas under Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK), which means elections will be conducted for 90 seats.
- The old Assembly had strength of 111 seats (again 24 kept aside for PoK) with four seats for Ladakh region. That means 7 extra seats will be added to the effective strength of the House.

CHIEF JUSTICE ADVOCATES MORE AUTONOMY TO CBI

Why in News?

- Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi has recommended a comprehensive legislation to make the Central Bureau of Investigation functional as an efficient and impartial investigative agency.

Highlights:

- The Chief Justice said that time and again, the Supreme Court had utilised its constitutional authority to ensure that the CBI functioned without any fear or favour, and in the best public interest. As a multi-faceted, multi-disciplinary investigative agency, it had for the most part of its existence enjoyed tremendous public trust.
- He opined that the CBI should be given statutory status through legislation equivalent to that provided to the Comptroller & Auditor General.
- And that the legal mandate of the CBI must be strengthened by having a comprehensive legislation addressing deficiencies relating to organisational structure, charter of functions, limits of power, superintendence and oversight. Advocating administrative and financial autonomy for the CBI, he said, "To address an increasing incidence of inter-State crimes, an argument could be made for including 'public order' in concurrent list, for the limited purposes of investigating such crimes,". However, given that the superintendence and control of the agency continues to, in large measure, lie with the executive by virtue of Section 4 of the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946, the possibility of it being used as a political instrument remains ever present, he said.

Issues:

- Chief Justice Gogoi lists legal ambiguity, weak human resource, lack of adequate investment, accountability, and political and administrative interference as key concerns.
- In the context of political and administrative interference, he said that in the Vineet Narain v. Union of India case, the Suprme Court had expressed concern over the state of affairs and laid down explicit guidelines for protecting the integrity of the force.

- Under the DSPE Act, the CBI requires consent of the State concerned for investigation. Given vested interests or bureaucratic lethargy, such consent is often either denied or delayed, severely compromising the investigation. Additionally, a patch work of legislations governing the functioning of the CBI adversely affects inter-institutional coordination, both horizontally and vertically.

Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI):

- The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) is the premier investigating agency of India.
- It operates under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions.
- The agency has been known to investigate several economic crimes, special crimes, cases of corruption and other high-profile cases.
- Its job is to ensure a fair and an impartial probe.

MoD CLARIFIES THERE IS NO PROPOSAL TO PRIVATISE OFB

Why in News?

- Rumours being spread that Ordnance Factory Board (OFB)is being privatised has resulted in its employees calling for a 30 days' strike.

Highlights:

- Committee of senior officials of Ministry of Defenceled by Additional Secretary, Department of Defence Production alongwith Chairman of OFB, explained to the employee organisations that there is no proposal to privatise OFB.
- The proposal under consideration of Government is to make it into Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs), which is 100 per cent Government owned.
- It was also stated that corporatisation of OFB will bring OFB at par with other DPSUs of Ministry of Defence. This is in the interest of OFB as it will provide operational freedom and flexibility to OFB which it presently lacks.

Ordnance Factory Board:

- Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) consisting of the Indian Ordnance Factories is a defense contractor owned by the Indian government.
- OFB comprises forty-one ordnance factories, nine training institutes, three regional marketing centres and four regional controllerates of safety which are spread all across the country.
- OFB is the world's largest government-operated production organisation, and the oldest organisation run by the Government of India. It is often called the "Fourth Arm of Defence" and the "Force Behind the Armed Forces" of India.
- OFB is the 37th largest defence equipment manufacturer in the world, 2nd largest in Asia, and the largest in India.

e-Court

Why in News?

▶ The High Court of Punjab and Haryana to launch its first virtual court (e-Court) at Faridabad.

Highlights:

▶ The e-Court would deal with traffic challan cases from across the State.

▶ The project will be launched under the guidance of e-Committee of the Supreme Court of India.

▶ Virtual courts will remove the need for the litigant to be present in the court and facilitate adjudication of the case online through the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

E-committee:

▶ E-committee is a body constituted by the Government of India in pursuance of a proposal received from the supreme court of India for assistance in formulating a National policy on computerization of Indian Judiciary and advise on technological communication and management related changes.

▶ The E-Committee was set up in 2004 to provide a guide map for the use of I-T and administrative reforms in the judiciary.

e-Courts Project:

▶ The e-Courts project was conceptualized on the basis of the "National Policy and Action Plan for Implementation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the Indian Judiciary – 2005" submitted by e-Committee, Supreme Court of India with a vision to transform the Indian Judiciary by ICT enablement of Courts.

▶ The e-Courts Mission Mode Project, is a Pan-India Project, monitored and funded by the Department of Justice, Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India for the District Courts across the country.

▶ The following are the functions of e-Courts Project:

1. To provide efficient & time-bound citizen-centric services delivery as detailed in e-Court Project Litigant's Charter.

2. To develop, install & implement decision support systems in courts.

3. To automate the processes to provide transparency in the accessibility of information to its stakeholders.

4. To enhance judicial productivity, both qualitatively & quantitatively, to make the justice delivery system affordable, accessible, cost-effective, predictable, reliable and transparent.

DRAFT NATIONAL RESOURCE EFFICIENCY POLICY RELEASED

Why in News?

- Natural resources form the backbone of any economic development. India, as one of the fastest growing economies with GDP at 2.6 trillion USD, has increased its material consumption to six times.

- Enhancing resource efficiency and promoting the use of secondary raw materials has emerged as a strategy for ensuring that the potential trade-off between growth, resource constraints and environmental well-being can be minimized.

- Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change released Draft National Resource Efficiency Policy

Policy Highlights:

- The Draft National Resource Efficiency Policy (NREP) envisions a future with environmentally sustainable and equitable economic growth, resource security, healthy environment (air, water and land), and restored ecosystems with rich ecology and biodiversity.

- The Draft National Resource Efficiency Policy is guided by the principles of

- Reduction in primary resource consumption to 'sustainable' levels, in keeping with achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and staying within the planetary boundaries,

- Creation of higher value with less material through resource efficient and circular approaches

- Waste minimization

- Material security, and creation of employment opportunities and business models beneficial to the cause of environment protection and restoration.

DRAFT NATIONAL RESOURCE EFFICIENCY POLICY

Why in News?

- Natural resources form the backbone of any economic development. India, as one of the fastest growing economies with GDP at 2.6 trillion USD, has increased its material consumption to six times, from 1.18 billion tonnes (BT) in 1970 to 7 BT in 2015.

- The material consumption is expected to increase further to provide for an increasing population, rapid urbanization and growing aspirations.

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3. Waste minimization,

4. Material security, and creation of employment opportunities and business models beneficial to the cause of environment protection and restoration.

- The Draft National Resource Efficiency Policy provides an overarching collaborative framework for resource efficiency across all sectors in the country, covering both biotic and abiotic resources and life cycle stages and aspires for cross-sectoral stakeholder partnerships for the cause of resource efficiency for sustainable development.

CAPACITY BUILDING OF SUSTAINABLE FOOD VALUE CHAINS

Why in News?

- A National Conference on Capacity Building of Sustainable Food Value Chains for Enhanced Food Safety and Quality was organized by National Productivity Council (NPC) in collaboration with the Asian Productivity Organization, Tokyo, Japan.

National Productivity Council (NPC):

- NPC is a national level organization to promote productivity culture in India.

- Established by the Ministry of Industry, Government of India in 1958, it is an autonomous, multipartite, non-profit organization with equal representation from employers' & workers' organizations and Government, apart from technical & professional institutions and other interests.

- NPC is a constituent of the Tokyo-based Asian Productivity Organisation (APO), an Inter-Governmental Body, of which the Government of India is a founder member.

- NPC teams up with its clients to work out solutions towards accelerating productivity, enhancing competitiveness, increasing profits, augmenting safety and reliability and ensuring better quality.

- It provides a reliable database for decision-making, improved systems and procedures, work culture as well as customer satisfaction both internal & external.

- The solutions can be all-encompassing or specific depending on the nature of the problem. The council also helps monitor, review and implement the identified strategies. Promotional and catalytic in nature, NPC's services have bearings on economic growth and quality of life.

- The Council promotes a comprehensive view of productivity-focused on improving the triple bottom line – economic, environmental and social and adds value for all the stakeholders through generation & application of advanced knowledge for inclusive Growth.

UNION HRD MINISTER LAUNCHES NISHTHA

Why in News?

⯈ Union Human Resource Development Minister Shri Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' launched the National Mission to improve Learning Outcomes at the Elementary level- NISHTHA, National Initiative for School Heads and Teachers Holistic Advancement.

NISHTHA: National Initiative for School Heads' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement:

⯈ NISHTHA is a capacity building programme for "Improving Quality of School Education through Integrated Teacher Training". It aims to build competencies among all the teachers and school principals at the elementary stage.

⯈ The functionaries shall be trained in an integrated manner on learning outcomes, school-based assessment, learner-centered pedagogy, new initiatives in education, addressing the diverse needs of children through multiple pedagogies, etc.

⯈ This will be organized by constituting National Resource Groups (NRGs) and State Resource Groups (SRGs) at the National and the State level who will be training 42 lakhs teachers subsequently.

⯈ A robust portal/Management Information System (MIS) for delivery of the training, monitoring and support mechanism will also be infused with this capacity-building initiative.

Objectives:

⯈ Improvement in learning outcomes of the students.

⯈ Creation of an enabling and enriching inclusive classroom environment

⯈ Teachers become alert and responsive to the social, emotional and psychological needs of students as first-level counselors.

⯈ Teachers are trained to use Art as pedagogy leading to increased creativity and innovation among students.

⯈ Teachers are trained to develop and strengthen the personal-social qualities of students for their holistic development.

⯈ Creation of a healthy and safe school environment.

⯈ Integration of ICT in teaching-learning and assessment.

⯈ Developing a stress-free School-Based Assessment focused on the development of learning competencies.

⯈ Teachers adopt Activity Based Learning and move away from rote learning to competency-based learning.

⯈ Teachers and School heads to become aware of new initiatives in school education.

⯈ Transformation of the Heads of Schools into providing academic and administrative leadership for the schools for fostering new initiatives.

COMPULSORY RURAL SERVICE FOR DOCTORS

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court has held that the state governments can exercise their power to execute a compulsory service bond upon the doctors taking admission to post-graduate and super-speciality courses in government medical colleges, which would neither violate any fundamental rights of the candidates, nor would be a restraint on their professional activity.

Highlights:

- The Association of Medical Super Speciality Aspirants and Residents and others had challenged the state government's regulations that imposed a condition of compulsory service for a minimum fixed period with the state.

- Doctors complained that such a condition violated the right of an individual to carry on his profession, amounted to 'forced labour' in violation of their constitutional right and would impede the progress of their careers.

- The Supreme Court ruled that doctors across the country are bound by the compulsory bonds executed by them at the time of their admission in post-graduate and super-speciality medical courses.

- The SC noted that the huge infrastructure has to be developed and maintained for running medical colleges with post-graduate and super-speciality courses, the amount of fees charged from students is meagre in comparison to private medical colleges.

- Compulsory Bonds binds doctors with conditions to serve in their respective states for a certain fixed period, in rural areas. The doctors' original mark-sheets, certificates and other documents are also usually retained by the state authorities after the completion of speciality courses.

- Compulsory service is in the larger public interest and beneficial for deprived sections of society, the top court ruled in favour of the policy of various state governments to have compulsory bonds to be executed by the doctors before their admissions to PG and super speciality courses.

- The appellants contended that their rights guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution of India have been violated.

SABKA VISHWAS – LEGACY DISPUTE RESOLUTION SCHEME

Why in News?

- In the Union Budget 2019-20, the Hon'ble Finance Minister announced the Sabka Vishwas-Legacy Dispute Resolution Scheme, 2019.

Scheme:

- ‣ The two main components of the Scheme are dispute resolution and amnesty.
- ‣ The dispute resolution component is aimed at liquidating the legacy cases of Central Excise and Service Tax that are subsumed in GST and are pending in litigation at various forums.
- ‣ The amnesty component of the Scheme offers an opportunity to the taxpayers to pay the outstanding tax and be free of any other consequence under the law.
- ‣ The most attractive aspect of the Scheme is that it provides substantial relief in the tax dues for all categories of cases as well as full waiver of interest, fine and penalty.
- ‣ As the objective of the Scheme is to free as large a segment of the taxpayers from the legacy taxes as possible, the relief given thereunder is substantial.
- ‣ The Scheme is specially tailored to free a large number of small taxpayers of their pending disputes with the tax administration.
- ‣ Government urges the taxpayers and all concerned to avail the SabkaVishwas – Legacy Dispute Resolution Scheme, 2019 and make a new beginning.

COMPOSITE WATER MANAGEMENT INDEX 2.0

Why in News?

- ‣ The NITI Aayog has released the Report on the Composite Water Management Index 2.0.
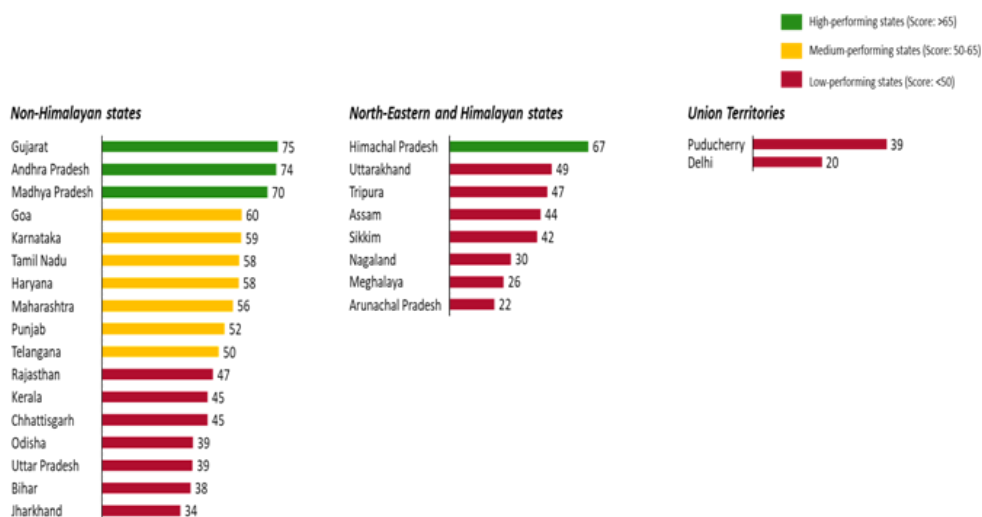
Composite Water Management Index:

- ‣ The CWMI is an important tool to assess and improve the performance of States and Union Territories inefficient management of water resources.
- ‣ This has been done through a first of its kind water data collection exercise in partnership with Ministry of Jal Shakti, Ministry of Rural Development and all the States/ Union Territories.
- ‣ The index would provide useful information for the States and also for the concerned Central Ministries/Departments enabling them to formulate and implement suitable strategies for better management of water resources.
- ‣ CWMI 2.0 ranks various states for the reference year 2017-18 as against the base year 2016-17.
- ‣ NITI Aayog first launched and conceptualized the Composite Water Management Index in 2018 as a tool to instil the sense of cooperative and competitive federalism among the states.
- ‣ This was a first-ever attempt at creating a pan-India set of metrics that measured different dimensions of water management and use across the lifecycle of water.
- ‣ The report was widely acknowledged and provided actionable guidance to States on where they were doing well absolutely and relatively and what they needed to focus on to secure their water future.

Report Highlights:

- In the report released, Gujarat holds on to its rank one in the reference year (2017-18), followed by Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.
- In North Eastern and Himalayan States, Himachal Pradesh has been adjudged number 1 in 2017-18 followed by Uttarakhand, Tripura and Assam.
- Among the UTs which had submitted data for the first time, Puducherry has been adjudged number 1.
- In terms of incremental change in index (over 2016-17 level), Haryana holds number one position in general States and Uttarakhand ranks at first position amongst North Eastern and Himalayan States.
- On average, 80% of the states assessed on the Index over the last three years have improved their water management scores, with an average improvement of +5.2 points.

Ranking of Different State in CWMI 2.0 (2019):

Legend:
- High-performing states (Score: >65)
- Medium-performing states (Score: 50-65)
- Low-performing states (Score: <50)

Non-Himalayan states

State	Score
Gujarat	75
Andhra Pradesh	74
Madhya Pradesh	70
Goa	60
Karnataka	59
Tamil Nadu	58
Haryana	58
Maharashtra	56
Punjab	52
Telangana	50
Rajasthan	47
Kerala	45
Chhattisgarh	45
Odisha	39
Uttar Pradesh	39
Bihar	38
Jharkhand	34

North-Eastern and Himalayan states

State	Score
Himachal Pradesh	67
Uttarakhand	49
Tripura	47
Assam	44
Sikkim	42
Nagaland	30
Meghalaya	26
Arunachal Pradesh	22

Union Territories

UT	Score
Puducherry	39
Delhi	20

SAN-SADHAN HACKATHON

Why in News?

- The government calls for applications for its latest initiative under the Swachh Bharat Mission called the 'San-Sadhan' Hackathon.

Highlights:

- It is an initiative to ease the lives of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan) by making toilets smarter, more accessible, and easier to use
- In this hackathon, the government is looking for smart, scalable and innovative solutions for economical toilets for individual and community use in rural and urban contexts
- The initiative is being organized jointly by the Ministry of Jal Shakti and the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, in collaboration with Atal Innovation Mission, NITI Aayog, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and 91 springboards.

- The Hackathon invites researchers, start-ups, student innovators, technology enthusiasts, and industry experts to participate.
- This hackathon is a great opportunity to win exciting prizes and get handholding and mentoring support by the ministry, industry experts and ecosystem enablers.
- The applicants will be showcasing their innovations on the final day of the hackathon and the winners shall be felicitated during the valedictory function which is slated to be held in mid-September.

WORLDSKILLS KAZAN 2019

Why in News?

- The world's biggest international vocational skills competition, WorldSkills Kazan 2019 got underway with a grand ceremony at Kazan, Russia.

Highlights:

- Mahendra Nath Pandey, Hon'ble Minister of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship inaugurated the India Pavilion at the competition.
- Team India was familiarised with Russian culture during the One School-One Country program; also aims at encouraging children to join skill programs.
- 'Future Skills' category introduced at the Competition to focus on digital economy.

One School One Country:

- Before the opening ceremony, the competing teams came together to present their national cultures under the One School-One Country initiative.
- The initiative aims to promote cultural exchange between the participating countries and to raise the profile of skills and different career pathways.
- Participants visited a Russian School, where they interacted with Russian school students and also participated in cultural programs.

New Initiatives:

- An international conference, WorldSkills Conference 2019, will also be held alongside the skills competitions, for government representatives, experts and thought-leaders to interact on an array of topics on future of skills to maximize economic and social impact.
- Two new initiatives — WorldSkills Juniors and 'Future Skills — are also being introduced in this edition. WorldSkills Junior aims at inspiring schoolchildren aged 14-16 years to join vocational and skill training and participate alongside the national teams.
- The focus of 'Future Skills' is to lay emphasis on relevant fields of activity in the era of high-tech production and digital economy.

THE RICE FORTIFICATION

Why in News?

- The NITI Aayog seeks creation of roadmap by Department of Food and Public Distribution for taking the Rice Fortification Pilot Scheme Pan India to tackle the menace of Malnutrition.

Rice Fortification:

- Fortification is the practice of deliberately increasing the content of an essential micronutrient, i.e. vitamins and minerals (including trace elements) in a food, so as to improve the nutritional quality of the food supply and provide a public health benefit with minimal risk to health.
- Rice fortification is the practice of increasing the content of essential micronutrients in rice and to improve the nutritional quality of the rice.
- Fortified rice are contains Vitamin A, Vitamin B1, Vitamin B12, Folic Acid, Iron and Zinc.

Benefits of Fortification:

- If consumed on a regular and frequent basis, fortified foods will maintain body stores of nutrients more efficiently and more effectively than will intermittent supplements.
- Fortified foods are also better at lowering the risk of the multiple deficiencies that can result from seasonal deficits in the food supply or a poor-quality diet.
- Fortification can be an excellent way of increasing the content of vitamins in breast milk and thus reducing the need for supplementation in postpartum women and infants.
- Fortification of widely distributed and widely consumed foods has the potential to improve the nutritional status of a large proportion of the population, both poor and wealthy.
- Fortification is often more cost-effective than other strategies, especially if the technology already exists and if an appropriate food distribution system is in place.

Food Fortification in India:

- Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has formulated a comprehensive regulation on fortification of foods namely 'Food Safety and Standards (Fortification of Foods) Regulations, 2016'. These regulations set the standards for food fortification and encourage the production, manufacture, distribution, sale and consumption of fortified foods.
- The regulations also provide for specific role of FSSAI in promotion for food fortification and to make fortification mandatory.
- This sets the premise for the national summit on fortification of food.

ENHANCED OUTREACH ON HIV/AIDS PREVENTION

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE) for enhanced HIV/AIDS outreach.

Highlights:

- The MoU signing took place between the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) and the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment (DoSJE).
- The objective is to reduce the incidence of social stigma and discrimination against victims of drug abuse and Children and People Living with HIV/AIDS.
- The MoU will help in developing specific strategies and action plans for HIV and AIDS prevention and mechanisms for drug addiction treatment and extending social protection schemes to the vulnerable populations.

India's current situation of HIV/AIDS:

- The National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) is a division of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare that provides leadership to HIV/AIDS control programme in India through 35 HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Societies.
- NACO has played a very big role in significantly reducing the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the country and that too faster than the global rates.
- More than 80% decline in estimated new infections from the peak of epidemic in 1995.
- Estimated AIDS-related deaths declined by 71% since its peak in 2005.
- As per the UNAIDS 2018 report, the global average for the decline in new infections and AIDS-related deaths from peak has been 47% and 51% respectively.

Antiretroviral Therapy:

- With neither a vaccine nor a cure in sight, Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) is the only option available for people living with HIV-AIDS.
- HIV is a type of virus called a retrovirus, and the combination of drugs used to treat it is called Antiretroviral Therapy (ART).
- According to the World Health Organization, standard ART consists of a combination of at least three antiretroviral drugs to suppress the HIV virus and stop the progression of the disease.
- Significant reductions have been seen in rates of death and suffering by the use of potent ART regimen, particularly in the early stages of the disease.

India's Role in the Global Fight against AIDS:

- There are 2 million new AIDS infections every year, and about 66% of the world population currently on antiretroviral therapy consumes drugs manufactured in India.
- Globally, the ART market is valued at .48 billion (in 2018) and is expected to reach .83 billion by 2025.
- Thus, Indian pharmaceutical companies, with their ability to manufacture high-quality, affordable medicines are very important in the global battle against AIDS.

MOBILE APPLICATION-"JANAUSHADHI SUGAM" LAUNCHED

Why in News?

- Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilizers launched a mobile application "Janaushadhi Sugam".

Highlights:

- The minister announced that "Jan Aushadhi Suvidha Oxo-Biodegradable Sanitary Napkin" will now be available at only One Rupee per pad.
- Janaushadhi Sugam app will enable people to search for Janaushadhi generic medicines and the stores at the tip of their fingers.
- About 28 million girls are reported to be leaving education because of lack of availability of good quality Sanitary Napkin" pads at a reasonable cost.
- The Government of India launched "Jan Aushadhi Suvidha Oxo-Biodegradable Sanitary Napkin" at Rs 2.50 per pad on the eve of the World Environment Day
- Jan Aushadhi Suvidha comes with a special additive, which makes it biodegradable when it comes in contact with oxygen after being discarded.
- This is an important step in ensuring the health security for the section of Indian women who still use unhygienic aids during menstrual period due to non-affordability of sanitary pads available in the market.
- This will ensure 'Swachhta, Swasthya and Suvidha' for the underprivileged women of the country. This step was taken by the Department of Pharmaceuticals.
- "Janaushadhi Sugam" app would have user-friendly options like- to locate nearby stores, direction guidance for the location through Google Map.
- The app will also enable to search Janaushadhi generic medicines, analyse product comparison of Generic vs Branded medicine in form of MRP & overall Savings, etc.

KERALA, TAMIL NADU AND HIMACHAL TOP INDIA'S CHILD WELL-BEING INDEX

Why in News?

- Child well-being index, a tool designed to measure and tracks children's well-being comprehensively has been released.

Highlights:

- The report released by the non-government organisation World Vision India and research institute IFMR LEAD.
- The report is an attempt to look at how India fairs on child well-being using a composite child well-being index.

- The India child well-being index is a crucial report that can be mined both by the Government and civil organisations to achieve the goal of child well-being and we will use this report effectively.

- This report provides insights on health, nutrition, education, sanitation and child protection.

- The dimensions of the index include healthy individual development, positive relationships and protective contexts.

- Focusing on the three key dimensions, 24 indicators were selected to develop the computation of the child well-being index.

- The report highlights the multi-dimensional approach towards measuring child well-being — going beyond mere income poverty.

Significance of the Report:

- The report is important considering that 40 per cent of the country's population is made of children between the ages of 1 and 18.

- The report, calls for States to look at their respective scores on the dimensions of child well-being, and to prepare for priority areas of intervention with specific plans of action.

- It also hopes to trigger policy level changes, seek better budgetary allocations and initiate discussions with all stakeholders, which can help in enhancing the quality of life of all children in the country.

- One of the primary objectives of this index is to garner attention to the under-researched theme of child well-being in India, and inspire further academic and policy conversations on related issues.

Performance of the States:

- Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh and Puducherry topped the charts in the child well-being index.

- Meghalaya, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh featured at the bottom.

- Among the Union Territories, Puducherry led the way and Dadra and Nagar Haveli featured at the other end.

- Kerala bagged the top spot due to its exceptional performance in health, nutrition and education facilities.

- Kerala also performed better in addressing malnutrition and ensuring child survival and access to a healthy environment in terms of clean drinking water and sanitation facilities.

NOC ONLINE APPLICATION PROCESSING SYSTEM (NOAPS)

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Culture & Tourism has launched an integrated No Objection Certificate (NOC) online Application Processing System (NOPAS) for National Monuments Authority (NMA) for 517 local bodies of six states.

Highlights:

- The online system automates the process of granting No-Objection Certificate (NOC) for construction-related work in the prohibited and regulated areas of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) protected monuments.
- NMA considers grant of permissions to applicants for construction-related activity in the prohibited and regulated area.
- National Monuments Authority (NMA) under the Ministry of Culture, has been set up as per provisions of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains AMASR (Amendment and Validation) Act, 2010.
- The applicant needs to fill up a single form which is being sent to the concerned agencies by the Urban Local Body, from whom No Objection Certificate (NOC) is required.
- The Portal has integration with the Smart 'Smarac' Mobile App of Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO), through which the applicant traverses his plot and the geo-coordinates of his plot along with the images get uploaded into the NIC portal along with the proximity and the approval status.
- NOAPS was launched by the NMA in September 2015 but was limited to only five urban local bodies in Delhi and one civic body in Mumbai. Now, the facility has been expanded to six more states: Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Jharkhand and Telangana.

SHAGUN-INTEGRATED ONLINE JUNCTION FOR SCHOOL EDUCATION

Why in News?

- The Human Resource Development Ministry launched one of the world's largest Integrated Online Junction for – School Education 'Shagun'.

Shagun:

- School Education Shagun (URL: htpp://shagun.govt.in/) is an over-arching initiative to improve school education system by creating a junction for all online portals and websites relating to various activities of the Department of School Education and Literacy in the Government of India and all States and Union Territories.

- The word Shagun is coined from two different words- 'Shala' meaning Schools and 'Gunvatta' meaning Quality and this online junction of different websites and portals into a single platform will enhance the accessibility of information relating to schools and will ensure a holistic approach to transform the education sector.
- The portal seeks to provide a very robust feedback mechanism which will increase public participation and will ensure accountability and transparency.
- The portal seeks to connect approximately 92 lakh teachers and 26 crore students.

Integrated National School Education Treasury:

- Union Human Resource Development Minister has also announced the setting up of the Integrated National School Education Treasury (INSET).
- It will envisage a fully integrated, accessible and seamless information network for all parameters relating to the students, teachers, and schools in the country.
- The main focus will be on the following areas:
- Reinforcing and cleaning the data of the Integrated Online Junction through feedback from Stakeholders
- Ensuring full inter-operability among the websites, portals and applications which are already hosted in the junction
- Creating high quality e-contents, including quizzes and puzzles to enhance learning and also for teachers in aiding classroom transactions
- Using artificial intelligence and deep machine learning in a variety of ways to enhance the quality of school education including for designing evidence-based inventions.

BIOMETRIC SEAFARER IDENTITY DOCUMENT (BSID)

Why in News?

- India has become the first country in the world to issue Biometric Seafarer Identity Document (BSID), capturing the facial bio-metric data of seafarers.

BSID:

- In India the BSID project has been taken up in collaboration with Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (CDAC), Mumbai.
- The Government notified the Merchant Shipping (Seafarers Bio-metric Identification Document) Rules in 2016.
- Every Indian seafarer who possesses a valid Continuous Discharge Certificate issued by the Govt. of India will be eligible for issue of a BSID.
- Nine data collection centers have been setup at Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Noida, Goa, New Mangalore, Kochi, Vizag & Kandla for issue of BSID.

Working of BSID:

- It introduces modern security features. It will have a biometric chip embedded in it.
- The security of the BSID card is ensured at various levels and through different methods.
- At the time of data capturing the live face is cross matched through passport photo using a face matching software.
- The card has two optical security features- Micro prints/micro texts and Unique Guilloche pattern.
- A software has been developed for capturing the facial biometrics and its authentication through the public key infrastructure.
- A record of each SID issued will be maintained in a national database and its related information will be internationally accessible.

Significance:

- The BSID is a marked improvement over the two finger or iris based bio-metric data, with modern security features.
- It will make the identification of the SID holder more reliable and efficient, while protecting their dignity and privacy.
- It will give a foolproof identification to our seafarers which will facilitate their movement, provide ease of getting jobs and help in identifying them from any location in the world.
- The new card is in confirmation of the Convention No. 185 of the International Labour Organisation on BSID. (India ratified the Convention in October 2015.

CAMPAIGN ANGIKAAR & E-course ON VULNERABILITY ATLAS

Why in News?

- Minister of State (I/C) for Housing and Urban Affairs today launched "angikaar" a campaign for change managementand e-Course on Vulnerability Atlas of India here today.

Campaign Angikaar:

- Angikaar has been launched for social behaviour change, focusing on issues such as water & energy conservation, waste management, health, tree plantation, sanitation and hygiene for beneficiaries of completed houses under PMAY (U)
- This will be done through community mobilisation and IEC activities.For this purpose, the campaign will converge with schemes and Missions of other Ministries dealing with these subjects.
- The convergence would especially focus on Ujjwala for gas connection and Ayushman Bharat for health insurance to the beneficiaries of PMAY (U).

E-course on Vulnerability Atlas:

 ⏩ The e-course on Vulnerability Atlas is offered by the Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs in collaboration of School of Planning & Architecture (SPA), New Delhi and Building Materials & Technology Promotion Council (BMTPC).

 ⏩ It is a unique course that offers awareness and understanding about natural hazards, helps identify regions with high vulnerability with respect to various hazards (earthquakes, cyclones, landslides, floods, etc.) and specifies district-wise level of damage risks to the existing housing stock.

 ⏩ The e-course will be a tool for effective & efficient disaster mitigation & management in the field of Architecture, Civil Engineering, Urban & Regional Planning, Housing & Infrastructure Planning, Construction Engineering & Management and Building & Materials Research.

Prohibition of E-cigarettes Ordinance 2019

Why in News?

 ⏩ The Prohibition of E-cigarettes Ordinance 2019 is being sent to a Group of Ministers as directed by the Prime Minister's Office.

e-cigarettes:

 ⏩ An e-cigarette, short for electronic cigarette, is a battery-operated device.

 ⏩ One of a large variety of Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS), an e-cigarette emits vaporized nicotine, or non-nicotine solutions.

 ⏩ The user inhales it looking for a sensation similar to inhaling tobacco smoke, but without the smoke.

 ⏩ The pros and cons of e-cigarettes are hotly debated, with the industry refuting scientific evidence about the product being harmful, and users urging the government to legalize it.

 ⏩ India's market for e-cigarettes, while nascent today, is projected to grow annually at more than 25 per cent in the next five years.

The Draft Ordinance:

 ⏩ The draft ordinance was necessitated by the fact that an earlier order by the Centre asking the states to crack down against e-cigarettes could not stand judicial scrutiny.

 ⏩ However, a recent order, in which the High Court threw out a petition asking for protection from an ordinance against e-cigarettes, has emboldened the Health Ministry.

 ⏩ It now seeks legal backing for a ban (rather than just an advisory) in the form of an ordinance.

 ⏩ The ordinance makes any violation of its provisions punishable by imprisonment of one to three years, and a fine of Rs 1-5 lakh.

 ⏩ Some states have already banned use and sale of e-cigarettes, vape and e-hookah.

Why Ordinance?

- Under the Constitution, health is a state subject, so any move to ban manufacture and sale of a product on health grounds needs to come from the state government.
- In February, the Central Drugs Standards Control Organisation had written to all state drug controllers, saying they should not allow sale, online sale, manufacture, distribution, trade, import or advertisement of ENDS.
- The Delhi HC stayed the Centre's circular banning sale and manufacture of ENDS like e-cigarettes and e-hookah with nicotine flavour, saying as the products were not a "drug".

The Scientific position on ban:

- The use of ENDS or e-cigarettes adversely affects almost all the human body systems with impact across the life course, from the womb to tomb.
- The cartridges used in ENDS or e-cigarettes are filled with liquid nicotine, flavouring agents and other chemicals.
- A typical cartridge contains about as much nicotine as a pack of 20 regular cigarettes and can act as a potential source for nicotine addiction.
- Studies on these nicotine solvents had shown a varied degree of release of potential carcinogens depending on the battery output voltage. The liquid-vaporizing solutions also contain toxic chemicals and metals that have been demonstrated to be responsible for several adverse health effects, including cancers and diseases of the heart, lungs and brain.

Portal for Affordable Credit and Interest Subvention Access (PAiSA)

Why in News?

- Deendayan Antyodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM), a flagship mission under the MoHUA has been conferred the prestigious SKOCH Governance Gold Award for its PAiSA portal.

PAiSA Portal:

- PAiSA stands for Portal for Affordable Credit and Interest Subvention Access.
- Launched in November 2018, PAiSA is a centralized IT platform which simplifies and streamlines release of interest subvention under the DAY-NULM.
- It has been designed and developed through the Allahabad Bank.

What it offers?

- It offers end to end online solution for processing, payment, monitoring and tracking of interest subvention claims from banks on a monthly basis.
- Claims for subvention are uploaded by banks through their CBS (Core Banking Solution) in respect of the beneficiaries of the Self Employment Programme, which are verified and approved by the ULB and State concerned.

- The approved claim amount gets credited directly to the beneficiary's loan account through DBT mode.
- SMS is also sent to the beneficiary's mobile number intimating the credit of subvention amount.

SKOCH Award:

- SKOCH Award, instituted in 2003, is the highest civilian honour in the country conferred by an independent organisation.
- It recognizes people, projects and institutions that go the extra mile to make India a better nation.
- SKOCH Award covers the best of efforts in the area of digital, financial and social inclusion.

IIM Recommendations on Recasting e-auction System

Why in News?

- The Tea Board has, in-principle, accepted the recommendations submitted by a team of IIM Bangalore professors to recast the present pan India e-auction system.

Highlights:

- The new system aims at improving price discovery, simplifying the process elevating industry standards, and enhancing the quality of tea on offer at the auctions.

- Flagging concerns over declining tea quality, IIMB has come up with a four-pronged strategy and has recommended implementing the Japanese format of auctions.

- Under this format of auctions, the process is simplified and a reverse auction held.

- Other recommendations include:

  1. Out-lot teas to be sold on the same day
  2. New portal will be created for small buyers to bid for tea
  3. FSSAI certification to be made mandatory
  4. Quality slippages to attract penal action against producer/seller

- All teas from India to be graded in accordance to only 28 grades

- Designing a comprehensive e-catalogue, fixed reserve price and logistic support for buyers.

- The deficiencies of the present pan Indian e-auction system rolled out in 2016 were many.

- The system had neither improved price discovery nor boosted volumes.

- **The modified system aims at addressing these issues while creating equal opportunities for all.**

DRDO successfully flight-tests QRSAM

Why in News?

- Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO) today successfully flight-tested its state-of-the-art Quick Reaction Surface-to-Air Missiles (QRSAM) against live aerial targets from Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur.

QRSAM:

- Quick Reaction Surface to Air Missile (QRSAM), with a strike range of 25 km, is being developed by the DRDO for the Indian Army.

- The all-terrain and all-weather missile with electronic counter-measures against jamming by enemy aircraft can be mounted on a truck and stored in a canister.

- Before this test, on February 26, two rounds of tests were successfully carried out.

- This missile can be rotated 360 degree while on the way to its target.
- QRSAM is also able to use as an anti-sea skimmer from a ship against low flying attacking missiles. QRSAM employs dual thrust propulsion stage using high-energy solid propellant.

QRSAM Test:

- DRDO conducted two different tests for different altitude and conditions. DRDO closely observed both tests and found that flights successfully demonstrated the Aerodynamics, high manoeuvring capabilities, Robust Control, Structural performance and Propulsion thus proving the design configuration.
- Electro-Optical Systems, Radars, Telemetry and other equipment have monitored and tracked the missiles through the entire flights. DRDO announced that all the mission objectives have been met.

NEW ISRO SYSTEM TO SHIELD ITS ASSETS FROM SPACE DEBRIS

Why in News?

- To get accurate data about the movement of space debris to avoid collision with its satellites, ISRO has decided to set up telescopes and radars in four corners of the country.

Space Situational Awareness and Management:

- The network will be set up under the Directorate of Space Situational Awareness and Management.
- The directorate would monitor inactive satellites, pieces of orbiting objects, near-earth asteroids and adverse space weather conditions.
- Currently ISRO has 50 functional satellites, including communication, navigation and surveillance satellites, in space.

NORAD'S Dependency:

- Till now, ISRO was dependent on NORAD (North America Aerospace Defense Command) data, which is available in public domain, for keeping track of space debris and monitoring our active and passive (dead) satellites.
- However, this global data is not accurate.
- NORAD also keeps accurate data, which is exclusively available to those that are members of its network. Therefore, ISRO can't access this data.

Other Developments:

- ISRO's sophisticated multi-object tracking radar installed in Nellore (90km from Sriharikota) will be part of this project.
- It will also set up a telescope in Ponmudi (Thiruvananthapuram) and second one in Mount Abu (Rajasthan) and third one in deep north.

- ISRO will also install radar in the northeast.
- Once this network is operational, India will be able to get accurate data on space debris and will also become part of the global network where India can access very accurate data on debris from hundreds of radars set up across the world.

GENOME INDIA INITIATIVE

Why in News?

- The Department of Biotechnology (DBT) plans to scan nearly 20,000 Indian genomes over the next five years, in a two-phase exercise, and develop diagnostic tests that can be used to test for cancer.

Genome India Initiative:

- The initiative aims to make predictive diagnostic markers available for some priority diseases such as cancer and other rare and genetic disorders
- The first phase involves sequencing of complete genomes of nearly 10,000 Indians from all corners of the country and captures the biological diversity of India.
- In the next phase, about 10,000 "diseased individuals" would have their genomes sequenced.
- These vast troves of data sets would be compared using machine learning techniques to identify genes that can predict cancer risk, as well as other diseases that could be significantly influenced by genetic anomalies. 22 institutions, including those from the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and the DBT would be involved in the exercise.
- The data generated would be accessible to researchers anywhere for analysis.
- This would be through a proposed National Biological Data Centre envisaged in a policy called the 'Biological Data Storage, Access and Sharing Policy', which is still in early stages of discussion.

Genome:

- A genome is an organism's complete set of DNA, including all its genes.
- It contains all the information needed to build and maintain that organism.
- By sequencing the genome, researchers can discover the functions of genes and identify which of them are critical for life.

Significance:

- There is interest among private and public companies in sequencing genomes thanks to the declining costs for the process.
- From China to the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia, several countries have announced plans to sequence their population.
- Currently, genomic data sets under-represent Asia, particularly India, whose population and diverse ethnicity make it an attractive prospect for genome-mining efforts.

SOLAR THERMAL ENERGY TECHNOLOGY

Why in News?

- The National Institute of Solar Energy (NISE) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) have signed an agreement to initiate a skill development programme for different levels of beneficiaries in the solar thermal energy sector.

Highlight:

- The agreement is part of the ongoing MNRE-GEF-UNIDO project which aims to support capacity building and skill development of technical manpower in the Concentrated Solar Thermal Energy Technologies (CST) which are being used to replace conventional fossil fuels e.g. coal, diesel, furnace oil etc.

GEF-UNIDO's Project:

- The GEF-UNIDO's project is designed to complement MNRE's support programme by helping to remove barriers associated with CST technology, its awareness, capacity building, market and financial barriers. The duration of the project is from **January 2015 to December 2019.** Different concentrating technologies have been developed or are currently under development for various commercial and industrial applications.

- For industrial processes where temperatures above 80°C are required, concentrating solar collectors such as parabolic trough or dish collectors, non-imaging concentrators or a Linear Fresnel system are required to be used. The industries showing good potential for implementation of solar concentrators are food processing, paper and pulp, fertilizer, breweries, electroplating, pharmaceutical, textiles, refineries, rubber and desalination sectors.

United Nations Industrial Development Organization:

- It is a specialized agency of the United Nations that promotes industrial development for poverty reduction, inclusive globalization and environmental sustainability.

- It is headquartered in Vienna, Austria.

IRON ION BATTERY

Why in News?

- For the first time, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras has fabricated a rechargeable iron ion battery using mild steel as the anode.

Highlights:

- With no lithium reserves in India and shortage of lithium reserves in the world, the stress is on developing rechargeable batteries of comparable performance using materials other than lithium.

- Iron has favourable physico-chemical properties like lithium.

- The redox potential of iron ion is higher than lithium ion and the radius of the Fe2+ ion is nearly the same as that of the lithium ion

Features:

- While lithium ions are the charge carriers in lithium ion battery, the Fe2+ ions perform that function in the case of iron ion battery.
- The performance of an iron ion battery can go up to 150 cycles of charging and discharging.
- In the iron ion battery, Vanadium Pentoxide is used as the cathode and iron perchlorate is used as the electrolyte.
- With 54% capacity retention at the end of 50 cycles of charging and discharging, the battery display good stability.
- It is possible to fabricate the battery under ambient conditions too.

Benefits:

- The iron ion battery is cost-effective and can store a high amount of energy.
- With the world turning its attention to electric vehicles, the focus is on developing batteries that are cheaper.
- Iron is more stable during the charging process and therefore prevents short-circuiting of the batteries.
- The amount of energy that can be drawn from the iron ion battery is 220 Wh per kg, which is 55-60% of lithium ion battery's performance.

CHANDRAYAAN-2 SUCCESSFULLY ENTERS LUNAR TRANSFER TRAJECTORY

Why in News?

- Chandrayaan-2 has successfully carried out the significant process of trans-lunar injection, moving from earth`s orbit towards the moon.

Highlights:

- Chadrayaan-2 is another step closer to the Moon and headed onwards on its path to the Moon. Chandrayaan-2 will approach the Moon on August 20 and finally land near the south pole of the Moon on September 7, 2019.
- Chandrayaan-2 will be entered into the Moon's orbit on August 20, 2019.
- After that, the spacecraft's liquid engine will be fired again to insert the Chandrayaan-2 into the lunar orbit.
- Once Chandrayaan-2 will enter into the Moon's orbit it will conduct four-orbit manoeuvres so that spacecraft could enter into the final orbit passing over the lunar poles at a distance of about 100 km from the Moon's surface.

- Following this, the spacecraft's lander, Vikram, is expected to soft-land on the south pole of the moon and unleash the rover to explore the surface on September 7.
- SRO released a statement that the health of the spacecraft is being continuously monitored from the Mission Operations Complex (MOX) at ISRO Telemetry, Tracking and Command Network (ISTRAC) in Bengaluru with support from Indian Deep Space Network (IDSN) antennas at Byalalu, near Bengaluru.
- The present health of the spacecraft is good and all systems onboard Chandrayaan-2 spacecraft are performing normally.

XDR-TB

Why in News?

- XDR-TB, an abbreviation for extensively drug-resistant tuberculosis (TB), is a form of TB which is resistant to at least four of the core anti-TB drugs.
- XDR-TB involves resistance to the two most powerful anti-TB drugs, isoniazid and rifampicin, also known as multidrug-resistance (MDR-TB), in addition to resistance to any of the fluoroquinolones (such as levofloxacin or moxifloxacin) and to at least one of the three injectable second-line drugs (amikacin, capreomycin or kanamycin).
- MDR-TB and XDR-TB both take substantially longer to treat than ordinary (drug-susceptible) TB, and require the use of second-line anti-TB drugs, which are more expensive and have more side-effects than the first-line drugs used for drug-susceptible TB.

How do people get XDR-TB?

- People may get XDR-TB in one of two ways.
- It may develop in a patient who is receiving treatment for active TB, when anti-TB drugs are misused or mismanaged, and is usually a sign of inadequate clinical care or drug management. It can happen when patients are not properly supported to complete their full course of treatment; when health-care providers prescribe the wrong treatment, or the wrong dose, or for too short a period of time; when the supply of drugs to the clinics dispensing drugs is erratic; or when the drugs are of poor quality.
- The second way that people can develop XDR-TB is by becoming infected from a patient who is already ill with the condition. Patients with TB of the lungs can spread the disease by coughing, sneezing, or simply talking.
- A person needs only to breathe in a small number of these germs to become infected. However only a small proportion of people infected with TB germs develop the disease. A person can be infected by XDR-TB bacteria but not develop the active disease, just as with drug-susceptible TB.

Indian Scenario:

- Cases of XDR TB are much fewer than those of the other drug-resistant strain, MDR/RR TB, and have been reported from 117 countries until 2017, a World Health Organization (WHO) report said. Out of 10,800 cases worldwide, India accounted for 2,650 cases, or almost one-fourth.
- As per WHO, two-thirds of cases of the XDR-strain are in China, India and Russia. These countries also share 47 per cent of the burden for MDR/RR TB. The average success rates for drugs to treat the XDR strain has been 34 percent globally.

PRECISION APPROACH RADARS (PARs)

Why in News?

- A contract for installation and commissioning of nine Precision Approach Radars (PARs) was concluded today between Ministry of Defence and M/s Data Pattern (India) Pvt Ltd at a cost of Rs 380 crores under 'Buy Indian' category.
- The state-of-the-art radars incorporating latest Phased Array technology will be installed at Indian Naval Air Stations and Indian Air Force Stations.

Precision Approach Radars:

- Precision Approach Radar (PAR) is a primary radar used at aerodromes for approach operations based on specific procedures for the pilot and the controller; however, the use of PARs for civil applications is rapidly decreasing. Precision Approach Radar offers the possibility of a safe landing even in poor visibility conditions.
- The radar is placed near the mid-point of the runway (at a distance up to 6.000 ft) and works remotely. The radar is particularly important in situations when the pilot has limited sight (because of fog, rain, etc.).
- In this situation, the radar has to provide the approach controller with maximum quality radar display complemented by computer evaluation of speed, deviations from glide path (or glide slope) and course line, the distance from the previously approaching aircraft, etc.
- Traffic controller provides highly accurate navigational guidance in azimuth and elevation to a pilot so that he can keep his aircraft aligned with the extended centreline of the runway.
- The accuracy of the radar permits lower minimum descent than a non-precision approach. Thus the pilot has a better chance of seeing the ship or airfield in bad weather conditions

4.ECONOMY

GOVERNMENT TO SUPPORT INDIA'S IT INDUSTRY

Why in News?

- Union Minister of Commerce & Industry and Railways, Piyush Goyal,held a meeting with senior managers of IT companies in New Delhi

IT Industry Challenges:

- India's IT industry contributed 7.7% to the country's GDP in FY 2017 and is expected to contribute 10% of India's GDP by 2025.
- The United States account for 2/3rds of India's IT services exports.
- India is the largest exporter of IT services in the world and exports dominate the Indian IT industry and constitutes about 79% of the total revenue of the industry.
- India's IT service sector is now gearing up to be the digital partner of intelligent automation like smart algorithms, bots and AI tools, which are fast becoming a part of every industry and an increasingly Digital World.

Challenges and support:

- the representatives of the companies informed that although the Chinese IT services market is the third largest in the world India's investments and business have not been able to grow in China. This is due to various non-tariff barriers and challenges faced by Indian companies to set up their entity in China.
- Market access issues that create hurdles for Indian companies to open their business in China was also discussed. Government of India will give all support for the global growth of India's flagship industry and will make all efforts to facilitate the IT service industry and for that it is ready to engage with China and also Japan and Korea
- Commerce and Industry Minister urged India's IT services companies to explore other markets and not be inhibited in operating in countries that are non-English speaking.

NUTRIENT BASED SUBSIDY (NBS) FOR FERTILIZERS

Why in News?

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved the proposal of the Department of Fertilizers for fixation of Nutrient Based Subsidy Rates for P&K Fertilizers for the year 2019-20.

Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) Scheme:

- The NBS Scheme for fertilizer was initiated in the year 2010 and is being implemented by the Department of Fertilizers.

- Government is making available fertilizers, Urea and 21 grades of P&K fertilizers to farmers at subsidized prices through fertilizer manufacturers/importers.
- Under the scheme, a fixed amount of subsidy decided on an annual basis is provided on each grade of subsidized Phosphatic and Potassic (P&K) fertilizers, except for Urea based on the nutrient content present in them.
- It is largely for secondary nutrients like N, P, S and K and micronutrients which are very important for crop growth and development.
- In India, urea is the only controlled fertilizer and is sold at a statutory notified uniform sale price.

What NBS Provides?

- The scheme allows the manufacturers, marketers, and importers to fix the MRP of the Phosphatic and Potash fertilizers at reasonable levels.
- The MRP will be decided considering the domestic and international prices of P&K fertilizers, inventory level in the country and the exchange rates. The NBS ensures that adequate quantity of P&K is made available to the farmers at a statutory controlled price.

NATIONAL TIME RELEASE STUDY

Why in News?

- The Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, as part of its strategic commitment to improve global trade, is conducting India's first national Time Release Study (TRS) between 1st – 7th August.

National Time Release Study:

- The TRS is an internationally recognized tool advocated by World Customs Organization to measure the efficiency and effectiveness of international trade flows.
- This initiative for accountable governance, will measure rule based and procedural bottlenecks (including physical touchpoints) in the clearance of goods, from the time of arrival until the physical release of cargo.
- The aim is to identify and address bottlenecks in the trade flow process and take the corresponding policy and operational measures required to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of border procedures, without compromising efficient trade control.

How it will be done:

- Previously individual customs formations had been independently conducting TRS studies at the port level. The national TRS has taken this a step further and evolved a uniform, multi-dimensional methodology which measures the regulatory and logistics aspects of the cargo clearance process and establishes the average release time for goods.

- The exercise will be conducted at the same time across 15 ports including sea, air, land and dry ports which cumulatively account for 81% of total Bills of Entries for import and 67% of Shipping Bills for export filed within India. The national TRS will establish baseline performance measurement and have standardized operations and procedures across all ports.
- Based on the results of the TRS, government agencies associated with cross border trade will be able to diagnose existing and potential bottlenecks which act as barriers to the free flow of trade, and take remedial actions for reducing the cargo release time. The initiative is on ground lead by the Central Board of Indirect Tax and Customs.

Benefits:

- Expected beneficiaries of this initiative will be export oriented industries and MSMEs, who will enjoy greater standardization of Indian processes with comparable international standards.
- This initiative will help India maintain the upward trajectory on Ease of Doing Business, particularly on the Trading Across Borders indicator which measures the efficiency of the cross border trade ecosystem. Last year India's ranking on the indicator improved from 146 to 80.

KABIL SET UP TO ENSURE SUPPLY OF CRITICAL MINERALS

Why in News?

- A joint venture company namely Khanij Bidesh India Ltd. (KABIL) is to be set up to ensure a consistent supply of critical and strategic minerals to Indian domestic market.
- It would also help in realizing the overall objective of import substitution.

Khanij Bidesh India Ltd. (KABIL):

- A joint venture company namely Khanij Bidesh India Ltd. (KABIL) is to be set up with the participation of three Central Public Sector Enterprises namely, National Aluminium Company Ltd. (NALCO), Hindustan Copper Ltd.(HCL) and Mineral Exploration Company Ltd. (MECL).
- The equity participation between NALCO, HCL and MECL is in the ratio of 40:30:30.
- The KABIL would carry out identification, acquisition, exploration, development, mining and processing of strategic minerals overseas for commercial use and meeting country's requirement of these minerals.
- The sourcing of these minerals or metals is to done by creating trading opportunities, G2G collaborations with the producing countries or strategic acquisitions or investments in the exploration and mining assets of these minerals in the source countries.
- The new company will help in building partnerships with other mineral rich countries like Australia and those in Africa and South America, where Indian expertise in exploration and mineral processing will be mutually beneficial bringing about new economic opportunities.

Significance:

- The sustained source of mineral and metal commodities is imperative for the transportation and manufacturing segment. R
- ecalling the commitment at the UN Climate Change Conference, Pairs, 2015, where India has pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and opting a greener mode of transportation by emphasizing upon Electric Vehicle Mobility.
- It is therefore important to ensure energy storage through batteries.
- Among such twelve minerals identified as strategic minerals, which have meagre resource base, Lithium Cobalt are significant.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY SERVICES LTD.

Why in News?

- The Indian Army in step with government policies on environmental protection has launched an ecological initiative with employing E Cars for use of its officials in New Delhi in partnership with Energy Efficiency Services Ltd (EESL), a joint Venture of Central PSUs under Ministry of Power.

EESL:

- Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) is a joint venture of four national Public-Sector Undertakings – NTPC Limited, Power Finance Corporation Limited, Rural Electrification Corporation Limited and POWERGRID Corporation of India Limited.
- As South Asia's first and foremost energy efficiency leader, EESL leads the market-related activities of the National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency (NMEEE), one of the eight national missions under the Prime Minister's National Action Plan on Climate Change.
- EESL is implementing the following Programmes:

1. Unnat Jyoti by Affordable LEDs for All (UJALA): World's largest zero-subsidy domestic LED bulb programme
2. **Street Lighting National Programme (SLNP):** World's largest street light replacement programme
3. **Agriculture Demand Side management (AgDSM):** World's largest Agricultural Demand Side Management programme

PASHMINA PRODUCTS RECEIVE BIS CERTIFICATION

Why in News?

- Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has published an Indian Standard for identification, marking and labelling of Pashmina products to certify its purity.

Pashmina:

- Pashmina is a fine type of cashmere wool. The textiles made from it were first woven in Kashmir.
- The wool comes from a number of different breeds of the cashmere goat; such as the changthangi or Kashmir pashmina goat from the Changthang Plateau in Tibet and part of the Ladakh region and few parts of Himachal Pradesh.
- Often shawls called shahmina are made from this material in Kashmir and Nepal; these shawls are hand spun and woven from the very fine cashmere fibre.
- Traditional producers of pashmina wool are people known as the Changpa.

Benefits:

- The certification will help curb the adulteration of Pashmina and also protect the interests of local artisans and nomads who are the producers of Pashmina raw material.
- It will also assure the purity of Pashmina for customers.
- It will ensure better prices for the goat herding community in Ladakh as well as for the local handloom artisans producing genuine Pashmina products.

Pashmina Goat:

- The Changthangi or Pashmina goat is a special breed of goat indigenous to the high altitude regions of Ladakh in Jammu and Kashmir.
- They are raised for ultra-fine cashmere wool, known as Pashmina once woven. The Textiles are handspun and were first woven in Kashmir.
- The Changthangi goat grows a thick warn undercoat which is the source of Kashmir Pashmina wool – the world's finest cashmere measuring between 12-15 microns in fiber thickness.
- These goats are generally domesticated and reared by nomadic communities called the Changpa in the Changthang region of Greater Ladakh.
- The Changthangi goats have revitalized the economy of Changthang, Leh and Ladakh region.

Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS):

- The BIS is the national Standards Body of India working under the aegis of Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution. It is established by the Bureau of Indian Standards Act, 1986 which came into effect on 23 December 1986.
- The Minister in charge of the Ministry or Department having administrative control of the BIS is the ex-officio President of the BIS.

Draft E-commerce Norms 2019

Why in News?

- To protect the interest of online shoppers, the Department of Consumer Affairs has released draft guidelines on e-commerce that state that an e-commerce entity cannot directly or indirectly influence the price of the goods or services.

E-commerce guidelines for Consumer Protection 2019:

- These are issued as guiding principles for e-commerce business for preventing fraud, unfair trade practices and protecting the legitimate rights and interests of consumers.
- These guidelines apply to business-to-consumer e-commerce, including goods and services.
- It added that every e-commerce entity needs to publish the name and contact details of the grievance officer on their website along with the mechanism by which users can lodge their complaints.
- As per the draft, an e-commerce firm cannot falsely represent themselves as consumers or post reviews about goods and services in their name.
- The draft guidelines adds that e-commerce firms need to ensure that personally identifiable information of customers is protected, is open for stakeholder comments for 45 days or till September 16, 2019.

Mandatory Terms:

- Besides, it proposed to make it mandatory for firms to display terms of contract with the seller relating to return, refund, exchange, warranty/guarantee, delivery/shipment, mode of payments and grievance redressal mechanism to enable consumers to make informed decisions. The draft also proposes that once an e-commerce firm comes to know about any counterfeit product, and if the seller is unable to provide any evidence that the product is genuine, the firm needs to take down the listing and notify the consumers of the same.

CONSUMER PROTECTION BILL, 2019

Why in News?

- The Parliament gave its nod to the landmark Consumer Protection Bill, 2019 which aims to protect the rights of consumers by establishing authorities for timely and effective administration and settlement of consumers' dispute.

Significance of the Bill:

- The Bill will replace the more than three decades old Consumer Protection Act, 1986.
- new bill will provide a better mechanism to dispose consumer complaints in a speedy manner and will help in disposal of large number of pending cases in consumer courts across the nation.

- Setting up of a Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) to promote, protect and enforce the rights of consumers as a class.

- The CCPA would make interventions to prevent consumer detriment arising from unfair trade practices. The agency can also initiate class action, including enforcing recall, refund and return of products.

- The Bill also envisages simplified dispute resolution process, has provision for Mediation and e-filing of cases. The Consumer will be able to file cases in the nearest commission under the jurisdiction of which he resides. For the first time there will be an exclusive law dealing with Product Liability. A manufacturer or product service provider or product seller will now be responsible to compensate for injury or damage caused by defective product or deficiency in services.

LINKING FARMERS TO FUTURES MARKET IN INDIA

Why in News?

- The Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) study suggests the need to empower the Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) to trade in the commodities futures market.

Highlights:

- For futures market to achieve the objectives of price discovery and risk mitigation and have an impact on Indian agriculture, it is necessary that more farmers and farmer-producer organisations (FPOs) participate in it.

- The concept of 'Farmer Producer Organizations (FPO)' consists of collectivization of producers, especially small and marginal farmers so as to form an effective alliance to collectively address many challenges of agriculture such as improved access to investment, technology, inputs, and markets. The FPO can be a production company, a cooperative society or any other legal form which provides for sharing of benefits among the members. In some forms like producer companies, institutions of primary producers can also become a member of PO. The FPOs are generally mobilized by promoting institutions/ resource agencies (RAs). Small Farmers Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC) provides support for the promotion of FPOs.

- The resource agencies leverage the support available from governments and agencies like NABARD to promote and nurture FPOs, but attempting an assembly line for mass production of FPOs has not given the desired results.

Future Market:

- Futures contracts are used as hedging instruments in agricultural commodities. Hedging is a common practice that insures the farmer against a poor harvest by purchasing futures contracts in the same commodity.

- Forward Markets Commission (FMC) was a regulatory authority for commodity futures market in India. Forward Markets Commission (FMC) has been merged with Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) with effect from September 28, 2015.

CSR EXPENDITURE TO BE MADE TAX DEDUCTIBLE

Why in News?

- Shri Injeti Srinivas, Secretary (Corporate Affairs), presented the Report of the High-Level Committee on CSR to the Union Minister of Finance and Corporate Affairs, Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman.

Recommendations:

- The main recommendations include, making Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) expenditure tax deductible, provision for carry forward of unspent balance for a period of $3 - 5$ years. The other recommendations include developing a CSR exchange portal to connect contributors, beneficiaries and agencies, allowing CSR in social benefit bonds, promoting social impact companies, and third-party assessment of major CSR projects.

- The Committee has emphasized on not treating CSR as a means of resource gap funding for government schemes. It has emphasized on CSR spending as a board driven process to provide innovative technology-based solutions for social problems.

- The Committee has also recommended that companies having CSR prescribed amount below Rs. 50 lakhs may be exempted from constituting a CSR Committee.

- The Committee has also recommended that violation of CSR compliance may be made a civil offence and shifted to the penalty regime.

GOVERNMENT PLANS TO EXIT 23 CPSEs

Why in News?

- Government has given 'in-principle' approval for strategic disinvestment of 23 central public sector enterprises (CPSEs) including subsidiaries, units and joint ventures.

Difference between Disinvestment and Strategic Disinvestment:

- In case of disinvestment, the Govt sells shares of a company so that it can fetch some money. But strategic disinvestment involves sale of substantial volume of shares so that, part of the control of the company and or management passes to the private shareholder.

Why government plan strategic disinvestment?

- The government should not be in the business
- When a turnaround has been attempted but was unsuccessful

Types of Disinvestment Methods in India:

- ⇢ **Minority Disinvestment/Token Disinvestment:** A minority disinvestment is one the government retains a majority stake in the company, typically greater than 51%, thus ensuring management control.
- ⇢ **Majority Disinvestment/Strategic Disinvestment:** The government retains a minority stake in the company i.e. it sells off a majority stake. It is also called Strategic Disinvestment.
- ⇢ **Complete Privatisation:** Complete privatisation is disinvestment wherein 100% control of the company is passed on to a buyer.

CPSE:

- ⇢ Central public sector enterprises (CPSEs) are those companies in which the direct holding of the Central Government or other CPSEs is 51% or more.

'PANCHAMIRTHAM' OF PALANI TEMPLE GETS GI tag

Why in News?

- ⇢ The famous Palani panchamirtham, given as 'prasadam' at the Murugan temple there, has been granted the Geographical Indication (GI) tag.

Highlights:

- ⇢ This is the first time a temple 'prasadam' from Tamil Nadu has been bestowed with the GI tag.
- ⇢ The panchamirtham is a combination of five natural substances — banana, jaggery, cow ghee, honey and cardamom. Dates and diamond sugar candies are added for flavour.
- ⇢ The panchamirtham is an 'abhishega prasadam' (food that is a religious offering), which is served in a semi-solid state.
- ⇢ Not even a single drop of water is added during the preparation of the panchamirtham. This gives it its classic semi-solid consistency and taste. No preservatives or artificial ingredients are used. According to the GI application filed, the Palani panchamirtham is prepared under the guidance given by the CFTRI (Central Food Technological Research Institute) Mysore, a government of India undertaking.

GI Tag:

- ⇢ A geographical indication (GI) is a name or sign used on certain products which corresponds to a specific geographical location or origin (e.g. a town, region, or country).
- ⇢ GIs have been defined under Article 22(1) of the WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights(TRIPS) Agreement as: "Indications which identify a good as originating in the territory of a member, or a region or locality in that territory, where a given quality, reputation or characteristic of the good is essentially attributable to its geographic origin."

⏵ The GI tag ensures that none other than those registered as authorised users (or at least those residing inside the geographic territory) are allowed to use the popular product name.

RBI ISSUES FINAL NORMS FOR REGULATORY SANDBOX

Why in News?

⏵ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has issued the final framework for regulatory sandbox in order to enable innovations in the financial technology.

Regulatory Sandbox:

⏵ A regulatory sandbox usually refers to live testing of new products or services in a controlled/test regulatory environment for which regulators may permit certain regulatory relaxations for the limited purpose of the testing.

⏵ The objective of the sandbox is to foster responsible innovation in financial services, promote efficiency and bring benefit to consumers.

⏵ It provides a secure environment for fintech firms to experiment with products under supervision of a regulator.

⏵ It is an infrastructure that helps fintech players live test their products or solutions, before getting the necessary regulatory approvals for a mass launch, saving start-ups time and cost.

⏵ The concept of a regulatory sandbox or innovation hub for fintech firms was mooted by a committee headed by then RBI executive director Sudarshan Sen.

⏵ The panel submitted its report in Nov 2017 has called for a regulatory sandbox to help firms experiment with fintech solutions, where the consequences of failure can be contained and reasons for failure analysed.

⏵ If the product appears to have the potential to be successful, it might be authorised and brought to the broader market more quickly.

What are new RBI Norms?

⏵ RBI will launch the sandbox for entities that meet the criteria of minimum net worth of ₹25 lakh as per their latest audited balance sheet.

⏵ The entity should either be a company incorporated and registered in the country or banks licensed to operate in India.

⏵ While money transfer services, digital know-your customer, financial inclusion and cybersecurity products are included, crypto currency, credit registry and credit information have been left out.

⏵ Meeting norms on customer privacy, data protection, security and access to payment data, the security of transactions, KYC, anti-money laundering will be mandatory.

FOUR NEW PRODUCTS GET GI TAG

Why in News?

➤ The Geographical Indication (GI) under the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade has recenly registered 4 new GIs.

Highlights:

➤ Latest additions to the List are:

Palani Panchamirtham from Palani Town in Tamil Nadu:

➤ Palani Panchamirtham is an abishegaPrasadam and is one of the main offerings in the Abisegam of Lord Dhandayuthapani Swamy, the presiding deity of Arulmigu Dhandayuthapaniswamy Temple, situated in palani Hills, in Dindigul District.

➤ It is a combination of five natural substances, namely, banana, jaggery sugar, cow ghee, honey and cardamom in a definite proportion.

➤ It is prepared in a natural method without addition of any preservatives or artificial ingredients and is well known for its religious fervour and gaiety.

➤ This is the first time a temple 'prasadam' from Tamil Nadu has been bestowed with the GI tag.

Tawlhlohpuan from Mizoram:

➤ Tawlhlohpuan, a medium to heavy, compactly woven, good quality fabric from Mizoram.

➤ It is known for warp yarns, warping, weaving & intricate hand-made designs.

➤ Tawlhloh, in Mizo language, means 'to stand firm or not to move backward'.

➤ Tawlhlohpuan is produced throughout the state of Mizoram, Aizawl and Thenzawl town being the main centre of production.

➤ It holds high significance in the Mizo society.

Mizo Puanchei from Mizoram:

➤ Mizo Puanchei is a colourful Mizo shawl/textile, from Mizoram.

➤ It is considered as the most colourful among the Mizo textiles.

➤ It is an essential possession for every Mizo lady and an important marriage outfit in the state.

➤ It is also the most commonly used costume in Mizo festive dances and official ceremonies.

➤ The weavers insert the designs and motifs by using supplementary yarns while weaving.

Tirur Betel leaf from Kerala:

➤ Tirur betel vine from Kerala, is mainly cultivated in Tirur, Tanur, Tirurangadi, Kuttippuram, Malappuram and Vengara block panchayaths of Malappuram District.

➤ It is valued both for its mild stimulant action and medicinal properties.

➤ It is commonly used for making pan masala for chewing, it has many medicinal, industrial and cultural usagesand is considered as a remedy for bad breath and digestive disorders.

Significance of GI Tag:

- ⋙ GI products can benefit the rural economy in remote areas, by supplementing the incomes of artisans, farmers, weavers and craftsmen.
- ⋙ India's rural artisans possess unique skills and knowledge of traditional practices and methods, passed down from generation to generation, which need to be protected and promoted.
- ⋙ The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade has taken several initiatives in this regard and is actively involved in promotion and marketing of GIs.

Geographical Indication:

- ⋙ GI is an indication used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation that are due to that origin.
- ⋙ GI tag conveys an assurance of quality and distinctiveness which is essentially attributable to its origin in that defined geographical locality.

PARTIAL CREDIT GUARANTEE SCHEME TO PSBs

Why in News?

- ⋙ The Government has issued a scheme regarding partial credit guarantee.

Highlights:

- ⋙ The scheme provides for a one-time partial credit guarantee to PSBs for purchase of pooled assets of financially sound NBFCs.
- ⋙ It address temporary asset liability mismatches of otherwise solvent NBFCs/HFCs without having to resort to distress sale of their assets for meeting their commitments.
- ⋙ The window for one-time partial credit guarantee offered by GoI will open from the date of issuance of the Scheme by the Government for a period of six months, or till such date by which Rupees One lakh crore assets get purchased by banks, whichever is earlier.
- ⋙ The Department of Economic Affairs will provide government guarantee of up to 10% of the fair value of assets purchased by a bank from a stressed NBFC or HFC.
- ⋙ The scheme is capped at Rs 1 lakh crore and will be open for up to six months.
- ⋙ The Department of Financial Services will obtain information on transactions in a prescribed format from PSBs and send a copy to the budget division of the Department of Economic Affairs. The government will settle claims by banks within five working days.
- ⋙ NBFCs will have to pay a fee to the government, at 0.25% per annum of the fair value of assets sold to banks.
- ⋙ They will be able to sell 20% of standard assets, worth up to Rs 5,000 crore, as on March 31.

- Assets sold must be at least AA or equivalent rated and the NBFC/HFC selling assets should have appropriate capital, net NPAs of less than 6% and been profitable for the last two financial years.

- NBFCs will also have to rework the asset-liability structure within three months to have a positive asset liability management in each bucket for the first three months and on cumulative basis for the remaining period.

- The one-time guarantee on the pooled assets will be valid for 24 months from the date of purchase and can invoked in specified circumstances.

- The guarantee shall cease earlier if the purchasing bank sells the pooled assets to the originating NBFC or HFC or any other entity before the validity of the guarantee period.

DEBENTURE REDEMPTION RESERVE

Why in News?

- The Centre has removed Debenture Redemption Reserve (DRR) requirement for listed companies, NBFCs and housing finance companies (HFCs).

Debenture redemption reserve (DRR):

- A debenture redemption reserve (DRR) is a provision stating that any Indian corporation that issues debentures must create a debenture redemption service in an effort to protect investors from the possibility of a company defaulting.

- In 2002, the then government said that for NBFCs registered with the Reserve Bank of India, the reserve had to be at least 50 percent of the value of debentures issued via public issuance.

- A 2013 revision brought this down to 25% of the value of publicly issued debentures

- A debenture redemption reserve is meant to protect the interests of retail bond holders in the event of a company going through financial stress. It was introduced in company law for the first time in 2000.

Highlights:

- The Corporate Affairs Ministry (MCA) has now amended its share capital and debenture rules to remove the requirement for creation of a DRR of 25 per cent of the value of outstanding debentures in respect of listed companies, NBFCs registered with the RBI and for HFCs registered with National Housing Bank (NHB) both for public issue as well as private placements

- For unlisted companies, the DRR has been reduced from the present level of 25 per cent to 10 per cent of the outstanding debentures. Hitherto, listed companies had to create a DRR for both public issue as well as private placement of debentures, while NBFCs and HFCs had to create DRR only when they opted for public issue of debentures.

OCEAN ENERGY AS RENEWABLE ENERGY

Why in News?

- In a decision that would give a boost to the ocean energy in India, Union Minister of State for Power and New & Renewable Energy (IC) and Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, Shri RK Singh approved a proposal to declare ocean energy as Renewable Energy.

Significance of Ocean Energy:

- Oceans cover 70 per cent of the earth's surface and represent an enormous amount of energy in the form of wave, tidal, marine current and thermal gradient.

- A variety of different technologies are currently under development throughout the world to harness this energy in all its forms.

- Deployment is currently limited but the sector has the potential to grow, fuelling economic growth, reduction of carbon footprint and creating jobs not only along the coasts but also inland along its supply chains.

- India has a long coastline with the estuaries and gulfs. MNRE looks over the horizon at development of new technology and considers the various options available to support its deployment.

- The objective of the technology programme is to accelerate and enhance support for the resource assessment and deployment of ocean energy in the country and to harness it for power generation and to overcome the barriers.

- The potential locations identified at Khambat & Kutch regions, and large backwaters, where barrage technology could be used. The total theoretical potential of wave energy in India along the country's coast is estimated to less intensive than what is available in more northern and southern latitudes. Although currently under-utilised, Ocean energy is mostly exploited by just a few technologies: Wave, Tidal, Current Energy and Ocean Thermal Energy.

Tidal Energy:

- The tidal cycle occurs every 12 hours due to the gravitational force of the moon. The difference in water height from low tide and high tide is potential energy.

- Similar to traditional hydropower generated from dams, tidal water can be captured in a barrage across an estuary during high tide and forced through a hydro-turbine during low tide.

- The Gulf of Cambay and the Gulf of Kutch in Gujarat on the west coast have the locations in the country where the potential exists.

Wave Energy:

- Wave energy is generated by the movement of a device either floating on the surface of the ocean or moored to the ocean floor. Many different techniques for converting wave energy to electric power have been studied.

- Wave conversion devices that float on the surface have joints hinged together that bend with the waves. This kinetic energy pumps fluid through turbines and creates electric power.
- Stationary wave energy conversion devices use pressure fluctuations produced in long tubes from the waves swelling up and down. This bobbing motion drives a turbine when critical pressure is reached.

Current Energy:

- Marine current is ocean water moving in one direction. This ocean current is known as the Gulf Stream.
- Tides also create currents that flow in two directions. Kinetic energy can be captured from the Gulf Stream and other tidal currents with submerged turbines that are very similar in appearance to miniature wind turbines.

Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion (OTEC):

- Ocean thermal energy conversion, or OTEC, uses ocean temperature differences from the surface to depths lower than 1,000 meters, to extract energy. A temperature difference of only 20°C can yield usable energy.
- Research focuses on two types of OTEC technologies to extract thermal energy and convert it to electric power: closed cycle and open cycle.
- In the closed cycle method, a working fluid, such as ammonia, is pumped through a heat exchanger and vaporized. This vaporized steam runs a turbine.
- The cold water found at the depths of the ocean condenses the vapour back to a fluid where it returns to the heat exchanger.
- In the open cycle system, the warm surface water is pressurized in a vacuum chamber and converted to steam to run the turbine. The steam is then condensed using cold ocean water from lower depths.

FOREIGN PORTFOLIO INVESTORS (FPIs) NEW NORMS

Why in News?

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has released new norms that sought to simplify the compliance and operational requirements for Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs).

Highlights:

- The norms are issued to check the outflows of FPIs as the shares worth over Rs 22,000 crore were sold in July and August 2019.
- FPIs have been withdrawing from Indian equities after the government introduced higher tax surcharge on the super-rich in the Budget 2019.
- FPI regulations have been redrafted based on the recommendation of H R Khan committee.

Revised Norms:

- SEBI decided to do away with the requirement that every FPI should have at least 20 investors.
- Simplification of the KYC (Know-Your-Customer) document requirement for overseas investors.
- SEBI has also allowed central banks of countries that are not members of Bank for International Settlement (BIS) to register as FPIs in India. According to SEBI, such entities are relatively long term, low-risk investors as they are directly/indirectly managed by the government.
- FPIs shall be permitted for off-market transfer of securities which are unlisted, or illiquid, to a domestic or foreign investor.
- Sebi has also permitted offshore funds floated by Indian asset management companies to register themselves as FPIsand invest in Indian markets.
- Sebi has decided that FPIs may be re-categorized into two categories – Categories I and II – instead of the present requirement of three categories.
- Apart from changes in FPIs regulations, SEBI has amended the Prohibition of Insider Trading regulations to include a clause to reward whistle-blowers.

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs):

- Foreign portfolio investment (FPI) consists of securities and other financial assets held by investors in another country. It does not provide the investor with direct ownership of a company's assets and is relatively liquid depending on the volatility of the market.

PRICE STABILISATION FUND (PSF)

Why in News?

- Onions for retailing by Safal is being made available at present from the government stock built under Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF). It was decided that retail priceof onion at Safal would not be allowed to exceed Rs 23.90/- per kg.

Price Stabilisation Fund:

- Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF) refers to any fund constituted for the purpose of containing extreme volatility in prices of selected commodities. The amount in the fund is generally utilised for activities aimed at bringing down/up the high/low prices say for instance, procurement of such products and distribution of the same as and when required, so that prices remain in a range.
- Accordingly, the Government of India in 2015, approved the creation of a Price Stabilization Fund (PSF) with a corpus of Rs.500 crores as a Central Sector Scheme, to support market interventions for price control of perishable agri-horticultural commodities during 2014-15 to 2016-17.

- Initially the fund was proposed to be used for market interventions for onion and potato only and pulses were added subsequently.

Procurement of Commodities:

- Procurement of these commodities will be undertaken directly from farmers or farmers' organizations at farm gate/mandi and made available at a more reasonable price to the consumers. Losses incurred, if any, in the operations will be shared between the Centre and the States.
- PSF Scheme provides for advancing interest free loan to State Governments/Union Territories (UTs) and Central agencies to support their working capital and other expenses they might incur on procurement and distribution interventions for such commodities.
- Hence, the actual utilisation of the fund depends on the willingness of the state governments / union territories to avail of such loans for these purposes. Further, the actual detection of the period when support is required and the deployment of price support measures are left to the states.
- For this purpose, the States will have to set up a 'revolving fund' (a fund which is constantly replenished and not limited by the fiscal year considerations) to which Centre and State will contribute equally (50:50). The ratio of Centre-State contribution to the State level corpus in respect of North-East States will, however, be 75:25. Central Agencies will set up their revolving fund entirely with the advance from the Centre.

Management of Price Stabilization Fund:

- The Price Stabilization Fund will be managed centrally by a Price Stabilization Fund Management Committee (PSFMC) which will approve all proposals from State Governments and Central Agencies. The PSF will be maintained as a Central Corpus Fund by Small Farmers Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC), a society promoted by Ministry of Agriculture for linking agriculture to private businesses and investments and technology. SFAC will act as Fund Manager. Funds from this Central Corpus will be released in two streams, one to the State Governments/UTs as a onetime advance to each State/UT based on its first proposal and the other to the Central Agencies. The one time advance to the States/UTs based on their first proposal along with matching funds from the State/UT will form a State/UT level revolving fund, which can then be used by them for all future market interventions to control prices of onions and potatoes based on approvals by State Level Committee set up explicitly for this purpose. The Price Stabilization Fund (PSF) was set up under the Department of Agriculture, Cooperation & Famers Welfare (DAC&FW), Ministry of Agriculture. The PSF scheme was transferred from DAC&FW to the Department of Consumer Affairs (DOCA) w.e.f. 1st April, 2016.

NATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY COUNCIL

Why in News?

▶ A two-day National Conference on Capacity Building of Sustainable Food Value Chains for Enhanced Food Safety and Quality organized by National Productivity Council (NPC) in collaboration with Asian Productivity Organization, Tokyo, Japan began in New Delhi

National Productivity Council:

▶ NPC is a national level organization to promote productivity culture in India.

▶ Established by the Ministry of Industry, Government of India in 1958, it is an autonomous, multipartite, non-profit organization with equal representation from employers' & workers' organizations and Government, apart from technical & professional institutions and other interests. Currently National Productivity Council (NPC) is an autonomous registered society under Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce & Industry. NPC is a constituent of the Tokyo-based Asian Productivity Organisation (APO), an Inter-Governmental Body, of which the Government of India is a founder member.

Functions:

▶ NPC teams up with its clients to work out solutions towards accelerating productivity, enhancing competitiveness, increasing profits, augmenting safety and reliability and ensuring better quality.

▶ It provides reliable database for decision-making, improved systems and procedures, work culture as well as customer satisfaction both internal & external. The solutions can be all-encompassing or specific depending on the nature of the problem.

▶ The council also helps monitor, review and implement the identified strategies. Promotional and catalytic in nature, NPC's services have bearings on economic growth and quality of life.

▶ The Council promotes a comprehensive view of productivity focused on improving triple bottom line – economic, environmental and social and adds value for all the stakeholders through generation & application of advanced knowledge for inclusive Growth.

DEVELOPMENT FINANCIAL INSTITUTION (DFI)

Why in News?

▶ The government has proposed to set up a development financial institution (DFI) to solve the infrastructure financing needs of the country.

Highlights:

▶ The establishment of such an institution is considered as a positive step as banks do not have the long-term funds to finance such projects.

- Banks cannot afford to lend for such projects because that would shrink their lending capacity as the funds get locked up in such projects for that time period.
- Reasons for DFIs to Fund Infrastructure:
- To boost economic growth which would increase capital flows and energise capital markets.
- To improve long term finances.
- To provide credit enhancement for infrastructure and housing projects
- As India does not have a development bank, DFI would fulfil the need for us to have an institutional mechanism.
- Debt flow towards infrastructure projects would be improved.
- The RBI had specified in 2017 that specialised banks could cater to the wholesale and long-term financing needs of the growing economy and possibly fill the gap in long-term financing.

Development Finance Institution:

- These are specialized institutions set up primarily to provide development/ Project finance especially in developing countries.
- These DFIs are usually majority-owned by national governments.
- The source of capital of these banks is national or international development funds.
- It ensures their creditworthiness and their ability to provide project finance in a very competitive rate.
- It strikes a balance between commercial operational norms as followed by commercial banks on the one hand, and developmental responsibilities on the other.
- DFIs are not just plain lenders like commercial banks but they act as companions in the development of significant sectors of the economy.

Classification of development Financial Institutions:

- Sector specific financial institutions: These financial Institutions focusses on a particular sector to provide project finance.
- Ex: NHB is solely related to Housing projects, EXIM bank is oriented towards import export operations.
- Investment Institutions: These are specialized in providing services designed to facilitate business operations, such as capital expenditure financing and equity offerings, including initial public offerings (IPOs). Ex: LIC, GIC and UTI.

SPECIAL DATA DISSEMINATION STANDARDS (SDDS) OF IMF

Why in News?

- In 2018, India failed to comply with multiple requirements prescribed in the Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS) mandatory for all IMF members

Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS):

- The SDDS is an IMF standard to guide member countries in the dissemination of national statistics to the public.
- It was established in 1996 to guide members that have, or might seek, access to international capital markets in providing their economic and financial data to the public.
- It is a global benchmark for disseminating macroeconomic statistics to the public. Its subscription indicates that a country meets the test of "good statistical citizenship.
- Countries that subscribe to the SDDS agree to follow good practices in four areas: the coverage, periodicity, and timeliness of data; public access to those data; data integrity; and data quality.
- India subscribed to the SDDS on December 27, 1996.

Indian Datasets not Updated:

- India failed to comply with multiple requirements prescribed in the SDDS — a practice mandatory for all IMF members.
- Whereas comparable economies comprising the BRICS grouping of Brazil, China, South Africa and Russia, have maintained a near impeccable record in the same period.
- Also, India's non-compliance in multiple categories in 2018 and to an extent in 2017 breaks with an otherwise near perfect dissemination record.
- When contacted, the IMF acknowledged India's deviations but termed them "non-serious".
- However, independent observers see these deficiencies as a result of indifference to data dissemination procedures.

Importance of SDDS:

- The IMF launched the SDDS initiative in 1996 to guide members to enhance data transparency and help financial market participants with adequate information to assess the economic situations of individual countries. The yearly observance report for each member country lists the compliances and deviations from the SDDS under each data category for that year.
- There are over 20 data categories which IMF considers for this report to capture a nation's economic health including national accounts (GDP, GNI), production indices, employment, and central government operations.

A recent Phenomenon:

- India's non-compliance with IMF standards is a recent phenomenon.
- When asked for the reason for the delays in 2018, Deputy Director in the Department of Economic Affairs termed it as a "one off event due to technical glitches".
- They were made available on other (Indian) government websites on a timely basis through links on the NSDP to these websites".

Implications of Non-Compliance:

- The IMF document states that monitoring observance of the SDDS is central to maintaining the credibility of the IMF's data standards initiatives and its usefulness to policymakers.
- It further states that if the IMF staff considers a non-observance as a "serious deviation" then procedures would be initiated against the member country.
- When the IMF was asked to explain why India's non-observance was deemed as non-serious , their statistical department persisted that this was due to "information availability in other government websites".
- It added that "the forthcoming harmonisation of the NSDPs for all SDDS countries with those for SDDS Plus and e-GDDS countries (other similar standards)" will solve this issue.

ECONOMIC CAPITAL FRAMEWORK

Why in News?

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to transfer Rs 1.76 lakh crore to the Central government, which may help the government in dealing with the economic slowdown.

Highlights:

- The Rs 1.76 lakh crore includes the central bank's 2018-19 surplus of ₹1.23 lakh crore and Rs 52,637 crore of excess provisions identified as per the revised Economic Capital Framework (recommended by Bimal Jalan Committee).
- The government already had revised downward the fiscal deficit target to 3.4% from 3.3% and initiated a slew of measures that are being dubbed as mini-budget.

Economic Capital Framework:

- The RBI had formed a committee chaired by former Governor Bimal Jalan to review its economic capital framework and suggest the quantum of excess provision to be transferred to the government. The panel recommended a clear distinction between the two components of the economic capital of RBI i.e. Realized equity and Revaluation balances.
- Revaluation reserves comprise of periodic marked-to-market unrealized/notional gains/losses in values of foreign currencies and gold, foreign securities and rupee securities, and a contingency fund. Realized equity, which is a form of a contingency fund for meeting all risks/losses primarily built up from retained earnings. It is also called the Contingent Risk Buffer (CBR).
- The Surplus Distribution Policy of RBI that was finalized is in line with the recommendations of the Bimal Jalan committee.
- The Jalan committee has given a range of 5.5-6.5% of RBI's balance sheet for Contingent Risk Buffer.

- Adhering to the recommendations, the RBI has decided to set the CBR level at 5.5% of the balance sheet, while transferring the remaining excess reserves worth ₹52,637 crore to the government.
- If CBR is below the lower bound of requirement, risk provisioning will be made to the extent necessary and only the residual net income (if any) transferred to the Government.

TECH SAKSHAM

Why in News?

- The Union Ministry for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) has launched a project named 'Tech Saksham' to accelerate MSME growth through technology enablement.

Highlights:

- It is a Ministry of MSME and Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) partnered project which brings together technology majors Dell Technologies India, HP India, etc to address technological gaps faced by MSMEs in their growth.
- The Vision is to bridge the gap in technology adoption for MSMEs so as to provide an impetus for them to be competitive on a global scale, increase their contribution to country exports and leverage cost efficiencies.
- It is a three-year-long comprehensive project which, in its first phase, will focus on sectors that are labour-intensive and have the propensity to respond positively to tech-adoption, and will spark a larger discussion in other MSME clusters.
- Through various policy recommendations, knowledge sessions, mentoring initiatives, and useful resource banks for MSMEs, the project will help in addressing critical barriers in the MSME ecosystem such as awareness and cost of technology purchase/maintenance, resources and manpower required to run the technologies, return on investments, etc.

CABINET APPROVES PROPOSAL FOR REVIEW OF FDI POLICY ON VARIOUS SECTORS

Why in News?

- The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal for Review of Foreign Direct Investment on various sectors.

FDI:

- Foreign direct investment (FDI) is an investment made by a firm or individual in one country into business interests located in another country.
- Generally, FDI takes place when an investor establishes foreign business operations or acquires foreign business assets, including establishing ownership or controlling interest in a foreign company.

- FDI are distinguished from portfolio investments in which an investor merely purchases equities of foreign-based companies.

Major decisions on FDI by the Cabinet:

1. 100% FDI under automatic route in coal mining and associated infrastructure

- It will attract international players to create an efficient and competitive coal market.

2. 100% FDI in contract manufacturing under Automatic Route

- Manufacturing through contract contributes equally to the objective of Make in India.
- FDI now being permitted under automatic route in contract manufacturing will be a big boost to Manufacturing sector in India.

3. Relaxing FDI rules for single brand retail; expands definition of 30% domestic sourcing

- It will lead to greater flexibility and ease of operations for SBRT entities, besides creating a level playing field for companies with higher exports in a base year.

4. Online retailing under single-brand retail; relaxing rule of mandatory brick-and-mortar store

- Permitting online sales prior to opening of brick and mortar stores brings policy in sync with current market practices.
- Online sales will also lead to creation of jobs in logistics, digital payments, customer care, training and product skilling.

Significance of the Move:

- The above amendments to the FDI Policy are meant to liberalize and simplify the FDI policy to provide ease of doing business in the country, leading to larger FDI inflows and thereby contributing to growth of investment, income and employment.
- It will result in making India a more attractive FDI destination, leading to benefits of increased investments, employment and growth.

100% FDI In Coal Will Boost Competitiveness

Why in News?

- The Centre's recently announced 100% foreign direct investment (FDI) in the coal sector.

Highlights:

- India is one of the largest importers of thermal coal. Government allowing 100% FDI in coal mining will attract global miners. This will result in FDI inflow along with updated technology, and increase India's coal production.
- It is believed that the Centre's announcement allowing 100% foreign direct investment (FDI) in the coal sector should enhance Coal India Limited's (CIL) competitiveness and efficiency.
- 100% FDI in mining is believed to send a positive signal to global investors and give a significant push to the economy.

- Increased mining will also lower "avoidable imports of coal that India has to make due to the prevalent demand-supply gap.

Significance:

- It is opined that the government has taken a slew of measures, but more needs to be done.
- The FDIs look for large mines and a simplified single-window for mining leases and environmental and forest clearances.
- While the announcement would kindle the interest of global miners, they would need increased ease-of-doing business and time-bound approvals before they invest here.
- In India, it takes at least six years from getting a mine allocation to actually starting mining operations.
- This has now been fixed at 66 months. The Coal Ministry is taking steps such as doing away with the need for prior approval before a State government hands over the mining lease, which typically takes 6-12 months.
- Overseas investors usually do not view such long timelines favourably.

5. GEOGRAPHY & ENVIRONMENT
Indian army launches e-cars in Delhi to fight air pollution

Why in News?

- The Indian Army launched e-cars for use of its officials in New Delhi on August 1.
- The e-car initiative has been launched in partnership with Energy Efficiency Services Ltd (EESL) in a joint venture of the Central PSU's under the Ministry of Power.

Highlights:

- The e-car launch is in line with government policies on environmental protection.
- The plan to deploy e-cars in Indian Army at Delhi was visualized on the occasion of the World Environment Day. The first batch of e-cars was flagged off on August 1, 2019.
- The Indian Army plans to operate 10 e-cars in the first lot as a pilot project and develop further such e-cars in Delhi to ensure minimal emissions and efficiency.
- The e-car initiative is expected to boost further development of electric vehicle technology and its adoption by the general public in the near future.
- The Indian Army has played a leading role in several environment conservation activities. The Indian Army's Territorial Army Battalions have been a part of major environmental protection initiatives such as forestation.
- Besides this, army units stationed in remote areas have been involved in several conservation activities in close coordination with the locals to help preserve the ecological balance and protect the environment.

Electric Cars in India 2019:

- Electric vehicle technology has proved to be a sound alternative to fight air pollution as it reduces carbon emission footprint.
- Several Indian automobile manufacturers including Tata Motors and Mahindra have taken the initiative in manufacturing Electric Cars.
- The EESL has played the role of the main facilitator in providing these e-vehicles to various Government agencies.

CANINE DISTEMPER VIRUS (CDV)

Why in News?

- With doubled tiger populations in India, the loss of habitat, a decline of prey and poaching continues to be a threat to tigers' survival.
- Along with these, a potential virus — Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) — that can be transmitted from CDV-infected dogs living in and around wildlife sanctuaries has started to raise concern among wildlife biologists.
- Last year, over 20 lions from the Gir forest succumbed to the viral infection and now a guideline has been prepared by the NTCA to prevent the spillover of the disease to wild animals.

Canine Distemper Virus (CDV):

- CDV is a contagious and serious disease caused by a virus that attacks the respiratory, gastrointestinal and nervous systems of puppies and dogs.
- Canine distemper is caused by a single-stranded RNA virus of the family Paramyxoviridae (the same family of the viruses that causes measles, mumps, and bronchiolitis in humans).
- Its common symptoms include high fever, eye inflammation and eye/nose discharge, labored breathing and coughing, vomiting and diarrhea, loss of appetite and lethargy, and hardening of nose and footpads.
- It affects a wide variety of animal families, including domestic and wild species of dogs, foxes, pandas, wolves, ferrets and large cats as well.

Risk of Disease Transfer:

- A recent study notes that 86% of the tested dogs around Ranthambhore National Park in Rajasthan carried CDV antibodies in their bloodstream.
- This means that the dogs are either currently infected or have been infected sometime in their life and have overcome the disease.
- This finding points out that there is an increased risk of disease transfer from the dogs to tigers and leopards that live in the park.

Preventive Measure:

▸ The main aim should be to vaccinate the free-ranging and domestic dogs in the area around national parks. The disease needs to be recognised and more targeted studies need to be initiated to collect baseline data on CDV from wherever they are reported from in wild carnivores. Understanding the role of domestic animals as contributors to a local CDV reservoir is imperative precursor in considering control measures.

KOSI-MECHI RIVER INTERLINKING PROJECT

Why in News?

▸ The Centre has approved the Rs 4,900 crore project for interlinking of Kosi and Mechi rivers of Bihar.

▸ This is the second major river interlinking project in the country to be approved after the Ken-Betwa project in Madhya Pradesh.

Kosi-Mechi River Interlining Project:

▸ Bihar has got the final remaining mandatory techno- administrative approval for the project from the MoEFCC.

▸ The central government has approved construction of 76.20 km canals on eastern bank of Kosi for irrigation purpose, the minister said.

▸ Being a green project, it will not displace people nor require acquisition of forest land.

▸ The total land requirement is about 1,396.81 hectares.

Benefits of the Project:

▸ The project will not only prevent recurring floods in north Bihar, but also irrigate over 2.14 lakh hectares of cultivable land in Araria, Purnea, Kishanganj and Katihar districts, collectively called Seemanchal region.

▸ The project is aimed at alleviating hardships of the people resulting from the floods and has the potential to usher in a green revolution in Seemanchal region.

▸ This project will provide a diversion to the surplus water of Kosi River through existing Hanuman Nagar barrage to Mechi River of Mahananda basin.

▸ Mechi River will get water from another source and it will become a vast natural resource of irrigation. There are no national parks, wildlife sanctuaries or eco-sensitive zones within 10 km radius of the project.

Move for a National Project:

▸ Bihar is pitching the river interlinking project for the national project & status and in that case the majority funding of the project will be borne by the Centre.

▸ The fact that the entire command area is contiguous to Indo-Nepal international boundary is a critical aspect that the Government of India would likely take special note.

WORLD BIOFUEL DAY

Why in News?

▸ World Biofuel Day is observed every year on 10th of August to create awareness about the importance of non-fossil fuels as an alternative to conventional fossil fuels and highlight the various efforts made by Government in the biofuel sector.

Highlights:

▸ This year the theme of the World Biofuel Day is "Production of Biodiesel from Used Cooking Oil (UCO)".

▸ Biofuels have the benefits of reduction of import dependence, cleaner environment, additional income to farmers and employment generation.

▸ Biofuel programme also compliments Government of India's initiatives for Make in India, Swachh Bharat and increasing farmers income. A number of initiatives have been undertaken to increase production and blending of biofuels since 2014.

▸ In India, the same cooking oil is used for repeated frying which adversely affects the health due to formation of polar compounds during frying. These polar compounds are associated with diseases such as hypertension, atherosclerosis, Alzheimer's disease, liver diseases among others.

▸ UCO is either not discarded at all or disposed off in an environmentally hazardous manner choking drains and sewerage systems.

▸ The National Policy on Biofuels, released by the Government of India in 2018, envisages production of biofuel from UCO.

▸ Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is implementing a strategy to divert UCO from the food value chain and curb current illegal usage.

▸ The benefits of transformation of UCO will help bring health benefits as there would be no recycling of the UCO, employment generation, infrastructural investment in rural areas & cleaner environment with reduced carbon footprint.

▸ To facilitate the production of Biodiesel from UCO, the Oil Marketing Companies shall float an Expression of Interest (EOI) for procurement of Biodiesel from Used Cooking Oil across 100 cities.

▸ The purpose of inviting this EOI is to encourage the applicants to set up Biodiesel producing plants from Used Cooking Oil (UCO), processing plants and further utilizing the existing potential of UCO based Bio-diesel in India.

UNITED NATIONS INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION (UNIDO) AND NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SOLAR ENERGY

Why in News?

▸ An agreement was signed today between the National Institute of Solar Energy (NISE) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) to initiate a skill development programme for different levels of beneficiaries in the solar thermal energy sector.

Highlights:

▸ NISE and UNIDO will engage national and international experts to bring the best practices by developing specialized training material.

▸ The agreement is part of the ongoing MNRE-GEF-UNIDO project implemented jointly by UNIDO and to support capacity building and skill development of technical manpower in the Concentrated Solar Thermal Energy Technologies (CST) which are being used to replace conventional fossil fuels e.g. coal, diesel, furnace oil etc. and save costs and emissions in the industrial process heat applications.

UNIDO:

▸ UNIDO is the specialized agency of the United Nations that promotes industrial development for poverty reduction, inclusive globalization and environmental sustainability.

▸ The mission of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), as described in the Lima Declaration adopted at the fifteenth session of the UNIDO General Conference in 2013, is to promote and accelerate inclusive and sustainable industrial development (ISID) in Member States.

▸ Accordingly, the Organization's programmatic focus is structured, as detailed in the Organization's Medium-Term Programme Framework 2018-2021, in four strategic priorities:
   1. Creating shared prosperity
   2. Advancing economic competitiveness
   3. Safeguarding the environment
   4. Strengthening knowledge and institutions

UNIDO's Four Enabling Functions:

▸ Technical cooperation

▸ Analytical and research functions and policy advisory services

▸ Normative functions and standards and quality-related activities

▸ Convening and partnerships for knowledge transfer, networking and industrial cooperation.

National Institute of Solar Energy:

▸ National Institute of Solar Energy (NISE), an autonomous institution of Ministry of New and Renewable (MNRE), is the apex National R&D institution in the field Solar Energy.

- The Government of India has converted 25-year-old Solar Energy Centre (SEC) under MNRE to an autonomous institution in September, 2013 to assist the Ministry in implementing the National Solar Mission and to coordinate research, technology and other related works.
- The institute is involved in demonstration, standardization, interactive research, training and testing solar technologies and systems.
- It is an effective interface between the Government and institutions, industry & user organizations for development, promotion and widespread utilization of solar energy in the country.

CITES

Why in News?

- India has submitted proposals regarding changes to the listing of various wildlife species in the CITES secretariat meeting, scheduled later this month in Geneva, Switzerland.

CITES:

- CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) is an international agreement between governments. Its aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.
- The species covered by CITES are listed in three Appendices, according to the degree of protection they need.
- **Appendix I** includes species threatened with extinction. Trade in specimens of these species is permitted only in exceptional circumstances.
- **Appendix II** includes species not necessarily threatened with extinction, but in which trade must be controlled in order to avoid utilization incompatible with their survival.
- **Appendix III** contains species that are protected in at least one country, which has asked other CITES Parties for assistance in controlling the trade. Changes to Appendix III follow a distinct procedure from changes to Appendices I and II, as each Party's is entitled to make unilateral amendments to it.

How New Species are added into the CITES List:

- The Conference of the Parties (CoP), which is the supreme decision-making body of the Convention and comprises all its Parties, has agreed on a set of biological and trade criteria to help determine whether a species should be included in Appendices I or II. At each regular meeting of the CoP, Parties submit proposals based on those criteria to amend these two Appendices.
- Those amendment proposals are discussed and then submitted to a vote. The Convention also allows for amendments by a postal procedure between meetings of the CoP, but this procedure is rarely used.

- Changes to Appendix III follow a distinct procedure from changes to Appendices I and II, as each Party's is entitled to make unilateral amendments to it.

Proposal:

- The proposals submitted are regarding changes in the listing of the smooth-coated otter, small-clawed otter, Indian star tortoise, Tokay gecko, wedgefish and Indian rosewood.
- The country seeks to boost the protection of all the five animal species as they are facing a high risk of international trade.
- For the Indian rosewood, the proposal is to remove the species from CITES Appendix II. The species covered by CITES are listed in three appendices on the degree of protection they require. India is among the parties proposing the re-listing of the star tortoise from CITES Appendix II to Appendix I. The species faces two threats: loss of habitat to agriculture and illegal harvesting for the pet trade. With regard to the two otter species, India, Nepal and the Philippines have proposed that the listing be moved from CITES Appendix II to Appendix I for the more endangered species. A similar proposal has been made to include the Tokay gecko in Appendix I.

BUFFER ZONE

Why in News?

- The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has relaxed the procedure for environmental clearances of developmental activities in the buffer zone.

Highlights:

- Buffer Zone is an area supposed to reinforce conservation of protected area. This move is likely to weaken the protection offered to wildlife sanctuaries and national parks.
- As per an office memorandum (OM), the projects outside the boundary of the notified Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) of a sanctuary or national park but within 10 km radius of the park will not need prior clearance from the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL).
- The Wildlife Conservation Strategy of 2002 recommends a buffer of 10 km around sanctuaries.
- ESZ are formed to serve as "shock absorber" for protected areas. The basic aim here is to regulate certain activities around national parks and wildlife sanctuaries to minimise negative impact on the fragile ecosystem around.
- Such proposals will now get environmental clearance from the ministry's Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC), which will ensure "appropriate conservation measures in the form of recommendations". Projects within the notified ESZ will require the NBWL's nod, which can be applied for together with the initial "terms of reference" application.
- Mining will be prohibited within the notified ESZ or within only one km from the boundary of the park, whichever is higher according to the new OM.

- It nullifies previous OMs dated February 27, 2007 and December 2, 2009, which made the NBWL's approval mandatory for projects within a 10 km radius of the park.

Concerns:
- This completely defeats the purpose of recognising 10 km around protected areas as areas that need to be recognised for their conservation value.
- It also reads down the importance of ensuring wildlife related scrutiny at the time of Environment Clearances.

National Board for Wildlife:
- As per the amendment of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 in 2002, a provision was incorporated for the constitution of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL), replacing the Indian Board for Wildlife. The National Board for Wildlife has 47 members with the Prime Minister in the Chair. The Minister in charge of the Ministry of Environment & Forests in the Central Government is the Vice-Chairperson.
- The Board is responsible for promotion of conservation and development of wildlife and forests.

SUNDARBANS CONSERVATION

Why in News?
- Discovery India and World Wide Fund (WWF) India have partnered with the Government of West Bengal and local communities in the Sundarban to help save the world's only mangrove tiger habitat.

The Project:
- The project will use technology to solve several of the issues faced in the region. This includes building datasets on impacts of climate change on estuarine ecosystem.

- The initiative focuses on enhancing farmland productivity through low-cost measures and adjusting crop calendars to deal with climate change.
- The initiative will also include work towards securing habitats for tigers and prey species.
- The project at Sundarbans is part of a global movement, Project CAT (Conserving Acres for Tigers), aimed at building healthy habitats for Tigers by conserving six million acres of protected land across four countries.

Project CAT (Conserving Acres for Tigers):
- Discovery Communications is working with World Wildlife Fund and others to support a worldwide effort to double the number of tigers in the wild by 2022. It is a mission to ensure a future for tigers and other endangered wildlife by conserving nearly a million acres of

protected land on the border of India and Bhutan. Tigers face multiple threats from poaching, habitat loss and fragmentation, conflict with humans and overhunting of their prey species.

Umbrella Species:

- ▸ Umbrella Species are species that are selected for conservation-related decisions because the conservation and protection of these species indirectly affect the conservation and protection of other species within their ecosystem. Umbrella species help in the selection of potential reserve locations, as well as the determination of the composition of the reserve.

- ▸ These species usually have a large area requirement for which the conservation of the species extends the protection to other species sharing the same habitat. Umbrella species are representative of other species in their habitat since they are known species, and they also determine the area of conservation.

Keystone Species:

- ▸ A keystone species is an organism that helps define an entire ecosystem. Without its keystone species, the ecosystem would be dramatically different or cease to exist altogether. Keystone species have low functional redundancy. Any organism, from plants to fungi, may be a keystone species; they are not always the largest or most abundant species in an ecosystem.

Sundarbans:

- ▸ The Sundarbans mangrove forest, one of the largest such forests in the world, lies across India and Bangladesh on the delta of the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers on the Bay of Bengal. It is adjacent to the border of India's Sundarbans World Heritage site inscribed in 1987.

- ▸ The site is intersected by a complex network of tidal waterways, mudflats and small islands of salt-tolerant mangrove forests, and presents an excellent example of ongoing ecological processes. The area is known for its wide range of fauna, including 260 bird species, the Bengal tiger and other threatened species such as the estuarine crocodile and the Indian python.

NATIONAL MARITIME DOMAIN AWARENESS (NMDA) PROJECT.

Why in News?

- ▸ Post 2008 Mumbai terror attacks, India established National Maritime Domain Awareness (NMDA) grid built around the National Command Control Communication Intelligence (NC3I) network and the Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) which obtains information from over 50 coastal radar stations including those located on island territories.

- ▸ In the NMDA project, the NC3I network will function as the communication backbone and the IMAC will be the NMDA Centre.

IMAC:

- Set up to provide coastal security and to avert tragic incidents like the 26/11 terror attack on Mumbai, the IMAC is the nodal centre of the National Command Control Communications and Intelligence Network (NC3I Network), and is a joint initiative of Indian Navy, Coast Guard and Bharat Electronics Ltd to improve coastal surveillance.
- The IMAC collates, fuses and disseminates intelligence and information about 'unusual or suspicious movements and activities at sea'.
- The IMAC also receives vital operational data about 'white shipping' (merchant shipping including fishing vessels over 300 tons) from a number of sources such as the Automatic Identification System (AIS) and the long-range identification and tracking (LRIT), a satellite-based, real-time reporting mechanism for position of ships. This information is further supplemented by shore based electro-optical systems and high definition radars.

National Command Control Communications and Intelligence Network:

- The NC3I network links 51 Naval and Coast Guard stations, located along the coast and on island territories.
- The network provides these stations coastal surveillance information obtained from various sensors such as the coastal radar chain of the Indian Coast Guard and automatic tracking systems as well as electro-optical cameras.
- The network rides on dedicated terrestrial data circuits, as well as, satellite communication, which helps the stations in remote locations to be networked.
- The IMAC is the centre where data from various sensors and databases is aggregated, correlated and then disseminated to various stations for enhanced awareness.

OXYTOCIN AND IT OVER COMMERCIAL USAGE

Why in News?

- The final decision on whether the government can block private pharmaceutical companies from manufacturing and selling vital pregnancy drug oxytocin in India handed to the Supreme Court.

Oxytocin:

- Oxytocin, also known as the 'love hormone', is a hormone secreted by the pituitary glands of mammals during sex, childbirth, lactation or social bonding.
- It is secreted by pituitary glands in human body.
- However, it can also be chemically manufactured and is sold by pharma companies for use during childbirth. It is administered either as an injection or a nasal solution.

Why is it vital?

- Oxytocin is a uterine stimulant hormone, prescribed for the initiation of uterine contractions and induction of labour in women, as well as stimulation of contractions during labour.
- Oxytocin helps promote the release of breast milk. It is also used to help abort the foetus in cases of incomplete abortion or miscarriage, and to control bleeding after childbirth.
- It is also used widely in the dairy industry, agriculture and horticulture to boost production.

What is the Case?

- The health ministry in April 2018 notified a ban on private firms from manufacturing and selling oxytocin.

- It wanted to restrict the responsibility of supplying the drug to a Karnataka-based public sector manufacturer to avoid its misuse in the veterinary field.

- Following a case by drug makers like some private players the Delhi High Court in December 18 quashed the ban on various grounds, including that it lacked scientific basis.

- The government has appealed the decision at the Supreme Court, arguing that the Karnataka PSU has built up the capacity to manufacture and supply the required quantity of the drug here.

6. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

INS Tarkash at Bergen

Why in News?

- Indian Naval Ship Tarkash, a front-line warship of the Indian Navy, entered the port of Bergen, Norway, for a three-day visit as part of Western Fleet Overseas Deployment.

Highlights:

- The ship is part of the Indian Navy's Western Fleet and is under the operational Command of Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief/ Western Naval Command, based at Mumbai.
- The port call by Tarkash at Bergen is a demonstration of India's warm ties with Norway. INS Tarkash, commanded by Captain Sathish Vasudev, is one of the most potent frontline frigates of the Indian Navy equipped with a versatile range of weapons and sensors.
- During the port call, various dignitaries and government officials of Norway are scheduled to visit the ship. Professional interactions are planned with the Royal Norwegian Navy and Coast Guard towards further enhancing co-operation between the two countries.
- In addition to social engagements and sports event, best practices will also be shared between the Indian and Royal Norwegian Navies.

India and Norway Ties:

- ⇶ India has cordial and friendly relations since 1947 with Norway. Bilateral cooperation between the two countries is progressed through the India-Norway Joint Commission Meetings.
- ⇶ The inaugural 'Bilateral Discussion' between the Royal Norwegian Navy and IN was held in February 2017 at New Delhi.
- ⇶ Indian Navy ships are regularly deployed as part of Indian Navy's mission of building 'bridges of friendship' and strengthening international cooperation with friendly countries.
- ⇶ The ship visit to Norway comes amidst growing importance and convergence of national goals towards shared maritime interest and deepening of ties between both the countries.

IPCC REPORT

Why in News?

- ⇶ A new report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released Thursday presents the most recent evidence on how the different uses of land — forests, agriculture, urbanisation — are affecting and getting affected by climate change.

IPCC:

- ⇶ The Geneva-based IPCC is the United Nations body for assessing the science related to climate change.
- ⇶ It was created "to provide policymakers with regular scientific assessments on climate change, its implications and potential future risks, as well as to put forward adaptation and mitigation options".
- ⇶ This is the first time that the IPCC, whose job it is to assess already-published scientific literature to update our knowledge of climate change science, has focused its attention solely on the land sector. It is part of a series of special reports that IPCC is doing in the run-up to the sixth edition of its main report, blandly called the Assessment Reports, that is due around 2022.
- ⇶ Last year, the IPCC had produced a special report on the feasibility of restricting global rise in temperature to within 1.5 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial times. These reports were sought by governments to get a clearer picture of specific aspects of climate change.

Highlights:

- ⇶ The current report talks about the contribution of land-related activities to global warming — how the different uses of land, like agriculture, industry, forestry, cattle-rearing, and urbanisation, was affecting emissions of greenhouse gases.
- ⇶ An important part of the report talks about the manner in which even existential activities like food production contributes to global warming and is also affected by it. The global food production system could account for 16 to 27 per cent of GHG emissions

- The report says that if pre-production activities like cattle rearing and post-production activities like transport, energy and food processing, is taken into account, then food production could contribute as much as 37 per cent of all greenhouse gas emissions every year.
- It points out that nearly 25 per cent of all food produced is either lost or wasted. And even the decomposition of the waste releases emissions.
- The global rise in temperature has been much faster over land than over the entire planet.
- This additional warming over land could have led to increased frequency, intensity and duration of heat-related events such as heat waves.

Land Climate Link:

- Land use, and changes in land use, have always been an integral part of the conversation on climate change. That is because land acts as both the source as well as a sink of carbon.
- Activities like agriculture and cattle rearing, for example, are a major source of methane and nitrous oxide, both of which are hundreds of times more dangerous than carbon dioxide as a greenhouse gas.
- At the same time, soil, trees, plantations, and forests absorb carbon dioxide for the natural process of photosynthesis, thus reducing the overall carbon dioxide content in the atmosphere.
- This is the reason why largescale land use changes, like deforestation or urbanisation, or even a change in cropping pattern, have a direct impact on the overall emissions of greenhouse gases.

Land, Oceans, Forests:

- Land and ocean together absorb nearly 50 per cent of greenhouse gases emitted every year through natural processes in the carbon cycle.
- The importance of land, or ocean, as a carbon sink, thus cannot be overstated in the global fight against climate change. That is why afforestation, and reduction in deforestation, are vital approaches in a global strategy to combat climate change.
- India's action plan on climate change too, has a very important component on forests. India has promised that it would create an additional carbon sink of about 2.5 billion to 3 billion tonnes by the year 2032 by increasing its forest cover, and planting more trees.

What needs to be Done:

- Measures such as reduction in food wastage, sustainable agriculture practices and shifting of dietary preferences to include more plant-based food could reduce emissions without jeopardising food security.

SHILLONG DECLARATION

Why in News?

- The 22nd National Conference on e-Governance adopts 'Shillong Declaration' with focus on Northeast. The declaration has outlined the future trajectory that would be taken in terms of e-governance with a focus on improving connectivity in Northeast.

Highlights:

- Improve the citizen's experience with Government services by promoting timely implementation of India Enterprise Architecture (IndEA).

- Consolidate the plethora of successful State level e-Governance projects with a focus to replicate them as a common application software.

- Take steps to further improve connectivity in North Eastern States by addressing the issues of telecommunications connectivity at grassroot level.

- Take steps to enhance the activities of Electronics Sector Skill Council in North Eastern States and explore the possibility for opening an electronics skill center in Shillong.

- Promote use of e-Office and move towards less paper State Secretariats in the North-Eastern States and in the District level offices.

INDIA-MALDIVES MoU

Why in News?

- The India-Maldives MoU on Training and Capacity Building Programme for Maldivian Civil Servants was operationalised.

Highlights:

- The Prime Minister of India in his visit to Maldives in June 2019, had emphasised India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy and assured India's full support to Maldives and strengthening of democratic and independent institutions of Maldives.

- One of the MoUs signed during the visit was between the National Center for Good Governance, India and the Civil Services Commission of Maldives which envisaged capacity building activities for Civil Servants of Maldives at the National Centre for Good Governance over the next 5 years.

- The Agreement envisaged that the National Center for Good Governance, India will be the nodal institution for designing customised training modules and its implementation taking into account the requirements of the Civil Service Commission of Maldives.

⏩ The subject matter of the training programs include public administration, e-governance and service delivery, public policy and governance, information technology, urban development and planning, ethics in administration and challenges in implementation of SDGs.

INDIA-BHUTAN RELATIONS

Why in News?

⏩ Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bhutanese counterpart Lotay Tshering held wide ranging talks on Saturday and discussed steps to further expand the bilateral partnership across several sectors.

Highlights:

⏩ The two countries signed 10 MoUs in the fields of space research, aviation, IT, power and education. Launched the RuPay Card in Bhutan by making a purchase at Simtokha Dzong, built in 1629 by Shabdrung Namgyal, which functions as a monastic and administrative centre and is one of the oldest dzongs in Bhutan.

⏩ He said an additional $100 million will be available to Bhutan under a standby swap arrangement to meet the foreign exchange requirement.

⏩ Unveiled an e-plaque on the interconnection between India's National Knowledge Network and Bhutan's Druk Research and Education Network.

Significance of Bhutan for India:

⏩ Bhutan's significance to India stems from its geographic location. Nestled in the Himalayas, it is sandwiched between India and China. Thus, it serves as a buffer between the two Asian giants.

⏩ Bhutan's value as a buffer soared after China annexed Tibet in 1951.

⏩ As the 2017 crisis in the Doklam region revealed, India will strongly oppose, even militarily, any Chinese attempt to assert control over Doklam. Securing Bhutan's present borders especially its western border is clearly important for India.

⏩ Doklam in the hands of a hostile power would heighten the vulnerability of India's Siliguri Corridor, a narrow strip of land that links India to its Northeastern states.

Background:

⏩ Diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan were established in 1968 with the

⏩ establishment of a special office of India in Thimphu. Before this our relations with

⏩ Bhutan were looked after by our Political Officer in Sikkim.

⏩ The basic framework of India- Bhutan bilateral relations was the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed in 1949 between the two countries, which was revised in February 2007.

⏩ The Golden Jubilee of the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan is being celebrated in the year 2018.

Treaty of Friendship:

- On August 8, 1949 Bhutan and India signed the Treaty of Friendship, calling for peace between the two nations and non-interference in each other's internal affairs.

- However, Bhutan agreed to let India "guide" its foreign policy and both nations would consult each other closely on foreign and defence affairs. The treaty also established free trade and extradition protocols.

- Scholars regard the effect of the treaty is to make Bhutan into a protected state, but not a protectorate, because Bhutan continues to have the power to conduct its own foreign policy.

The New Treaty of Friendship 2007:

- India re-negotiated the 1949 treaty with Bhutan and signed a new treaty of friendship in 2007. The new treaty replaced the provision requiring Bhutan to take India's guidance on foreign policy with broader sovereignty and not require Bhutan to obtain India's permission over arms imports. India allows 16 entry and exit points for Bhutanese trade with other countries (the only exception being the People's Republic of China) and has agreed to develop and import a minimum of 10,000 megawatts of electricity from Bhutan by 2021.

Bilateral Cooperation:

- There are a number of institutional mechanisms between India and Bhutan in areas such as security, border management, trade, transit, economic, hydro-power, development cooperation, water resources. There have been regular exchanges at the Ministerial and officials' level, exchanges of parliamentarian delegations to strengthen partnership in diverse areas of cooperation.

Hydropower:

- Hydropower Cooperation Hydropower projects in Bhutan are an example of win-win cooperation, providing a reliable source of inexpensive and clean electricity to India, generating export revenue for Bhutan and cementing our economic integration.

- Government of India has constructed three Hydroelectric Projects (HEPs) in Bhutan totaling 1416 MW, which are operational and exporting surplus power to India

- About three-fourth of the power generated is exported and rest is used for domestic consumption.

Military Ties:

- India has strong military and economic ties with Bhutan. The Indian military "is virtually responsible for protecting Bhutan from external and internal threats" and to this end, the Eastern Command of the Indian Army and Air Force have integrated Bhutan's defence into their role and responsibilities.

- Indian Military Training Team (IMTRAT) trains Bhutanese security personnel as well.

AGREEMENT BETWEEN INDIA AND PERU

Why in News?

⏩ The Union Cabinet, has approved signing of agreement between the National Medicinal Plants Board, Ministry of AYUSH of the Republic of India and the National Institute of Health of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Peru on Cooperation in the field of Medicinal Plants.

Background:

⏩ India is one of the richest countries in the world in terms of biodiversity and more than 7000 species of plants are estimated to have medicinal usage in folk and documented systems of traditional medicines like Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha & Homoeopathy (AYUSH System of Medicine). The Republic of Peru is one of the Latin American Countries which are the biodiversity hotspots in the world and like India. Peru is also having rich biodiversity of medicinal plants and the medicinal plants based traditional medicine practices are prominently practiced by indigenous people.

Significance:

⏩ Both countries having rich medicinal plants biodiversity and medicinal plants based indigenous traditional system of medicines.

⏩ Considering the richness of medicinal plants biodiversity and uses of these resources in Indigenous Traditional Systems of medicines in both countries and to strengthen the bilateral cooperation, the proposed Agreement on cooperation, in the field of medicinal plants is envisaged. The proposed Agreement will further enhance bilateral cooperation between the two countries in the area of Medicinal Plants. This will be of immense importance to both countries. This Agreement will provide structured framework for cooperation between the two countries on Medicinal Plants.

RUSSIA SET TO OFFER SUBMARINES DURING MODI-PUTIN SUMMIT

Why in News?

⏩ Russia is likely to offer India its conventional submarines at the summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Vladimir Putin at Vladivostok.

Highlights:

⏩ Modi is to visit Vladivostok to attend the Eastern Economic Forum as well as the annual bilateral summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

⏩ This is the 20th summit between the leaders of the two countries since the year 2000 when the mechanism was institutionalized.

⏩ The meeting between Modi and Putin will be their third this year—previously they met on the margins of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meet in the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek and the

G20 meet in Osaka. The two countries are looking to get Indian investment into Russia's Far East that borders China, a region rich in mineral resources.

Strengthening Defence:

- The submarines will be offered on the government-to-government route under the Navy's Project-75I at the summit.
- This is expected to save a lot of time in the procurement process.
- The Navy is looking to buy six advanced conventional diesel-electric submarines under Project 75I that, after several delays, has made progress in the past several months.
- The procurement is under the Strategic Partnership (SP) model, and is the second project to be processed through this route after the Navy's tender for utility helicopters.
- The Russian submarine will likely be based on the Amur 1650 conventional submarine, modified to suit Indian requirements.

7. INTERNAL SECURITY & DISASTER MANAGEMENT

ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN REUNITING MISSING CHILDREN & TRAFFICKED PERSONS'

Why in News?

- A one-day Workshop on 'Role of Technology in Reuniting Missing Children & Trafficked Persons' was jointly organised by National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, in collaboration with Indian Police Foundation

Highlights:

- The workshop deliberated on the use of biometrics by law enforcement agencies for the identification of persons.

Strengthening defence

Reviewing defence cooperation will be on top of the agenda during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Russia next week

- The deal to manufacture at least 200 Ka-226T Utility helicopters for the Indian Army and Air Force is likely to get a boost
- The two leaders will also review

the setting up of a manufacturing plant in India for Ak-203 assault rifles

- Russia is likely to offer its conventional submarine for the Navy's P-75I tender
- Russia might consider an offer of Su-57 Russian Fifth Generation Fighter Aircraft (in picture) to India

- Use of biometrics is not a new practice in law enforcement; however, it was not as technologically advanced as present-day applications. Rise of computing and electronics have greatly assisted biometric applications to become faster, more secure and accurate.
- Use of biometrics has become a necessity in today's complex world.

- It was emphasized that with the use of biometrics, law enforcement agencies can also locate large number of persons, especially children who are reported missing.
- Similarly, unidentified found persons and unidentified dead bodies can also be matched using biometrics with the existing records of missing persons and unidentified found persons.
- In a large population, it is the only mechanism to provide an accurate match and help people in reuniting with their families.
- Use of facial recognition technology for various applications, stressing upon the importance of identifying tools which would greatly facilitate the investigation of crime and detection of criminals and provide information for reuniting missing children and trafficked persons.
- NCRB clarified the doubts related to security breach, reliability and privacy of individuals while implementing AFRS (Automated Facial Recognition System). AFRS of NCRB will not work on public databases.
- AFRS results will be further corroborated and analysed by collecting other evidences by Investigation Officer before drawing any conclusions. AFRS will not source facial images from CCTV cameras in public places, unless the video footage is part of the scene of crime.

NATURAL SIGNS OF FLOODS FOR URBAN AREAS

Why in News?

- A study in the Journal of the British Academy has found that indigenous knowledge on how nature warns of flooding is relevant in urban areas as well.

Highlights:

- Climate change and population growth put millions of people at risk of increasingly unpredictable weather patterns.
- More than 3 million urban dwellers could be at risk of flooding from extreme rainfall by 2050 as climate change brings more unpredictable weather hazards, the study said.
- According to a 2018 report for the C40 cities, extreme heat and power blackouts, alongside food and water shortages, are other threats if climate changing emissions are not curbed.
- The study interviewed 1,050 people in 21 rural and urban communities in Ghana, including the capital city Accra and the main city of Tamale in its Northern Region.

Indigenous Knowledge:

- Indigenous knowledge about how to spot flood risks ahead of time could save lives in cities.
- Indigenous people in Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Myanmar and Ethiopia, for example, use their knowledge to observe and mitigate impacts of extreme climate events such as flooding and droughts.

➔ Indigenous knowledge can be used as an additional layer to scientific research in designing early warning systems for floods.

Signs of Nature:

➔ Understanding changes in natural indicators, such as plants, birds and temperatures, could be used to alert urban residents to extreme weather.

➔ Knowledge transfers that can be made between rural and peri-urban spaces could save lives and livelihoods around the world.

➔ Researchers documented natural indicators used by indigenous communities to predict floods, droughts and temperature changes.

➔ The indicators include:

1. Links between rainfall patterns and ant behaviour

2. Appearances by certain birds

3. Flowering of baobab trees

4. Observations of heat intensity

5. Promoting tree-planting in urban areas could offer further opportunities to apply indigenous knowledge on flora in cities.

BrahMos MISSILE TO BE DEPLOYED ALONG COAST FOR MARITIME SECURITY

Why in News?

➔ The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) has approved the procurement of a Software Defined Radio (SDR) and the Next Generation Maritime Mobile Coastal Batteries (NGMMCB) for the Navy.

Highlights:

➔ The NGMMCB will be fitted with the BrahMos surface-to-surface supersonic cruise missiles and deployed along the coast.

➔ The SDR has been designed and developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) and the Navy's Weapons Electronics Systems Engineering Establishment (WESEE).

➔ SDR will facilitate high-speed data and secure voice communication with anti-jamming capability.

BrahMos:

➔ BrahMos was jointly developed by India and Russia and has been inducted into the the Army and the Navy. It is a joint venture between the Russian Federation's NPO Mashinostroyeniya and India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) who together have

formed BrahMos Aerospace. The name BrahMos is a portmanteau formed from the names of two rivers, the Brahmaputra of India and the Moskva of Russia.

⚜ The BrahMos is a medium-range ramjet supersonic cruise missile.

⚜ It can be launched from submarine, ships, aircraft, or land.

⚜ It is the fastest supersonic cruise missile in the world and the world's fastest anti-ship cruise missile in operation. The missile travels at speeds of Mach 2.8 to 3.0, which is being upgraded to Mach 5.0. In 2019, India upgraded the missile with a new range of 500 km.

INDIA'S DOCTRINE OF NUCLEAR NO FIRST USE

Why in News?

⚜ Raksha Mantri has said that while India has strictly adhered to the doctrine of 'No First Use' (NFU) of nuclear weapons, it can be reconsidered on future circumstances.

⚜ It was not immediately clear if policymakers are willing to revisit it.

Doctrine in Making:

⚜ A commitment to not be the first to use a nuclear weapon in a conflict has long been India's stated policy.

⚜ India first adopted a "No first use" policy after its second nuclear tests Pokhran-II, in 1998.

⚜ In August 1999, the govt. released a draft of the doctrine which asserts that nuclear weapons are solely for deterrence and that India will pursue a policy of "retaliation only".

⚜ Pakistan, by contrast, has openly threatened India with the use of nuclear weapons on multiple occasions beginning from the time the two nations were not even acknowledged nuclear powers.

No First Use Doctrine:

⚜ Among the major points in the doctrine was "a posture of No First Use", which was described as follows: Nuclear weapons will only be used in retaliation against a nuclear attack on Indian territory or on Indian forces anywhere".

⚜ India's nuclear retaliation to a first strike will be massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage. Also in the event of a major attack against India, or Indian forces anywhere, by biological or chemical weapons, India will retain the option of retaliating with nuclear weapons. Nuclear retaliatory attacks can only be authorised by the civilian political leadership through the Nuclear Command Authority. (The Nuclear Command Authority comprises a Political Council and an Executive Council. The Political Council is chaired by the PM.)

⚜ India would not use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states.

- India would continue to put strict controls on the export of nuclear and missile related materials and technologies, participate in the Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty negotiations, and continue to observe the moratorium on nuclear tests.
- India remains committed to the goal of a nuclear weapons free world, through global, verifiable and non-discriminatory nuclear disarmament.

Background:

- The successive governments are following Vajpayee's doctrine and have directly or indirectly reaffirmed their commitment to NFU.
- However, the doctrine has been questioned at various times by strategic experts in domestic policy debates, and the idea that India should revisit this position has been put forward at various high-level fora.

DEFENCE PROCUREMENT PROCEDURE

Why in News?

- Raksha Mantri ShriRajnath Singh has approved setting up of a Committee under the Chairmanship of Director General (Acquisition) to review the Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP) 2016 and Defence Procurement Manual (DPM) 2009. The Committee will revise and align the procedures with the aim of ensuring seamless flow from asset acquisition to life cycle support.

The Committee:

- The DPP 2016 and DPM 2009 have been due for revision. Aligning the procedures will ensure seamless flow from asset acquisition to life cycle support and strengthen the 'Make in India' initiative of the Government.
- Apart from DG (Acq) 11 other members, not below the rank of Joint Secretary/Major General equivalent, are part of this high-level committee.

Terms of reference of the Committee:

- Revise the procedures as given in DPP 2016 and DPM 2009, so as to remove procedural bottlenecks and hasten defence acquisition.
- Align and standardise the provisions in the DPP 2016 and DPM 2009, wherever applicable, to optimise life cycle support for equipment. Simplify policy and procedures to facilitate greater participation of Indian Industry and develop robust Defence Industrial base. Wherever applicable, examine and incorporate new concepts, such as life cycle costing, life cycle support, performance-based logistics, ICT, lease contracting, codification & standardisation. Include provisions to promote Indian start-ups and research & development.
- Any other aspect which will contribute towards refining the acquisition process and support the 'Make in India' initiative.

INFORMATION FUSION CENTRE – INDIAN OCEAN REGION (IFC-IOR)

Why in News?

▸ The NMDA project was launched in accordance with the vision of PM on SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region).

IFC- IOR:

▸ The IFC-IOR was established with the vision of strengthening maritime security in the region and beyond, by building a common coherent maritime situation picture and acting as a maritime information hub for the region.

▸ Through this Centre, information on "white shipping", or commercial shipping, will be exchanged with countries in the region to improve maritime domain awareness in the Indian Ocean. The IFC has been established at the Navy's Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) in Gurugram, which is the single point centre linking all the coastal radar chains to generate a seamless real-time picture of the nearly 7,500-km coastline.

▸ IFR-IRO would also ensure that the entire region is benefited by mutual collaboration and exchange of information and understanding the concerns and threats which are prevalent in the region.

ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INTERNATIONAL CDRI

Why in News?

▸ The Union Cabinet has given ex-post facto approval for the Establishment of an International Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) along with its supporting Secretariat Office in New Delhi

CDRI:

▸ The CDRI is proposed to be launched at the UN Climate Action Summit.

▸ Organized by the UN Secretary General, this event will bring together the largest number of Heads of States to generate commitments for combating the effects of climate change and resulting disasters, and will provide the high-level visibility required for the CDRI.

▸ A global coalition for disaster resilient infrastructure would address concerns that are common to developing and developed countries, small and large economies, countries at early and advanced stages of infrastructure development, and countries that have moderate or high disaster risk.

▸ Few concrete initiatives work at the intersection of Sendai Framework, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Climate Change Adaptation with a focus on infrastructure.

Impact:

‣ The CDRI will serve as a platform where knowledge is generated and exchanged on different aspects of disaster and climate resilience of infrastructure.

‣ It will bring together technical expertise from a multitude of stakeholders. In doing so, it will create a mechanism to assist countries to upgrade their capacities and practices, with regard to infrastructure development in accordance with their risk context and economic needs.

‣ This initiative will benefit all sections of society. Economically weaker sections of society, women and children, are the most vulnerable to the impacts of disasters and hence, will be benefitted from the improvement of knowledge and practice in creating disaster resilient infrastructure.

‣ It will also benefit all areas with high disaster risk. In India, the north-eastern and Himalayan regions are prone to earthquakes, coastal areas to cyclones and tsunamis and central peninsular region to droughts.

INDIA SECURITY SUMMIT

Why in News?

‣ The 12th India Security Summit with the theme "Towards New National Cyber Security Strategy" was held on the 28th of August, 2019 in New Delhi.

Measures Taken to Counter Cyber Threats:

‣ **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C):** This scheme has been rolled out by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)for the period 2018-2020, to combat cybercrime in the country, in a coordinated and effective manner.

‣ **Cyber Swachhta Kendra:** The "Cyber Swachhta Kendra" (Botnet Cleaning and Malware Analysis Centre) is a part of the Government of India's Digital India initiative under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).

‣ It intends to create a secure cyberspace by detecting botnet infections in India and to notify, enable cleaning and securing systems of end users so as to prevent further infections.

‣ It has been set up in accordance with the objectives of the National Cyber Security Policy, which envisages creating a secure cyber ecosystem in the country.

‣ This centre is being operated by the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) under the provisions of Section 70B of the Information Technology Act, 2000.

‣ The Central Government has taken steps to spread awareness on cybercrime, issue cyber-related alerts/ advisories, capacity building/ training of law enforcement officers/ judges/ prosecutors, improving cyber forensics facilities etc. to prevent cybercrime and expedite investigations.